CALIFORNIA’S RACE TO THE TOP EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE: A CRITICAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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In

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by

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San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read California's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge: A Critical Theory Perspective by Susanna H. Camp, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Education at San Francisco State University.

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In this thesis, I undertake a critical policy analysis that places educational accountability reform in the United States within a socioeconomic context, and considers its implications for social inequality. In particular, my perspective examines the ways in which reform policy has been framed by economic globalization and the rise of neoliberal social policy, in which the federal government seeks to retain legitimacy by instituting reforms to improve education while simultaneously reducing educational funding as part of an agenda to privatize educational services. As a means of maintaining public support, the government promotes and perpetuates the rhetorical discourses of equality, objectivity, and intervention in order to advance its agenda while continually undercutting educational funding, serving to further disadvantage marginalized constituencies. As evidence, I draw on the federal government's Race to the Top (RTT) reform measure, as manifested through its mandates of performance accountability for schools and teachers; its competitive funding model; its equation of equality with the development of "quality improvement rating systems"; and its seemingly deleterious effects on public school curriculum. The thesis concludes with recommendations for five alternate strategies for improving education, strengthening democratic participation, and bolstering economic growth.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

signed

Chair, Thesis Committee Date

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Chapter One: Introduction

In this thesis, I undertake a critical policy analysis that places educational accountability reform in the United States within a socioeconomic context, and considers its implications for social inequality. In particular, my perspective examines the ways in which reform policy has been framed by economic globalization and the rise of neoliberal social policy, in which the federal government seeks to retain legitimacy by instituting reforms to improve education while simultaneously reducing educational funding as part of an agenda to privatize educational services. As a means of maintaining public support, the government promotes and perpetuates the rhetorical discourses of equality, objectivity, and intervention in order to advance its agenda while continually undercutting educational funding, serving to further disadvantage marginalized constituencies. As evidence, I draw on the federal government’s Race to the Top (RTT) reform measure, as manifested through its mandates of performance accountability for schools and teachers; its competitive funding model; its equation of equality with the development of “quality improvement rating systems”; and its seemingly deleterious effects on public school curriculum. The thesis concludes with recommendations for five alternate strategies for improving education, strengthening democratic participation, and bolstering economic growth.

In the first chapter, I first establish common terminology, beginning with a definition of neoliberalism and a discussion of its origins, examining the historical and current economic conditions that continue to drive support for neoliberal policies. Second, I discuss the meaning of, and the discourses surrounding, performance accountability policy. Third, I analyze the funding sources of education and the recent development of competitive grant strategies such as Race to the Top (RTT) that ostensibly capitalize on economic crises to privilege privatized services over public provisions and encourage deregulation of the industry to accommodate private interests. Finally, I examine the broad implications of accountability on shaping curriculum, pedagogical practices, and contemporary perspectives on the goals of education.

The second chapter focuses more directly on a specific example of accountability policy, the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) in California, and its implications for early childhood education. This chapter discusses several flaws inherent in RTT-ELC policy. First, the government's selection of the particular set of quantitative assessment tools and standards chosen to measure educational achievement, and the use of RTT-ELC's quantified matrix over more holistic and comprehensive interpretations of effective early childhood education, constitute a narrow and reductive means of determining quality. Second, this policy systemically de-professionalizes the early childhood educator field and discredits the values of critical theory and innovation in the classroom. Third, the policy's quantification and normalization of child development, teaching practices, classroom environments, program policies, and other educational practices reproduces a linear narrative of cognitive development that privileges mainstream behaviors over others and does little to reduce unequal access to high quality early childhood education programs.

In the final chapter, I present my conclusion that accountability policy is unjust in its deleterious effect on the U.S. public education, and suggest alternatives to accountability that could be more equitable and improve opportunities for learning. I recommend five main strategies for improving education, promoting positive social change, and strengthening the economy: (1) the development of a coherent and honest policy that fosters the intellectual development and personal growth of all students, and contributes to long-term social goals; (2) funding solutions that fund schools adequately and equitably, with more money and resources targeted to those who need extra support, without dismantling the public system in the process; (3) a concerted investment in teachers that encourages them to focus on continuous instructional improvement in which pedagogical inquiry is driven by critical theory; (4) the endorsement of a broad curriculum that includes the liberal arts, is not guided by external assessment metrics, and leverages children's home experiences and cultural capital; and (5) support for educational efforts that extend beyond the school setting and provide support for families and communities.

Chapter Two: Accountability Policy

Neoliberalism defined

Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Whereas liberalism is predicated on individual rights and freedoms, neoliberalism reworks liberalism to support global capitalist expansion (Torres, 2002). Neoliberalism transforms how we conceptualize government intervention, and the relationship between individuals and society. As it applies to educational policy, individuals are conceived as autonomous "entrepreneurs of themselves" (Foucault, 1979, p. 198) who can always fulfill their own needs in the educational marketplace. The impression that market forces are neutral also means that those who do not succeed are held to have made bad choices (Hursh, 2007). Personal responsibility thus implies that nothing is the government's fault. And yet neoliberal government policies intervene with a heavy hand, seeking to control the public-private make-up of social services such as education.

Neoliberalism is the underlying ideology behind the current administration's educational reform policies, a legacy of political and economic conditions that have transformed American education from its more progressive roots in the early 20th century to a technocratic and unevenly funded system today; this ideology continues to reshape the stated and perceived goals of education. During the past four decades, neoliberalism has become so dominant that it seems to be necessary, inevitable and unquestionable. Bourdieu (1998) remarked that "Everywhere we hear it said, all day long – and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength – that it has been presented as self-evident" (p.29). Neoliberalism is thus presented as the natural, inevitable solution to problems with the educational system. The lure of the market is that freedom from government regulation is the solution to educational quality. The market is said to be natural and neutral, governed by effort and merit (Apple, 2001). Concurrently, during the era of neoliberal reform, the rhetoric of equal rights has also remained dominant in the stated intentions of educational policies, yet the economic decisions that drive these policies often contribute to outcomes that disadvantage marginalized populations and reinforce status quo class differences.

The history of neoliberal educational reform in the United States

In order to understand the current context of neoliberal educational reform, we need to examine the history of educational reform, which developed in tandem with economic changes beginning in the mid-20th century. In the 1960s, a Keynesian economic model of public welfare and big government informed educational policy in the United States. Post-war government policies focused on providing a stable and growing economy through government intervention in the economic cycle. The federal government supported and broadly funded social services such as education, health, and welfare. Concurrently, the civil rights movement and the development of multicultural theory were beginning to influence educational policy, as education was seen to be a great equalizer of opportunity. In 1965, the U.S. Congress under the administration of

Lyndon B. Johnson passed a major reform initiative, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the intent of which was to address the needs of disadvantaged students by standardizing expectations. The ESEA has been the federal government's main education law over the past four decades, and has evolved through many changes of administration and economic structural shifts. Today, while the ESEA still draws on its civil rights era terminology of "equity", it is now characterized by a neoliberal ideology of "accountability" characterized by reduced funding from the government.

In the 1970s, revisions to the ESEA focused on issues of equity and access for disadvantaged students. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 addressed persistent inequities that girls experienced in their academic and extracurricular activities. Further revisions to the ESEA resulted in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), intended to increase opportunities for access to public school for children with disabilities. These federal initiatives revealed a consistent federal drive to pressure states and local school districts to pursue equal opportunities for public school children (Manna, 2011). The 1970s were also marked by global competition and a crisis of domestic capital accumulation, out of which grew a rise in privatization and a commensurate scaling back of public provisions. The material origins of neoliberal educational reform grew out of this context (Harvey, 2005). In 1976, University of Chicago professor Milton Friedman won the Nobel Prize in economics for his libertarian opposition to government regulation of public services. This laid the groundwork for his later critiques of the public school system and his alternative proposals for vouchers and school choice. He maintained that the ultimate objective of educational reform was the freedom of families to choose how their children would be educated, thus giving birth to the educational marketplace wherein competition would "stimulate the development and improvement" of the school system (Friedman, 1955, p 123).

In the 1980s, the equity theme that had driven previous educational reform efforts was superseded by concerns about educational excellence, human capital outputs, and a back-to-basics curriculum. Perhaps the most influential voice in prompting this additional federal focus was Ted Bell, Ronald Reagan's first secretary of education and the creator of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The commission produced a report whose intent was to examine long-term trends in student achievement and the major problems undermining US education. The report, *A Nation At Risk*, became a media sensation and sparked a new era in educational reform. In the report, educational problems were positioned as a security risk: "We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (Gardner, 1983, p. 5). Framed in Cold War terminology, the report and the policies it advocated restated the goals of education as an economic imperative to remain competitive in the face of globalization. Meanwhile, Reagan's economic policies were predicated on reducing government spending for public services and the dissolution of the social safety net. Public spending for education and other social programs became defined as a cost rather than an investment, with a commensurate emphasis on productivity and efficiency. On the basis of his advocacy of freedom, deregulation, market-based educational reform policy, and privatization, Milton Friedman became one of Reagan's educational policy advisors.

It took more than a decade for the claims advanced by *A Nation at Risk* to result in a federal demand that states hold all students, advantaged and disadvantaged alike, to challenging academic standards. That was the premise behind the ESEA reenactment advanced by President Clinton in 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). With the IASA, federal policymakers attempted to address the shortcomings of decentralized, inconsistently enforced state testing and the "low expectations" that persisted in mass public education (Manna, 2011). As a condition of the IASA, states were required to develop high academic expectations for all students through standardized assessments. However, this policy lacked the federal administrative capacity to oversee or monitor the state programs, and did not contain any clear consequences for schools making limited or no academic progress. Further, there was no central definition of "progress" or "quality", and many states failed to report the achievement of low-income and minority students.

Contemporaneous with this legislation, the pro-business bias in domestic policy gave rise to a growing trend in privatized educational options such as vouchers, choice, and charter schools. In 1991, John Chubb and Terry Moe's *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, a report published by the Brookings Institution, gave new momentum to the privatization cause through its claim that public schools were "owned" by vested interests such as teachers' unions who exercised democratic control over American schools and resulted in unilaterally poor academic standards (Chubb & Moe, 1991). The authors' proposed solution to this problem was to destabilize unions and to transform the school system through the introduction of competition and choice. In their view, the state should set minimum regulations, and non-public groups should be invited to apply for state funds to run charter schools and other profitable enterprises within the educational marketplace. William J. Bennett, who had become the secretary of education in the Reagan administration after Bell's resignation in 1985, was a big proponent of choice and charter schools (and continues to dominate charter school advocacy today).

President George W. Bush's reauthorization of ESEA was known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This legislation drew bipartisan support, stemming from widespread concerns about the low expectations, weak accountability, and limited enforcement characterized by the IASA. Adopted in 2001, this sweeping reform initiative opened up a new era of testing and accountability in American public schools, and distilled its main objective for school improvement into one goal: that all children would become "proficient" in reading and mathematics by 2014. Demonstration of such proficiency was to be achieved through "adequate yearly progress" on state standardized tests in English and Math in grades 3 through 8. Failure to achieve progress would result in decreased funding and other punishments leveled at individual schools. In addition to measuring students' performance, the stated goals of NCLB were to link state academic content standards with student outcomes; tie student performance to "report cards" on schools, districts, and teachers; provide disaggregated assessment data on minority students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English-language proficiency; and create a metrics-based platform for decisions on instruction, curriculum and business practices. As its name implies, No Child Left Behind was meant to improve education for those traditionally left behind in American schools – in particular, minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged children, English-language learners, and students with disabilities – by implementing systematic testing that would shed light on which schools were not teaching basic skills effectively. Empirical data would then reveal where interventions (specifically, negative sanctions) could be made in the interest of improving outcomes for all students, including disadvantaged and disabled students.

By 2005, the Department of Education was already claiming dramatic gains from NCLB. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results released that year indicated improved student achievement in reading and math. In addition, it was reported that more progress was made by nine-year-olds in reading in the five year period from 2000 to 2005 than in the previous 28 years combined; America's 13-year-olds earned the highest math scores the test ever recorded; reading and math scores for black and Hispanic nine-year-olds reached an all-time high; achievement gaps in reading and math between white and black nine-year-olds and between white and Hispanic nine-year-olds reached an all-time low; and that 43 states and the District of Columbia either improved academically or held steady in all categories (Perie, Grigg, & Dion, 2005).

Immediate criticism ensued and continues to this day. Many argue that these statistics are misleading. The 2005 report, for example, compared 2005 with 2000, while No Child Left Behind was not fully implemented until 2003. The improvement in scores between 2000 and 2003 was roughly the same as that between 2003 and 2005, which calls into question how any increase could be attributed to NCLB. Standardized tests, and in particular such high-stakes tests, are criticized for failing to accurately measure meaningful knowledge and skills, and for their "corrupting influence" on curriculum, relationships, and the teaching profession (Andrade, 2012). Critics also argue that some of the high stakes testing data can be skewed when subgroups are "cherry-picked", groups such as English-language learners are designated as special needs students and thus reclassified into other subgroups, and other loopholes are deployed in order to omit reporting on lower-performing students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Also, critics have observed that it is easy to "game the system" by making standardized tests easier so that schools can more readily show gains (Haney, 2000). Selective disciplining was also employed in order to exclude certain students from taking the tests (Fenning & Rose, 2007). In 2011, a cheating scandal emerged in Atlanta, where dramatic gains had been reported, in which teachers and administrators were accused of changing their students' test answers. Meanwhile, teachers' unions such as the National Educators Association (NEA) continue to release statements condemning the tests for these and other reasons, not least of which is the lack of additional funding provided to implement the policies.

In November 2008, shortly after President Obama took office, the mortgage bubble burst, the markets collapsed, and the economy entered a deep recession. Congress approved a $787 billion stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), designed to jumpstart the struggling economy. Almost $100 billion of these funds were allocated to the education department, and Obama's new secretary of education, Arne Duncan, was given the task of disbursing these funds, the largest-ever federal education grant that an education secretary had discretionary power to distribute (McGuinn, 2012). Duncan was formerly the CEO of Chicago's public schools, where his credentials included the success of his Renaissance 2010 program, in which neighborhoods were gentrified, public housing projects were shut down along with community public schools, charter schools proliferated, and teachers’ collective bargaining rights were greatly reduced (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). Duncan’s neoliberal ideology informed the expedient decisions made by the Department of Education (DOE) in its disbursal of the ARRA funds. Obama and Duncan’s early collaborations were driven by a dissemination of lump-sum monies to agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, which runs Head Start, without the accompanying federal administrative oversight. Various educational services were also parceled out to private interests, and the government was thereby absolved from having to sustain funding efforts. In 2009, after the ARRA funds had been distributed, Duncan announced a new plan that was similar in its arrangement: $4.35 billion would be awarded to states with winning bids in a competitive grant package known as Race to the Top (RTT).

RTT arose from a national focus on a failing school system, and the administration’s desire to appear magnanimous in the face of rampant criticism of NCLB. In fact, Duncan appears to have leveraged public disapproval over NCLB to garner support for RTT and his own vision of even more accountability via testing:

> NCLB is creating a slow-motion educational train wreck for children, parents, and teachers…. An overwhelming number of schools in the country may soon be labeled as “failing,” eventually triggering impractical and ineffective sanctions…. To avoid these sanctions, many states have lowered academic standards instead of making them more rigorous…. Our children get only one shot at an education. They cannot wait any longer for reform. For this reason, our administration will develop a plan that trades regulatory flexibility for reform (Duncan, 2011).

Concurrent with the introduction of RTT, declining state revenues from the bad economy have led states to chase federal dollars at any cost. High unemployment, declining real estate values, stagnating wages, and weak sales figures have lowered tax revenues, particularly in middle- and working-class localities. This leads to deep cuts in state services such as education. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports that 33 states will reduce K-12 education spending through a variety of cuts in staffing, transportation budgets, services for high-needs and at-risk students, and adult literacy programs (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010). When RTT was announced, states had no choice but to submit applications. Only four states (Alaska, North Dakota, Texas, and Vermont) did not apply.

The rules governing RTT were published on November 18, 2009, and advanced four specific priorities for the awarding of funds in a competitive grant system. The stated objectives of RTT are (1) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; (2) building data systems that measure student growth and success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve instruction; (3) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; and (4) implementing the above three reforms in order to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. In each of its four stated goals, RTT crystallizes key neoliberal, pro-business education policies. Obama's plan solidifies and streamlines these trends while also promoting favored neoliberal causes, including the proliferation of charter schools, institutionalizing performance accountability, and the dismantling of multicultural education and progressive theory. For example, the assessment instruments mandated by RTT are said to be “culturally neutral”, and educators are held to professional development that is specific to the understanding and implementation of such instruments; their lack of neutrality is not open to debate. RTT’s use of competitive grants is widening the achievement gap through its paradoxical principles. States with greater access to funding are rewarded with additional funding as a result of winning the alleged race to the top. By rewarding winning states with additional funding, RTT simultaneously punishes states (and schools) that are unable to compete in the first place due to a severe lack of funds. By thus enhancing the disparity in funding, RTT increases the achievement gap. The following section of this paper focuses on some implications of these policies for increased inequality and the racial and class stratification that is created by economic and ideological trends of globalization.

Accountability defined

A defining characteristic of the “accountability” ideology that has evolved over the past 40 years is the way in which it has implicitly shifted the responsibility for children’s education from the government (and teachers’ unions) to individuals (teachers, principals, parents, and students) in the alleged pursuit of “equity”. An example of this application of the equity discourse inherent in accountability is clear in this statement made by former secretary of education Rod Paige, upon the release of NCLB:

> We have an educational emergency in the United States of America. Nationally, blacks score lower on reading and math tests than their white peers. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We need to collectively focus our attention on the problem…. We have to make sure that every single child gets our best attention. We also need to help African-American parents understand how this historic new education law can specifically help them and their children (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The implied logic supporting NCLB, RTT, and other accountability policies is that implementing quantitative metrics such as standardized tests as the determinant of educational achievement will produce dedicated public school teachers who will transform the school system and create opportunities for the underprivileged. Critics of such accountability measures are accused of racism, as Paige also declared: "Anyone who opposes annual testing of children is an apologist for a broken system of education that dismisses certain children and classes of children as unteachable" (Paige, 2001).

Apple (2006) has analyzed the meanings of the word "accountability" and the semantic implications for neoliberal educational reform policies. On the one hand, to be accountable is to be held responsible. Accountability is a term borrowed from the business world, along with others such as efficiency, competition, performance, measures, achievement, excellence, and best practices. This sense of the word is implied in the policy of "performance accountability", where teachers, principles, and schools are held responsible for their students' relative success or failure to achieve stated performance goals. In its concurrent implications of equity and cultural neutrality, accountability is supposed to level the playing field and extend better opportunities to all students regardless of race and class differences; this logic suggests that teachers themselves are guilty of exacerbating disparity. In other words, given "culturally neutral" tools, any achievement gap correlated with socioeconomic differences may be assumed to be the fault of the teacher. Policy statements and media coverage (which are sometimes indistinguishable from each other) frequently emphasize that teachers will be held accountable for their students' performance, so that inferior teachers can be fired.

The film "Waiting for Superman" (Guggenheim, 2010) presented a view of a school system in which public schools were characterized as "failure factories", and bad teachers were deemed responsible. The film was harshly critical of teachers’ unions, and garnered much publicity in the aftermath of its release, for all manner of corporate/charitable efforts and private ventures focused on blaming teachers for their performance. The educational reformer Michelle Rhee’s Students First, a charter school advocacy group, and the Gates Foundation’s “Measures of Effective Teaching” project, which proposes that teachers are the main determinant of quality education, are byproducts of this logic. Such critics of public education suggest that today’s educational system is broken, that American schools are “dropout academies”, because unionized teachers are lazy, uncaring, overpaid, underqualified and unmotivated, and that bureaucrats stifle innovation. The solution, reformers say, is to apply management methods from the private sector in order to induce competition and higher performance across the board.

Performance accountability is a dominant feature of neoliberal educational reform policies such as NCLB and RTT, both of which include ramifications for teacher and principle tenure in their stated objectives. Whereas NCLB blamed schools, RTT goes much farther in shifting the blame to teachers. Furthermore, by containing provisions to sanction or close failing schools and to offer parents the “choice” to move their children to charter schools, these policies reinforce the implication that the government’s sole responsibility is to sustain and enforce the metrics that gauge school quality. It is then left to the parents to make the best choice for their children, based on the schools’ “report cards” and other empirical data that are made publicly available as a legal mandate of accountability policies.

Accountability and the discourse of objectivity

Systemized metrics associated with accountability policies point to the second important meaning of the word accountability, drawing from its root meaning of "to count". In this sense, to be accountable means to be held responsible for something that is measured. There is an implicit privileging of quantitative, numerical data over qualitative, holistic information. NCLB has been roundly criticized by critical theorists and educational policy analysts (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Apple, 2006; Ravitch, 2010; Giroux, 2010; National Education Association, 2013) for its use of assessment scores as the main gauge of educational success based on a narrow definition of achievement as determined by "scientifically based research" – as opposed to non-scientific educational methodologies including following tradition, personal preferences, and non-scientific research, such as research based on case studies, ethnographies, personal interviews, discourse analysis, grounded theory, action research, and other forms of qualitative research. These are generally not an acceptable basis for making decisions about teaching children under the act.

Like NCLB, RTT is similarly built on the premise that the use of a standardized metric to determine educational quality will equalize access, opportunity, and curricula in all schools and communities. This argument relies on a discourse of "objectivity" in its rationale that educational efficiency and improvement can be accomplished through standards and standardized testing. Proponents of this strategy claim that curriculum standards have been objectively determined and that they provide the most valid and reliable means of assessing student learning. Establishing benchmarks and sanctions to regulate school activity, policymakers and government agencies implicitly accept that standardized tests offer an objective metric of student performance to measure and direct efforts of teachers and school and district administrators.

Coupled with neoliberal economics, accountability policies seem to reinforce anti-public sentiment in their support for businesses such as charter schools, publishers of assessment media such as tests and related curricula, and professional development providers who train school personnel in the use of the new metrics which measure the quality of learning. These efficiency efforts are led by liberal-technocratic professionals (Bowers, 1984) within the federal and state departments of education, along with federal- and state-funded research and development contractors from the "new managerial" class (Apple, 1996), whose role is to ensure compliance among the professionals in the field. This association also permeates a neoliberal discourse about the inferiority of public services over more "efficient" business practices. Inner-city, poor/minority public schools are defined as "failing", on "probation", and characterized by a lack of student and teacher effort (Lipman, 2004), whereas charter schools are promoted as innovative, more competitive, and therefore an inherently superior choice. Indeed, both NCLB and RTT contain clauses dictating that failing public schools are to be shut down and turned over to charters. Compared to NCLB, RTT goes much further in tying nationalized high-stakes testing to teacher accountability and school finance, while promoting charter schools. RTT mandates that funds not be given to states that do not include a loosening of charter school restrictions in their grant proposals.

In short, accountability is a loaded word, a legitimating myth exploited by those in power to imply that their policies address “equity” concerns when in reality they just perpetuate status quo imbalances. The discourse of accountability is a means of maintaining the hegemonic power structure that exacerbates disadvantages for the socioeconomically deprived. Holding individuals accountable is an evasive tactic that allows the government to avoid addressing the need for broader economic changes that would distribute funds and thus opportunities more equitably. The suggestion that schools, teachers, and children are to be held responsible for the myth of upward economic mobility and “cashing in knowledge for jobs” (Saltman, 2007, p. 12) is disingenuous.

Through accountability policy and its related discourses of teacher, school, and local responsibility, both the federal and state governments seek to retain legitimacy by instituting reforms to improve education while, at the same time, reducing educational funding as part of an overall strategy to reduce government expenditures on social services by privatizing them (Hursh & Martina, 2003). Reformers assert that free market competition with charter schools will transform public school teachers and principals into caring educators who will close the opportunity gap based on their “highly qualified” status.

Competitive grant funding defined

Federal spending on education amounts to only 7% of schools’ budgets. In the vast majority of states, local property taxes provide a large amount of the funding for public schools, meaning that affluent suburban schools have greater access to funds than their inner-city counterparts. Thus, property tax is a driving force in shaping inequality (Abbott, 2013). The federal government does not assist states in rectifying the enormous disparities between schools in more affluent communities and schools in lower-income communities.

Whether consciously or not, the system writes off its poorest students. Kozol (2005) describes the “educational apartheid” inherent in the funding disparities between inner-city and suburban schools. In high-poverty urban schools with high concentrations of minority students, classrooms are crowded, facilities decrepit, teachers poorly paid, and art and music are largely absent from the curriculum. Meanwhile, in relatively wealthy suburban school districts with fewer disadvantaged students, teachers are comparatively well compensated, and budgetary shortfalls can be supplemented by parent donations or community fundraisers subsidizing equipment, classroom aides, and extracurricular programs. Young people in poor communities learn different civic lessons through this funding disparity than do those in wealthier areas. The decaying buildings and deficient resources in their schools speak to them about their value to the rest of us (Smith, 2010).

Yet a popular opinion persists that schools are overfunded. Bush, defending NCLB in 2001, likened federal education spending to “pumping gas into a flooded engine” (Bruni, 2001), suggesting that the public school system was overflowing with cash. In times of economic downturn, government agencies such as the DOE switch rapidly into crisis mode to implement solutions that often privilege private interests; this happened in 2008 with the disbursal of the ARRA funds, and is happening now with

RTT. Some critics (Klein, 2007; Parenti, 1998; Saltman, 2007; Chomsky, 2013) suggest that such crises are manufactured in order to facilitate the implementation and public acceptance of neoliberal policies such as closing public schools, thereby diverting money into charter schools and other private sector beneficiaries. Saltman (2007) characterizes public education as a tool for producing capital to create political and economic leaders, docile workers and marginalized citizens, and for sorting and sifting those to be excluded from opportunity and power. Further, policymakers are accused of engaging in "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2007) wherein public funds are handed over to the private sector, thus benefiting politicians, corporations, and other agents of the hegemonic elite. After all, public elementary and secondary education in the U.S. is big business. In 2009, annual educational expenditures in the U.S. were almost $600 billion (Levine & Levine, 2012).

In the midst of a financial downturn, with states' budgets dwindling and public services being slashed, RTT's competitive funding model seemed a welcome innovation to state departments of education looking to make up lost sources of funds. Moreover, politically, they virtually had no choice but to submit applications for the RTT grants. Whereas NCLB mandated higher scores while neglecting to provide poorer schools with the resources to make this achievement possible, RTT revealed a systemic bias in its allocation of resources to those who are best able to game the system, setting up the more wealthy states and school districts for further success and dooming their less wealthy peers to continued failure.

RTT coerces states to jump through hoops in order to chase dollars instead of pursuing what is in the best interest of the students, and instead of targeting high poverty areas with better teachers and resources. Neoliberal policies impose negative sanctions on failing schools. In 2013, massive school closures have occurred around the country, most notably in Chicago and Philadelphia. Ironically, in some areas funding has increased for prisons at that same time, giving rise to the meme of the "school to prison pipeline". African American males are more likely to go to prison than college. Meanwhile, as high-stakes testing policies have been implemented, graduation rates are declining among non-Asian minority students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). Because the economy can no longer absorb unskilled workers at living wages, lack of education is increasingly linked to crime. Between 1980 and 2000, three times as many African American men were added to the nation's prison systems as were added to our colleges (Justice Policy Institute, 2002). School closings devastate communities and are frequently driven by developers who want to gentrify neighborhoods. Often, when public schools close, their funding is handed over to charter schools. This disbursal of funding to non-public agencies seems to facilitate the determination of outcomes by corporate and financial interests, without any public accountability.

RTT is based on competition, not need. By exacerbating funding disparities, RTT strips children of their right to an adequate, equitable education by providing students in "winning" states, counties, and programs the opportunity to learn in high quality environments, while children enrolled in "losing" educational environments are deprived of the same opportunity due to a lack of funding. Forcing students, schools, and states to compete for their civil right to an education is not just. A successful reform should take into account the fact that high-poverty schools contend with challenges such as the recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers and the promotion of a rigorous curriculum. RTT does not address these concerns. Assessments cannot make up for deficiencies in school resources and facilities, overcrowded classrooms, understaffed faculty, segregated schools and children in poverty. States need to modify their education financing formulas to provide more state aid to poorer districts to offset lower local property tax revenues, providing less state aid to wealthier districts.

How accountability policies affect curriculum & pedagogy

Neoliberal educational reform policies have transformed public school curriculum and pedagogy with deleterious effects. Reform policies are by nature critical of the pedagogical practices they replace, seeking to rein in seemingly irrelevant or ineffectual curricula and reinstate a back-to-basics ideology. Incentives and sanctions that hold teachers accountable for raising students' or program scores virtually ensure that administrators and teachers will reorganize the curricular and instructional components of their work to adhere to assessment objectives. For example, the NCLB mandate to raise English and Math scores resulted in a dramatic and immediate reassignment of curricular and pedagogical priorities in public school classrooms, particularly for poor and minority students. The Common Core State Standards now being adopted across the U.S. also narrow the curriculum to that which is deemed to align with evidence of demonstrated "competencies", which teachers must learn to recognize and tabulate in order to demonstrate their own proficiency and worth. In the technocratic, empirical and data-driven era of neoliberal educational reform, metrics and standards are used to designate formal names for children's cognitive events. Teachers are beholden to "detailed lists of named and numbered outcomes for each isolated parcel of instruction” (Kozol, 2005, p. 64). There is a special irony in the implication that such systems increase efficiency, when in reality teachers are forced to continuously tabulate children’s cognitive progress along mandated metrics and cross-reference learning “competencies” with their numerical values.

Studies on performance accountability suggest that incentives and sanctions motivate teachers to work harder, but that their intensified effort focuses only on short-term, superficial, and arguably detrimental strategies that may hold promise for their careers or the success of their employers, but do not engender long-term, substantive changes that benefit students academically (Rice & Malen, 2010). In other words, accountability measures encourage teachers to teach to the test, a practice once regarded as professional malpractice but now considered a “best practice” with negative consequences for well-rounded curriculum or the support of critical thinking skills. Critics have noted that students in poor and minority schools are consistently subjected to instruction that focuses almost exclusively on low-level information and skills (Ravitch, 2010). Additionally, school districts that are already struggling to provide students with enough books, laboratory supplies and other high-quality curricular resources are forced to spend thousands of dollars a year on expensive commercially produced test preparation materials of limited educational value (Andrade, 2012).

In tandem with neoliberal ideologies, 38 state legislatures have recently passed bills to increase funding for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) subjects and other vocationally oriented curricula, with a commensurate decrease in funding for liberal arts subjects such as literature, art, music, history, civics, and geography (Finn & Ravitch, 2007). In RTT, the prioritization of STEM education in state standards is among the major criteria for approval of funding. Assessments aligned with this particular suite of technical skills define “proficiency” as the ability to pass tests that measure technical knowledge, while ignoring such skills as creativity and reasoning. Abandoning the liberal arts in the name of STEM increases social inequities. While children in wealthy suburban enclaves get to explore art and music, philosophy and history, poor urban minority students are stuck in crowded, factory-like classrooms where test preparation is prioritized over more engaging school activities. Chomsky (2013) likens mass public education to Taylorism, and describes modern pedagogy as a backlash to the democratizing period of the 1960s, an overt attempt to “train students in obedience and servility.” As he describes in his seminal work Class Warfare (Chomsky, 1996), the education system is fragmented into two tiers. For the elite, the 20% of society who make up the political class of managers and decision makers, education fosters skills such as creativity and independence, in order to allow them to do their job of making money. For the masses, the other 80% of society whose job is to follow the orders of the hegemony, education is a “system of imposed ignorance” designed to sustain the class system (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Accountability policies reinforce these hierarchical priorities by narrowing curricular choices for so-called failing schools, but not for higher-performing, well-funded schools.

Naturally, teacher education programs have been scaled back in tandem with the narrowing of the curricula. Giroux (2010) describes this as a “dumbing-down” technique wherein “transformative pedagogy is viewed as dangerous by Duncan and many of his supporters” (p. 355). Rather than receiving a rigorous critical education that allows for innovation and exploration, teachers are taught to adhere to formulas. They receive extensive training on instrumental methodologies and metrics designed to produce empirical data for the accountability reform schemes, but do not learn to understand and nurture individual potential. Teachers who receive such training are then designated “highly qualified.” We need to assess teachers as people who are broadly educated and not just narrowly specialized.

Furthermore, the narrowing of curricula teaches children that what matters is test scores, not intellectual exploration. Neoliberal reform policies such as RTT emphasize efficiency over equity, testing over critical pedagogical practices, private values over public values, competition over cooperation, and individual advancement over collective gain. RTT inappropriately makes test scores the goal of education, rather than a mere indicator. Moreover, as Freire recognized, neoliberal policies can be a tool that serves to subjugate marginalized children by holding them to inferior educational standards: “The dominant class, deaf to the need for a critical reading of the world, insists on the purely technical training of the working class, training with which that class should reproduce itself as such” (Freire, 1996, p. 83).

The goals of education should not be wholly determined by federal policymakers with pro-business agendas and a vested interest in maintaining the status quo; rather, the setting of social and educational goals should be an educative process set forth by educators, parents, students, and community members. Instead of closing schools or privatizing them, our public officials and our policies should work to improve public schools. School leaders should look carefully at their student populations and take note of what proportion of students are struggling or disadvantaged due to poverty or neglect at home; how many in the school are English-language learners and may need extra help; how many have disabilities and need intervention.

Structural inequities such as socioeconomic disadvantages are a major influence on students’ readiness to learn and subsequent achievement. School alone can’t equalize the systemic societal inequities that dictate students’ opportunities for advancement. To reverse the damages wrought by inadequate nutrition and poor health, inadequate housing and other forms of poverty-driven neglect, we need to change our funding strategies so that disadvantaged communities receive more money to make up for the difference in tax income; rather than penalizing struggling schools, we should be granting them additional resources to make up for deficits in program quality. Students’ success should not be determined by their zip codes. The government has failed to invest the substantial resources and make the fundamental curricular, pedagogical, and structural changes that would be necessary to redress the injustices experienced by poor minorities.

The codified narrative of the failing public school system and the discourse of accountability reform employ a “politics of fear” (Furedi, 2005) to manipulate people’s anxieties and to drive support for a neoliberal agenda that purports to be about equity but is really about privatization and a lack of government accountability. So-called “failing schools” are those that enroll high concentrations of students who need extra help. What they need is more attention, extra tutoring, smaller classes, social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists, and a variety of other interventions. RTT does not support the structural social and economic reform that could make these options possible. The next chapter takes a closer look at how RTT specifically exacerbates inequalities among schools and students in California.

Chapter Three: Overview of RTT, RTT-ELC and "The Matrix"

Race to the Top (RTT) is a $4.35 billion United States Department of Education initiative funded as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, announced by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on July 24, 2009. Under this reform initiative, states were to compete against each other for federal funding for K-12 education, gaining points for satisfying certain educational policies such as performance-based standards for teachers, principals, and school environments, the alignment of national standards with state standards (including the adoption of the Common Core State Standards), the promotion of charter schools and privatized reforms, and the introduction of computerized and technical practices in school systems, including data collection, storage, and analysis. In 2011, the RTT initiative was expanded to include the early childhood education sector, with the aim to align the standards of the full spectrum of the public school system for children aged 0-18; this additional measure was launched as the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). California was granted $52,575,935 million (about half of what it applied for) in public funds designated to "improve the quality of early learning programs and close the achievement gap for vulnerable young children" (California Department of Education, 2012). The grant funding is distributed via regional consortia representing 17 counties around the state.

A central component of California's $52.5 million dollar grant is a technical specification called the "California Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-

ELC) Quality Continuum Framework Quality Rating System (QRIS) Hybrid Matrix", which is included as an appendix to this paper (see Appendix). A QRIS is a set of tools designated to collect and disseminate information about the quality of early learning programs. Each tool delivers a quantified rating on a measureable outcome, which is then calibrated to a composite program score on a scale of 1 to 5, with the understanding that the higher the number of points attained, the higher the quality of the program (California Department of Education, 2012). Funding for any given educational program (child care center or family child care provider) is then contingent on meeting this set of technical performance deliverables. Following is a brief description of each of the "outcome based" assessment instruments and other technical requirements outlined in the matrix:

Core I: Child Development and School Readiness.

- Desired Results Developmental Profile **(DRDP)**: an assessment instrument offering a means of quantifying child assessment on a linear scale meant to reflect a child's readiness to advance to next age grade or academic level.
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire **(ASQ)**: a developmental screening tool meant to induce "intervention strategies" for children not perceived to be performing or advancing in a linear manner.

Core II. Teacher Credentialing and Professional Development.

- A specified number of units of academic credit, credentialing, and professional development earned by teachers (particularly in content that is related to any of the measurement instruments and standards outlined in the matrix).
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System **(CLASS)** scores: this tool is a numerical scale that provides measurable data to assess the classroom environment in terms of instructional support, classroom organization, and teacher-student interactions. The CLASS score is determined by a trained outside observer who visits and assesses the classroom environment in one three- to four-hour visit.

Core III. Program Administration and Environment

- Ratios and Group Size: Recommended ratios of staff to children are outlined in the matrix. The lower the ratio (i.e., more staff per child), the better the score.
- Environmental Ratings Scales **(ERS)** scores: similar to the CLASS assessment instrument, ERS tools offer a numerical assessment (on a scale of 0 to 6) of the classroom environment. Items and subscales measure "developmentally appropriate" furniture and equipment; toileting/diapering practices; general supervision of children; daily schedule of program activities; and other quantifiable measures of observable behaviors within the program. Like the CLASS score, the ERS score is determined by an outside assessor who conducts pre- and post-observations of the program.
- Director Qualifications: Qualifications for early childhood development center program directors are delineated in the matrix and range from just 12 academic units of college-level ECE content to the possession of a Masters degree in ECE with administrative credential and 21 hours of professional development annually. Keeping the credentialing requirement current ensures that the administrators adhere to the latest professional development standards and are thus well versed in the ideology of standards-based practices such as those measured by the RTT-ELC matrix.

The matrix serves as the primary means and determination of success for all early childhood programs receiving RTT funding. Scores and adherence to the instruments guide the decisions made by program administrators as to how to run their programs. This paper argues that such technocratic prerogatives are constricting.

The Reductive Ideology of Scientism

The central problem with the RTT-ELC policy lies not in its stated goals of quality improvement and equity (for of course quality education is an essential target and, despite the deficit perspective inherent in the language of the "achievement gap", equal access to opportunity is also a worthy mission), but rather in RTT's narrow and reductive means of determining quality. The federal government's selection and requirement of this particular set of standards at the expense of others, and the use of RTT's quantified matrix over more holistic and comprehensive interpretations of quality, represent a bureaucratization that privileges codification and standardization over other means of ascribing value (Hemphill & Blakely, in press). Duncan (2009) expresses his confidence in RTT's evidence-based decision making thusly: "I am a deep believer in the power of data to drive our decisions. Data gives us the roadmap to reform. It tells us where we are, where we need to go, and who is most at risk" (p. 1).

The matrix offers a highly structured and very definitive set of goals that ostensibly offer an empirical measure of how teachers teach and children learn. Habermas (1972) referred to this privileging of quantitative analysis as "scientism", the reductive belief in the universal applicability of the scientific method and approach, and the view that empirical science constitutes the most authoritative worldview or most valuable part of human learning to the exclusion of other viewpoints. The RTT framework, by relying on scores to determine success, is an example of scientism: emphasizing efficiency at the expense of equity, prioritizing testing over critical pedagogical practices, and accentuating competition over cooperation (Giroux, 2010). In its use of a competitive funding model, Race to the Top is first and foremost a contest -- from competition among states for federal funding, among individual schools for high scores, and among teachers for performance ratings -- and sends the clear message that schools will improve if they are forced to compete (Ravitch, 2013c). Rewards are not distributed evenly: those who perform poorly (for reasons that may stem from lack of resources) receive less federal funding than their better-performing peers.

The metaphor of competition situates this policy firmly within a neoliberal sociopolitical ideology based on reduced government spending for public services. RTT's implementation/strategy supports the proliferation of educational entrepreneurs in the management of the schools. One of the consequences of the RTT legislation has been an influx of for-profit contractors, consultants, and vendors offering such services as teacher evaluation systems, teacher training programs, new technologies, data collection systems, data management and storage services, data analysis, and so forth. Since the implementation of RTT, significant portions of funds have gone to educational consultants outside of the public school system (McNeil, 2012). In its dispersal of funds to programs with the most money and to outside contractors, RTT is missing a key opportunity to provide funds where they are needed the most.

The imposition of the RTT-ELC standards and the mechanism of performance-based funding have led to a reconfiguration of the early childhood workforce in California. These efficiency efforts are led by liberal-technocratic professionals (Bowers, 1984) within the federal and state departments of education, along with federal- and state-funded research and development contractors from the "new managerial" class (Apple, 1996), whose role is to ensure compliance among the professionals in the field. Among the private contractors now granted funds to enforce the RTT-ELC standards, new staff members have been hired and existing staff repurposed to focus their roles around the creation of professional development documentation and the provision of "technical assistance” opportunities for early childhood education professionals. Program administrators spend RTT funds to hire coaches and other consultants specializing in the ERS and CLASS assessment scales, to ensure better scores and additional funding. Teacher education in the current context of the “audit culture” (Apple, 2006) emphasizes neither critical pedagogy nor multicultural theory, but rather, learning techniques to assess measureable outcomes.

Deprofessionalization of the educator workforce

The second problem with the RTT-ELC’s prioritization of quantified standards is its uncritical adherence to linear, technical measures circumscribing the activities not only of children but also of teachers and professionals in the field. Giroux (2010) describes this as a “dumbing down” principle that reduces the teacher to the role of technician, and actively denigrates more holistic ideas of child development theory. RTT-ELC’s emphasis on teacher training, professional development and credentialing, which is inwardly focused to align with the objectives delineated by the matrix, appears to discourage innovation among educators. By training teachers to adhere to a narrow set of technical specifications rather than allowing for a more comprehensive and rigorous critical education, RTT promotes a “political and cultural illiteracy while making teachers and students more receptive to the disempowering disciplinary practices of neoliberal policies, values, and social relations” (Giroux, 2010, p. 345). The matrix also seems to serve as a convenient device for shifting the attention of professional educators from broader notions of quality care to a concrete set of deliverables in which professional efforts are neatly defined as numerically measurable outcomes. The RTT culture privileges information that can be measured and quantified, over problem-posing praxis that invites deeper thought and offers conditions for change. In contrast to the intransigence of current educational reform policy, Freire (1987) believed in promoting political and critical literacy among educators, for educators who do not have political clarity are powerless to change the conditions that perpetuate inequality. Amid frequent and ongoing trainings dedicated to the use of assessment instruments, data collection, data entry and analysis, and other professional development requirements of educators receiving RTT-ELC teachers have little time for reflection on related political issues.

RTT’s technocratic professional development eschews any substantive focus on socioeconomic or cultural differences between children. Because the assessment instruments that constitute the matrix are said to be values-neutral, educators are led to believe that performance on the scales is unrelated to funding differences in educational environments or cultural differences among children. Habermas’s scientism, the dominant ideology of management, evaluation and research, thrives in the RTT-ELC matrix. Early childhood educators are “increasingly being educated in the language code that reproduces the liberal-technocratic way of thinking” (Bowers, 1984, p. 15); this paradigm is reinforced through a professionalization process that “discounts the importance of commonsense experiences and tacit forms of knowledge” acquired by the teacher in specific cultural contexts (Bowers, 1984, p.16). In other words, teachers who are educated for strict adherence to the RTT-ELC matrix may be unable to make informed, critically conscious, contextual choices about teaching specific students in local environments.

The myth of the universal norm

Finally, the quantification and normalization of child development, teaching practices, classroom environments, program policies, and other educational practices reproduces a linear narrative of progress that privileges mainstream practices over others and does little to reduce inequality. With the use of norm-referenced scales such as the DRDP, ASQ, CLASS, ERS, etc, performance failures may be attributed to individual entities (children, teachers, principals, schools) rather than to the system itself. The logic of “accountability” policy then holds those targets accountable rather than working to address gaps in funding or related resources. Instead, RTT is fixated on norm-referenced performance measures that belie the reality of inherent inequalities among students. Indeed, the search for similarities rather than differences is grounded in the Western scientific method that underlies psychological research more broadly – one that prioritizes processes assumed to be universal but doesn’t account for demographic variation or cultural contexts (Arnett, 2008). Yet critical pedagogy and cultural awareness teach us that there are no universal best practices; teachers need to focus consciously on cultural difference and intentionally practice intervention strategies to address systemic inequity. In tandem with such interventions, funding should be provided to address gaps, rather than incentivized as a reward for those who adhere to the norm.

The alignment of the infant/toddler standards with the pre-K and K-12 standards assumes that there is a universal, linear development trajectory that contextualizes children’s entire educational path, from the moment they enter school, within a quantitative framework. Within these tight parameters, those who don’t measure up according to the standards developed for mainstream students, those whose experience and performance relegates them to positions outside of the dominant center, are destined to fail. The presupposition of a universal norm naturally positions those whose development is outside of this path to be inferior. This normalization of expectations compounds early cognitive theorists' view of primitive versus advanced intelligence, and presumes that thought and learning is primarily a function of the individual -- a notion which at the root is contrary to critical theorists' principles of early childhood education. Furthermore, by declaring assessment tools such as the DRDP and the ASQ to be culturally neutral, the administrators of the RTT-ELC maintain a race-blindness that enables them to dodge accountability for the chronic and systemic underfunding of education in the state of California. These norm-referenced developmental screening tools attempt to establish a linear growth continuum tied to implications of universal age-graded milestones. A child who does not perform according to his age group is likely to be identified as having a learning disability, and subsequently subjected to further tests and probable tracking at a lower developmental level as he or she enters the next age range. Such diagnoses can be damaging. Ideas of developmental maturity, precocity, and retardation are tied to judgments regarding what aspects of human intelligence and behavior are valued in the dominant culture (Rogoff, 2008). This system privileges mainstream, middle-class children, and devalues children who perform outside of the spectrum measured by the assessment tools.

Meanwhile, RTT sees the standardization of curriculum as tantamount to the raising of standards, and its legislative rhetoric is carefully crafted to suggest that disparities in “quality” (as defined by the matrix) are to blame for the academic achievement gap. And yet, students who “fail” are typically those whose backgrounds are most different from the school setting or the expectations of school administrators. RTT is an example of educational accountability reform policy whose funding and focus is relegated solely to school-based efforts, whereas in fact, inequalities in children’s cognitive abilities and subsequent academic success are rooted in race, ethnicity, and class differences, and are substantially shaped by their home settings. Disadvantaged children fall behind at a very early age, before they even enter a classroom. The link between socioeconomic status (SES) and language development has been well established (Hart & Risley, 1995; Lee & Burkham, 2002). New research suggests that gaps begin as early as 18 months, with significant disparities in vocabulary and language processing efficiency already evident between infants from higher- and lower-SES families; by 24 months there is a gap between SES groups in processing skills critical to language development (Fernald, Marchman & Weisleder, 2013). Another recent study found that 65% of low-SES preschoolers in Head Start Programs had clinically significant language delays (Nelson, Welsh, Vance Trup, & Greenberg, 2011). These setbacks in language development impact children’s ability to communicate effectively and have a profound impact on later school performance. In California, where one in four children is an English Language Learner, over 50% of public school children are low-income students (Suitts, 2013), almost 25% of children under the age of five are living in poverty, and homelessness is on the rise (Holland & Darling-Hammond, 2013), there is great variation among students and a clear correlation between family income and academic performance. Differences in vocabulary, social-emotional wellbeing, access to resource-rich environments, orientation toward education, and other factors influenced by socioeconomic status all help to determine one's life chances. The Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has written extensively about the implications for society of the lost contributions to the economy that stem from unequal opportunity. Low-income students are much more likely to attend public schools that have significantly lower academic and student support and per-pupil funding; these disadvantaged students are more likely than students from wealthy families to have lower test scores, fall behind in school, drop out, and fail to acquire a college degree (Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Shonkoff, 2006). These differences have profound implications for the life's chances of such individuals, as well as the overall success of the economy. The OECD's 2013 Survey of Adult Skills reports an overall poor proficiency among American adults aged 16-65 in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments – the key information-processing skills that are essential to 21st century economies – and in various generic skills such as cooperation, communication, and organization. One of the key failings of the U.S. public school system, the report suggests, is the lack of universal access to high quality early childhood education at a reasonable and equitable cost (OECD, 2013). RTT is not filling this need.

In summary, RTT legislation proposes an overarching one-size-fits-all assessment framework wherein standardization is seen to be synonymous with increasing quality across the board. Unlike the vision offered by the RTT-ELC Quality Continuum Matrix, effective and equitable accountability measures should include a broad range of assessment alternatives; teacher training and education that incorporates commonsense, context-specific cultural awareness and critical theory; and real intervention strategies for non-mainstream children. The next chapter offers a perspective on such strategies.

Chapter Four: Reforming "Reform"

In the preceding chapters, I have described the current conditions in the U.S. public educational system, as shaped by neoliberal accountability policy, elaborating specifically on issues with the implementation of the RTT-ELC in California. Problems include: funding that is driven by competition for limited resources, rather than equitable or need-based distribution; related to this, a standardized and narrow curriculum which is driven by external assessments; the adoption of accountability policies characterized by rewards and sanctions that serve to perpetuate socioeconomic divisions among schools and students; and an incoherent teacher professional development system which is driven by external metrics as opposed to respectful support. In this chapter, I will recommend five main strategies for reforming the system: (1) the development of a coherent and honest policy that fosters the intellectual development and personal growth of all students, and contributes to long-term social goals; (2) funding solutions that fund schools adequately and equitably, with more money and resources targeted to those who need extra support, without dismantling the public system in the process; (3) a concerted investment in teachers that encourages them to focus on continuous instructional improvement in which pedagogical inquiry is driven by critical theory; (4) the endorsement of a broad curriculum that includes the liberal arts, is not guided by external assessment metrics, and leverages children's home experiences and cultural capital; and (5) support for educational efforts that go beyond the school setting and provide support for families and communities. The combination of these strategies will improve education, strengthen democratic participation, and bolster economic growth.

Maintain long-term policy goals: social growth and humanitarian perspectives

First, if we are seriously interested in true educational reform, we need to be honest about equity, acknowledge whose interests are being served, and overhaul policy goals. Instead of lending so much credibility and decision-making control to politicians, billionaires, and other corporate leaders whose children will likely never attend public schools, we need to empower professional coalitions of educators, students, and community members dedicated to improving the public school system from a humanitarian position. Corporate, profit-seeking "reformers" who come from outside the public sector have no vested interest in the success of public systems other than the publicity and profit garnered during their tenure in the media spotlight. In fact, many of their high-profile public-private ventures actively favor the closing of public schools in order to channel funds into their own private projects such as charter schools, pre-packaged curricular programs, and training companies. In fostering long-term social goals, such as enabling each child to grow into his or her own potential, we will create opportunities for economic and democratic growth.

Labaree (1997) argues that the central problems with American education are "not pedagogical or organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally political" (p. 40). That is, the problem is not that we don't know how to improve our schools, but that we are fighting among ourselves about the essential goals of education. Neoliberal, capitalist policies support the goal of education as a private good. Privatizing education only serves individual goals and does not serve the needs of society as a whole. Unfettered economic freedom leads to the unequal distribution of wealth; the deregulation and privatization of the school system are antithetical to democratic control. Market-based educational services privilege those who possess the capital to acquire them. In financial terms, this capital may serve as a means to acquire private schooling, computers and other resources, or test preparation services. On a social level, it may mean connections or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990), a form of cultural capital that is also influenced by class. Class difference is a powerful force in the United States, as the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider. And, despite the ideological cornerstone of our cultural beliefs that all people are created equal, minorities are still not equal to whites, girls not equal to boys, and poor children not equal to wealthy children. Giroux (2013) suggests that minority youth are no longer seen as a social investment, but as a liability, and are increasingly treated as if they are disposable. Such inequalities are manifested in terms of income and wealth but also in terms of educational attainment. Hegemonic assumptions and institutional power create a hidden curriculum within our schools that reinforces existing social inequalities by educating students according to their class and social status. Though in their stated goals, accountability reform policies purport to address equity, the reality is different. By commoditizing education for the individual educational consumer, the system emphasizes education as a private good.

These goals conflict with those of defenders of public education in the United States who make up a diverse contingent of committed educators and families from a variety of economic and racial backgrounds. Their common thread is a genuine interest in creating a high quality, high equity public system emphasizing effective education as a human right. Another commonality among supporters of public education (as opposed to business-minded reformers pushing for charter school takeovers) is that they generally are users of the public school system, so it is in their best interests to strengthen that foundation. Many politicians and educational reformers, on the other hand, send their children to private schools. Michelle Rhee, the former superintendent for the DC public schools and now the CEO of a corporate reform organization called Students First, is a staunch advocate for large class sizes and high-stakes testing, yet sends her own children to elite private schools (Mishak, 2013). In 1998, California gubernatorial candidate Al Checchi, a Beverly Hills millionaire who made public education one of the main themes of his campaign, said that he would not "sacrifice his children's future" by sending them to California public schools (Los Angeles Times, 1998). Though legally it is not a viable option, voters have long advocated for forcing public officials to send their own children to public schools in order to create an incentive for them to improve the system.

One of the ways we can strengthen our national capacity to provide equitable educational opportunities for all is to broaden the scope of the debate by looking to humanitarian organizations such as UNESCO for the sorts of expansive, holistic perspectives that promote positive change. In 1996, UNESCO released the Delors Report, which advanced the notion that education should develop the richness and diversity of talent for every human being, as expressed through four "pillars" of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Delors, 1996). Comprehensively, this vision advanced a holistic ideal that redefined learning itself as both a means and an end to education. The commission believed that education should contribute to every person's complete development -- mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. All people should receive in their childhood and youth an education that equips them to develop their own independent, critical ways of thinking and judgment so that they can make informed decisions about how best to contribute to society. Educational policymakers in the U.S. should embrace similar objectives by actively striving to help each child reach his or her full potential. Schooling should be about self-improvement, social empowerment, and transformative possibilities for society. These benefits should be distributed equally among our citizens as a humanitarian goal. We need to see youth as a social investment, not as a liability, and poor youth should not be seen as disposable, but rather as vital to the nation’s future prosperity.

Implementing such goals will stimulate economic growth. Darling-Hammond (2007) observes the declining rate of participation in higher education in the U.S., where only a third of young adults are enrolled in college, most in community colleges, compared to about 50% in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations. A recent OECD report (2005) found that for every year that the average schooling level of the population is realized, there is a corresponding increase of 3.7% in long-term economic growth. Ultimately, the price of educational inequality is loss of opportunity and stunted progress both for individuals and for society.

Provide adequate and equitable investment

Second, we need to take a hard look at our current, inequitable funding models and borrow solutions from those countries and states that have successfully redistributed resources according to different needs. Schools should be funded adequately and equitably, with more money and resources targeted to those who need extra support. We need to acknowledge the correlation between investment and performance. And, we need to invest in teachers by paying decent entry-level salaries and rewarding teachers who stay in the field, thus raising the status of the profession.

We need to be honest about the correlation between inputs and outputs. In contrast to many European and Asian educational funding models that fund programs centrally and equally, the U.S. has wide funding disparities, and significant variation in school quality. Most states have not equalized funding among school districts, and have vast differences in access to the educational resources needed for learning. The wealthiest 10% of school districts in the U.S. spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10%, and spending ratios of three to one are common within states (Kozol, 2005). In California, for example, many high-minority schools are so severely overcrowded that they offer a shortened school day and school year, do not offer the courses students would need to be accepted to college, and are staffed by untrained, inexperienced, and temporary teachers (Oakes, 2004). In many urban school districts across America, growing enrollments and tax cuts have led to extreme funding disparities and inequitable investment that serve to drive the opportunity gap.

Both international and domestic data analysis can help shed light on problems within the US. For example, a closer look at the disaggregated Programme for

International Student Assessment (PISA) data across racial groups reveals funding disparities that drive differences in achievement. Scores show American white students far above the international average, while scores for Hispanic and black students are far below average, leading to an overall poor national score. These scores are correlated to quality of education, such that those who consistently benefit from high quality education, with a rich curriculum, good teachers, and resource-rich environments at both home and school achieve higher educational goals. In contrast, those who attend predominantly minority, segregated schools that are overcrowded, lack basic textbooks and materials, and are staffed by untrained, inexperienced teachers have lower educational achievement. In these "apartheid" schools populated by the underclass, increasing numbers of students require second language instruction, special education services, individual attention, and targeted professional intervention (Ravitch, 2013b), but class size, school size, and inadequate funding make this impossible. RTT's answer to educational disparity has been to increase it, by rewarding the schools that already have the best resources and teachers with the most funding, and penalizing underfunded struggling schools by labeling them "failing" and then shutting them down. Educational reform efforts funded by billionaires, corporations, and private hedge funds have inflicted on lower income schools an endless cycle of under-trained, uncertified, first- and second-year teachers whose pedagogical approaches are driven by the data metrics to which they are contractually beholden. Instead of increasing disparities by rewarding the high-performing schools and shutting down the low-performing schools, we should develop a new model that evaluates schools based on how much money they have and need. A system that monitors investments and provides subsidized funding to help struggling schools obtain quality inputs would benefit society as a whole.

As Connecticut did successfully beginning in the 1980s, we can employ strategies to bring per-pupil expenditures to parity (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For example, first, we can raise the minimum beginning teacher salaries equally between low-income and high-wealth districts, providing subsidies from state funds to make up the differences. Second, funds can be allocated based on the number of fully certified teachers, thus creating incentives to raise the qualifications of the field. Third, scholarships and forgivable loans can be distributed to attract high-quality candidates. Fourth, we can encourage licensing reciprocity among states, enabling the mobility of qualified teachers and allowing for more selectivity based on teacher surpluses. Fifth, the content of teacher education curriculum can emphasize critical pedagogy, literacy development, and the inclusion of special needs, leading to a better understanding among professionals of how to engage individual students. Sixth, we can implement more rigorous licensing examinations that go beyond standardized tests to include portfolios, lesson plans, videotaped classes, evidence of student learning, and self and peer evaluations. After implementing similar reforms 30 years ago, Connecticut made significant gains in student achievement; In 1998, fourth graders there ranked first in the nation in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), despite increasing numbers of low-income, minority, and new immigrant students in the state's public schools during that time (National Education Goals Panel, 1999).

In the United States, teachers are undervalued and frequently maligned. Sleeter (2008) argues that teacher education in the US is under siege from a neoliberal assault that seeks to turn teachers into technicians while steering them away from theoretical knowledge that would guide their teaching, in favor of more "testable content knowledge" and systematic shortening or even bypassing of university-based teacher education. There is little public funding allocated to scholarships for new teachers, so they must either go into debt to pay for their own education, or enter the field with little or no training, for low pay. We should invest in our teaching forces by recruiting top candidates from universities, and paying them to go to school. We should teach teachers to learn how to create challenging curriculum and how to engage students in research and inquiry. Their training should also emphasize how students learn in different ways, and how to provide extra support for those with special needs such as learning disabilities, different cultural or language backgrounds, or other challenges.

Rather than perpetuating a destructive and demoralizing narrative that blames teachers for failures in the public system, we should be fostering a positive climate of continuous improvement. Agencies such as the Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Walton Foundation, Michelle Rhee's Students First, charter schools such as KIPP, Teach for America, and so on, have made it a mission to root out "low performing" teachers from public schools. Their efforts have directed massive publicity toward undermining teachers' unions and advocating for assessment-driven student outcome schemes such as merit pay – "the idea that never works and never dies" (Ravitch, 2013a) – which defines teachers' performance by the measures of their students' test scores. We need holistic measures of teacher competencies that combine formal and informal education, and a respect for learning through informal structures such as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). To facilitate a culture of learning within a community of teaching practitioners, social learning activities such as peer observations and group reflection should be central elements of program design. Administrators should encourage the development and maintenance of networks beyond their own schools, with other teachers at the local, national and international networks of their domain. In teacher training programs in particular, theory-based academic coursework should be integrated with field-based mentored internships, and include regular opportunities for individual and shared reflection among the trainees. Teachers need exposure to each other's classrooms, to observe the teaching practices of their peers and to reflect together on their respective pedagogies. Conscious participation within a community of practice comprised of teachers enables a form of professional development where all teachers improve concurrently with the advancement of the group's practices. Moreover, conditions for improving curriculum are strengthened when teachers collectively question teaching methods and work together to shape new practices while supporting each other's professional growth. Policymakers can support the development of the teaching workforce by honoring and rewarding teachers' prior experiential knowledge and its importance in the classroom. As Freire and Macedo (1987) argued, educators must be able to work collaboratively with each other, with their students, and with policymakers and administrators, in a culture of mutual support and respect. "Educators cannot work successfully by themselves; they have to work collaboratively in order to succeed in integrating the cultural elements produced by the subordinate students in their educational process" (p. 127). Ongoing teacher professional development should include opportunities for peer mentoring, lesson study, and action research. Rather than tying teacher performance evaluation to student test scores, we should encourage teachers to focus on instructional improvement, through self-evaluation, continuous teacher education, learning from each other, and coaching and mentoring.

Support critical pedagogy and reflective practice in teacher education

Third, while increasing support for teachers and elevating the status of the profession, we need to encourage critical pedagogy as a basis for liberating practice. Teacher education should also include an emphasis on critical race theory as a means of empowering marginalized youth. Critical theory within the teacher educational curriculum builds a foundation for transformative praxis and social change. This theory should be broad in scope, and should go beyond theories of classrooms and teaching, in order to allow for an understanding of the sociopolitical and economic context that shape education. In the U.S., for example, this understanding requires recognition of our historical legacy of colonization and oppression, coupled with structural inequities sustained by capitalism. A basis in theory offers a perspective on privilege, oppression, and marginalization in their various forms (classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, religious discrimination, and other forms of injustice that sustain disadvantage through covert and overt discourses).

Critical pedagogy includes not just the practice of teaching, but also the structure, process, content, and social context of education. Critical pedagogy is about power and empowerment, and educators’ moral responsibility to help students, particularly those from non-dominant cultures, to find their own voice. McLaren (1998) describes critical pedagogy as a radical theory of education that is “irrevocably committed to the side of the oppressed” (p. 164). If we do not engage intellectually in confronting the hegemonic interests served by current educational policies, we are complicit with those who control educational decisions – outcomes controlled not only by well-intentioned policymakers inspired by Dewey’s progressive ideals, but also by those who serve other interests: corporations, dominant cultural groups, and conservative political factions – and we do a disservice to those whose interests are not served by these decisions. Thus, an educator’s own power to create change begins with critical consciousness. Sleeter (2008) suggests that teacher education is under assault from neoliberal pressures that steer efforts away from multicultural, equity-based approaches and toward “shortening university-based teacher education or bypassing it altogether” (p. 1952) in the interest of government-mandated standards. Reform strategies that remove theory in the interest of such metrics remove children’s best interests from the equation.

Freire (1983) spoke of the empowering nature of critical consciousness among educators: “If men[/women] are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change” (p. 7). Freire uses the term “assistencialism” to refer to educators’ responsibility to enable people to reflect on themselves, their actions, and their roles to engage in an increased capacity for informed choice. Administrators can help to empower teachers by increasing their political literacy so that they can make informed choices and are not relegated to the role of curricular technicians (Giroux, 2010). Just as children need critical thinking skills in order to learn more than just basic skills and apply knowledge to real world experiences, so do teachers need to be able to adapt to different settings and circumstances, to reach children of different cognitive and cultural levels.

As teachers, administrators, scholars, and policymakers, we have a moral obligation to challenge the status quo and to question both the efficacy and equity of decisions that structure educational institutions, guide our roles within the system, and influence our power to make positive change. When we think critically about education, in any context, we shed light on the inequities and power dynamics that favor some students and marginalize others. When we question the status quo, we clarify who defines knowledge and power, who is oppressed by this power, and who has a vested interest in maintaining this oppressive order. We begin to see, for instance, as Freire did, that those who lack access to educational opportunities are thus subordinated to those who are more privileged. A "culture of silence" (Freire, 1972) is reflected in the peripheral, impoverished, and excluded populations who are subjected to written and unwritten codes or rules circumscribing institutional power, and it is our duty to empower all students to break that silence. Lipman (2006) advocates for teacher activism as a means of countering the ethical challenges posed by accountability reform:

> This is a critical time for educators to speak out and act. Children and youth need teachers who challenge techniques of silencing by demonstrating the courage to stand up against injustice and open up critical dialogue …. The lack of future, meaning, or purpose for so many youth of color is paralleled by an ethical and professional crisis in teaching. Test-driven curricula and accountability have so devalued any notion of teaching as an ethical and intellectual profession that some

> of the best teachers are leaving. This crisis also holds the potential for teacher activism (Lipman, 2006, p. 68).

There is a resemblance between the industrial age struggles against scientific management, or Taylorism, and today's resistance among educators to corporate reform schemes. Just as factory workers fought top-down dictates, deskilling, and the privileging of basic skills over critical thinking, so are teachers today working to prevent the undemocratic and neoliberal implementation of high-stakes testing and merit pay, assaults on professionalism, and the dumbing down and narrowing of curricula. Against a tidal wave of federal and state reforms, including Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind, Students First, union-bashing, and the daily onslaught of public school closures, educators can fight back on both local and global levels. Resistance may come in the form of protest and activism, scholarly literature, or independent efforts in critical pedagogy that suffuse counter-hegemonic narratives into the standardized curriculum. Another form of resistance among practitioners and scholars is to engage in dialectical endeavors to seek out other points of view and to synthesize them into a holistic perspective. Recognizing how privilege and oppression are legitimized and sustained by hegemonic structures and dominant ideologies requires an understanding of the relationships between knowledge and power. By identifying and calling out those whose interests are served by current policies, we can then confront them, dispel dominant dialogues that perpetuate harm, and increase public awareness of underlying truths. Apple (2006) advocates for tactical approaches that "interrupt rightist claims" within the media, in academic and professional publications, and in daily life. For instance, when confronted with reform strategies that support neoliberal policies such as privatization, charter schools, vouchers, assessment-driven reforms, performance-based merit pay for teachers, etc., we can retaliate with alternative expressions of progressive perspectives, writing letters to the editor or op-ed pieces in the same rightist publications in which the claims appear. Similarly, Diane Ravitch, through her daily blog (dianeravitch.net), has made a commitment to disseminating important information about the latest developments in neoliberal educational policy (covering topics such as privatization, school closures, accountability policy, merit pay, charter schools, corporate reform measures, assessment-driven curriculum, etc.). In recent years, she has been a staunch defender of quality public education, equity, teachers' rights, and holistic educational reform, and speaks out on a daily basis to proselytize for change. Educators must become transformative intellectuals, in order to "link emancipatory possibilities to critical forms of leadership by rethinking and restructuring the role of curriculum workers" through counter-hegemonic narratives (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 142).

Develop expansive, holistic curriculum

Fourth, we should not allow assessments to drive the curriculum. We need to support the liberal arts and encompass educational subjects that encourage critical thinking, inquiry, and self-expression. Our efforts should leverage children's home experiences and cultural capital. Curriculum should be tied in meaningful ways to individual experience, and personal meaning-making should be fostered through creative projects that are contextual with children's own surroundings. Schools should balance home culture with school culture, creating a sense of family and caring in the classroom, so that all children, even particularly those who are struggling, receive individual attention.

As schools have been pushed away from holistic teacher education and from rich conceptions of teaching, so has the curriculum been narrowed to align with government-mandated assessments and standards. In the U.S., the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are now being implemented across the country, with financial incentives offered by the federal government to states who adopt the CCSS curriculum. The stated goals of CCSS are to emphasize Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) subjects while providing a national curriculum that ensures standardized content and therefore more "accountable" assessments tied to the curriculum. As opposed to equity-oriented, learner-centered teaching, teachers are being prepared as technicians to implement curriculum packages (Sleeter, 2008). Education that is narrowly focused on science and math does not foster well roundedness. While the US has been sacrificing liberal arts curriculum in favor of STEM subjects, other countries have been doing the opposite. South Korea, for example, devotes a majority of its focus to social studies, physical education, music, fine arts, applied arts, moral education, foreign languages, and a range of extracurricular activities and electives (Huh, 2007). Meanwhile, in Finland, instruction is intentionally and increasingly individualized. The intent of Finland's national curriculum (at only 10 pages in length) is to provide teachers with recommended assessment criteria for each grade and subject (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers then use those broad guidelines to create their own curriculum and set of learning outcomes. Pedagogy is inquiry-based, guided by students' own interests. Group projects are common, and in many cases students determine their own targets and work at a self-guided pace. The cultivation of independence and active learning allows students to develop metacognitive skills that help them to frame, tackle, and solve problems; evaluate and improve their own work; and guide their learning processes in productive ways. The CCSS is taking us in the direction of more assessment-based curriculum, when we need to be moving toward a more holistic solution that incorporates writing and solving open-ended problems, instills metacognitive learning processes, and encourages critical thinking and problem-solving.

Additionally, rather than enforcing a standardized, supposedly culturally neutral curriculum that doesn’t account for cultural differences, we need to balance home culture with school discourse. We need to remember that “basic skills” (such as grammar, punctuation, the five-paragraph essay, and other conventions) required in school are just one aspect of the cultural capital of the middle class. Children’s cognitive development is heavily affected by cultural factors. To believe otherwise, that is, to accept the view that cognitive development is an independent, individual process, is to endorse a definition that is ethnocentric and limits both the potential and the pedagogical responsibility of the teacher. Cognitive development is not just the generally accepted premise of the individual acquisition of knowledge and skills. Rather, from a sociocultural perspective, cognitive development is the transformation of understanding through shared endeavors and cultural interactions (Rogoff, 2003). Cognition is a social process; individuals do not come into the learning environment with innate mental skills. Rather, they develop their intelligence through an accumulation of knowledge and skills via their social group, acquiring multiple perspectives that inform their beliefs, mental schemas, and intellectual output. Education, therefore, involves learning through collaborative efforts – between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and parents, schools and communities, and so on. The role of the critical pedagogue in this process is to bridge the cultural gaps that extend privilege to dominant cultures and perpetuate disadvantage among subordinate cultures.

The educational theorist James Paul Gee (1989) suggests that, just as speakers of other languages need to learn English in order to communicate effectively within an English-speaking society, so too do members of non-dominant cultures need to learn the dominant, “primary” discourse in order to gain social currency within the hegemony. Primary discourses, like languages, are most effectively learned when acquired; that is, subconsciously transmitted by exposure, without formal teaching. Those outside of the culturally dominant discourse are at an inherent disadvantage because they cannot acquire it; instead, they need to learn the discourse, a process involving conscious knowledge gained through teaching. In the classroom, Gee suggests, where the dominant discourse of academic narrative styles dictates who achieves success, teachers need to understand the distinction between acquisition and learning, and to scaffold those outside of the discourse. “Classrooms that do not properly balance acquisition and learning, and realize which is which, and which student has acquired what, simply privilege those students who have begun the acquisition process at home, engaging these students in a teaching/learning process, while the others simply fail” (Gee, 1990, p. 147). Further, on the subject of teaching discourse, Gee stresses the need to acknowledge inequities in the access to privileges afforded by the dominant narrative style, for "the liberal classroom that avoids overt talk of form and superficialities, of how things work, as well as of their sociocultural-political basis, is of no help" (Gee, 1989, p. 12).

The educational theorist Lisa Delpit says that literacy is more than reading or writing, but a political entity that gives rise to a "culture of power" (1995). Dominant groups apply frequent tests of fluency so as to exclude from full participation those who are not born to positions of power. Is it racist to insist that non-mainstream children adopt an alien discourse, if that discourse is oppressive to them? Delpit suggests that it is not racist, but rather, that teaching the rules of the discourse is essential, even as we accept the reality that everyone will be evaluated by the rules of the dominant discourse. These are essential realities for practitioners faced with implementing a standardized curriculum and high-stakes testing, where rigid rules and goals define the parameters of success. Theories of discourse also form the basis for critical race theory, which explores pedagogical possibilities that can empower teachers and students to break the boundaries between dominant and non-dominant discourses.

The work of critical race theorists has illuminated sources of strength students bring to education that can be honored and leveraged in order to help them transcend oppression. Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges and deconstructs the premise advanced by the philosopher Pierre Bourdieu that the knowledge and discourse of the upper and middle classes are considered the most valuable capital in a hierarchical society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's insights have often been interpreted as a way to explain why the academic and social outcomes of underprivileged students are significantly lower than the outcomes of more socioeconomically privileged and culturally dominant students; this argument is particularly invoked to explain the “achievement gap”, also known as the “opportunity gap”. Yet, this is a deficit perspective, in that it presupposes that underprivileged students “lack” the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Thus it is essential that educators transcend the deficit logic of the achievement gap, and incorporate more empowering ideas from critical race theory. A central principle of critical race theory is that populations that have otherwise been subordinated can be empowered through alternate, legitimate narratives that challenge dominant discourse and power relations. In particular, Yosso (2005) has illuminated the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. Various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. Teachers and administrators must recognize deeper ways to help students leverage these alternate forms of cultural and symbolic capital.

Furthermore, Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life (and by extension, its schools). Educators need to be able to understand power differences and the politics of education by interpreting, or deconstructing, current policies through a critical theory lens. CRT facilitates this by challenging “the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination” (Harris, 1993, p. 1715). CRT expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT insists on recognition of experiential knowledge of people of color. This recognition is the basis of the theme of "voice" scholarship that runs through CRT. Voice scholarship calls for pivoting the center or looking to the margins to find other sources of power and empowered expression. Additionally, attention to voice has been employed in educational research (Yosso, 2005; Perez-Huber, 2009), methodologies such as storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family history, scenarios, biographies, etc., to draw on the strengths of the lived experiences of marginalized students. CRT challenges educators to reevaluate the nature of equity. When students arrive at school with legacies of unequal treatment and restricted opportunities, it is not enough just to "treat students equally"; in fact, it is offensive to rationalize this equality of treatment as a justification for not questioning the disproportionately negative educational outcomes for students of color. This type of colorblind, multicultural paradigm is "mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). The "culturally neutral" RTT performance measures and CCSS curriculum offer no insights into how to negotiate race divisions in order to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth. Curriculum guidelines should be broad and flexible, so that teachers can adapt them to local and individual needs.

Make Change Beyond the School Setting

Finally, if our efforts are to bring about real social change, we need to implement reforms beyond the school setting. According to the Academic Pediatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the most important problem facing American children today is the effect of poverty on the health and well being of young people (APA Task Force on Childhood Poverty, 2013). One in five children lives below the federal poverty line, and almost one in two are poor or near poor, with a disproportionate burden falling on the very young, racial and ethnic minorities. Thus, policy interventions to improve educational outcomes are unlikely to be effective unless they are accompanied by far broader social policy initiatives to address poverty and inequality. Policymakers should look to reduce the impact of poverty on education by improving instruction to children with low achievement, and by building links with parents and the community. Advantages start at home, with the family and social environment, and can be supported by early and ongoing intervention programs that seek to enjoin parents in improving their children’s motivation and engagement, and public programs that provide more opportunities for these children outside of the school system. We need accountability systems that put pressure on schools to respond effectively to, and in collaboration with, the communities they serve – rather than subjecting children and teachers to a battery of high-stakes, norm-referenced testing procedures that penalize those who fail. The state should not be the ultimate authority in determining educational opportunity. Communities, including families and teachers, must participate in decision-making. A better accountability system that engages and empowers the community in decisions about young children’s education, and includes funding mechanisms to address extra-curricular, community-based support, is essential in combatting educational and economic inequities in the state of California and beyond. Hegemonic assumptions and institutional power create a hidden curriculum within our schools that reinforces existing social inequalities by educating students according to their class and social status. Teachers need to engage critically with standardized curricula and pedagogies in order to break down the institutional practices that privilege majority cultures over minorities, boys over girls, middle class values over those of subordinate peoples. And in so doing, they can begin to work differently with students, and therefore to change the status quo. "Only when the people of a dependent society break out of the culture of silence and win their right to speak – only, that is, when radical structural changes transform the dependent society – can such a society as a whole cease to be silent" (Freire, 2006, p. 59).

The critical pedagogue's perspective rejects the increasingly narrow focus on standardized curriculum as a strict formula for what gets tested, and suggests instead that standards be used as focal points for our creative work as educators. Effective and equitable accountability measures should include a broad range of assessment alternatives; teacher training and education that incorporates commonsense, context-specific cultural awareness and critical theory; and real intervention strategies for non-mainstream children. Accountability should be systemic and holistic, and include measures of early childhood resources, parent support, health, and community, after-school and summer programs. Berliner (2006) believes that educational efforts that focus solely on classrooms, school environments, and the teaching workforce are "ludicrous" and do nothing to reduce the economic disparity that dictates the quality of learning. He advocates for diverting attention toward supporting families and communities and reducing the poverty that limits school achievement and life opportunities. Similarly, Noguera (2008; 2010) suggests that federal education accountability policy is fundamentally flawed because it creates incentives for educators and policymakers to ignore the need to strengthen family and community programs by failing to include these supports in accountability calculations. He advocates for including out-of-school “wrap-around” educational supports in a broader accountability system to address the needs of disadvantaged children (Thomas, 2013).

Success nominally attributed to the beneficial effects of education, especially graduating from college, is in truth largely a result of factors determined long before children even enter school. Heckman (2012) argues for equalizing economic and social opportunities through high quality early childhood education programs that improve the early environments of disadvantaged children and supplement their family lives by teaching consistent parenting and by giving children the mentoring, encouragement and support available to functioning middle-class families. Children in these programs develop foundational skills on par with those of more affluent children and create a stronger family structure for themselves. Caring parents and early stimulation are essential ingredients of successful early childhood environments. The Carolina Abecedarian Project, better known as ABC, gave cognitive stimulation, training in self-control and social skills, and parental education starting in the first few months of life. The children were also provided with health checkups and health care. Four groups of individuals born between 1972 and 1977 were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, and their progress has been monitored so far through studies conducted at ages 12, 15, 21 and 30. This program had lasting effects on I.Q., parenting practices and child attachment, leading to higher educational attainment and more skilled employment among those in the treatment group (Campbell & Ramey, 2010).

We also need to foster connections between the school and the community. Delpit (2012) advocates for connecting the curriculum to the community, by "using the community as a classroom" (p. 204). Policy changes should support educational efforts that go beyond the school setting – i.e., wrap-around supports for parents and communities. We should instill in children a connection to the community, to something greater than themselves, and help to develop values and leadership among youth. Classrooms and laboratories could be extended to include local government offices, businesses, churches, and other schools. Guest speakers, visiting teachers, and advisors can be found among local community members. In bridging the barrier between the school walls and the surrounding community, we help children to develop citizenship and leadership skills tied to societal values. A curriculum that blends concerns for the development of the whole child – not just intellectually, but also morally, aesthetically, and physically – helps children to develop a mature sense of self-identity in order to engage productively within their communities. Community service and work-study programs are another way to help children develop the knowledge and skills for engaging in the diverse world of work, fostering a connection not only a social responsibility within their own neighborhoods, states, and country, and an awareness as global citizens. Education must be holistic, and humanitarian goals must be transparent within our efforts to change the system.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have discussed several major flaws in the federal Race to the Top accountability policy. In its use of competitive grant funding, the government has failed to invest adequate resources or make the fundamental curricular, pedagogical, or structural changes necessary to redress the systemic injustices wrought by the last four decades of neoliberal educational policies that exacerbate inequality and promote segregation by race, class, and income. The inevitable result of such unjust policies is low academic performance, which is then blamed on the schools at the expense of the students. Additionally, RTT privileges quantitative data over holistic information, and reinforces anti-public, pro-business sentiment while placing blame for educational shortcomings on schools, teachers, and students, rather than on policymakers. The outcome has been a narrowing of curriculum, pedagogy and the scope of teacher professional development. The problems with the system are not intractable, and positive changes can be achieved by reworking policy to address long-term goals, implementing funding solutions that are adequate and equitable, investing in teachers and encouraging broader curricular choices, and providing support for families and communities that helps to close the achievement gap.

The challenge we face today is to repair public policy and provide our schools, communities, and children with the care and support they need to thrive. Our policies and programs should address the root causes of disadvantage. Providing educational equity and enabling all children to learn requires the development of systems that support capacity building for educators and schools. The equal distribution of funds throughout the public school system, and an accountability policy that makes the government accountable to our children is imperative to supporting the full potential of our children and our country.

The failure to educate all of our children equally limits economic growth by wasting human capital. Policymakers need to make a moral and political commitment to addressing and mitigating the multiple dynamics of power in education, seeking social transformation through redistribution of wealth and resources. We also need to make a financial investment early in children's lives in order to prevent the need for more expensive compensatory fixes later on. The perpetuation of democratic government is dependent on the universal education of the people governed, and schools play a key role in economic outputs. A commitment to equity will determine our country's future.

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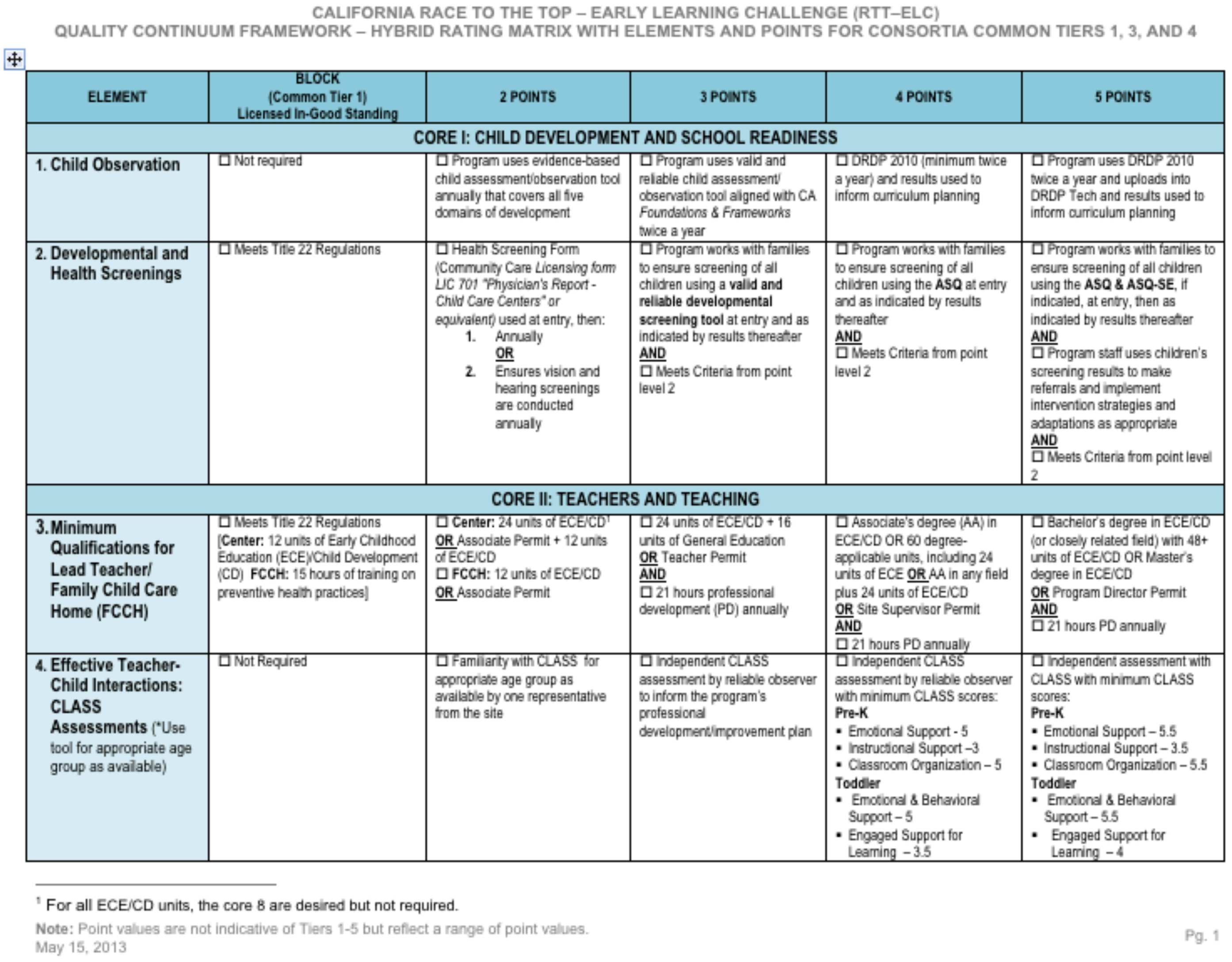
Appendix



CALIFORNIA RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE (RTT–ELC)
QUALITY CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK – HYBRID RATING MATRIX WITH ELEMENTS AND POINTS FOR CONSORTIA COMMON TIERS 1, 3, AND 4

ELEMENT	BLOCK (Common Tier 1) Licensed In-Good Standing	2 POINTS	3 POINTS	4 POINTS	5 POINTS
CORE I: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL READINESS					
1. Child Observation	☐ Not required	☐ Program uses evidence-based child assessment/observation tool annually that covers all five domains of development	☐ Program uses valid and reliable child assessment/ observation tool aligned with CA *Foundations & Frameworks* twice a year	☐ DRDP 2010 (minimum twice a year) and results used to inform curriculum planning	☐ Program uses DRDP 2010 twice a year and uploads into DRDP Tech and results used to inform curriculum planning
2. Developmental and Health Screenings	☐ Meets Title 22 Regulations	☐ Health Screening Form (Community Care *Licensing form LIC 701 "Physician's Report - Child Care Centers" or equivalent)* used at entry, then: 1. Annually **OR** 2. Ensures vision and hearing screenings are conducted annually	☐ Program works with families to ensure screening of all children using a **valid and reliable developmental screening tool** at entry and as indicated by results thereafter **AND** ☐ Meets Criteria from point level 2	☐ Program works with families to ensure screening of all children using the **ASQ** at entry and as indicated by results thereafter **AND** ☐ Meets Criteria from point level 2	☐ Program works with families to ensure screening of all children using the **ASQ & ASQ-SE**, if indicated, at entry, then as indicated by results thereafter **AND** ☐ Program staff uses children's screening results to make referrals and implement intervention strategies and adaptations as appropriate **AND** ☐ Meets Criteria from point level 2
CORE II: TEACHERS AND TEACHING					
3. Minimum Qualifications for Lead Teacher/ Family Child Care Home (FCCH)	☐ Meets Title 22 Regulations [**Center:** 12 units of Early Childhood Education (ECE)/Child Development (CD) **FCCH:** 15 hours of training on preventive health practices]	☐ **Center:** 24 units of ECE/CD[1] **OR** Associate Permit + 12 units of ECE/CD ☐ **FCCH:** 12 units of ECE/CD **OR** Associate Permit	☐ 24 units of ECE/CD + 16 units of General Education **OR** Teacher Permit **AND** ☐ 21 hours professional development (PD) annually	☐ Associate's degree (AA) in ECE/CD OR 60 degree-applicable units, including 24 units of ECE **OR** AA in any field plus 24 units of ECE/CD **OR** Site Supervisor Permit **AND** ☐ 21 hours PD annually	☐ Bachelor's degree in ECE/CD (or closely related field) with 48+ units of ECE/CD OR Master's degree in ECE/CD **OR** Program Director Permit **AND** ☐ 21 hours PD annually
4. Effective Teacher-Child Interactions: CLASS Assessments (*Use tool for appropriate age group as available)	☐ Not Required	☐ Familiarity with CLASS for appropriate age group as available by one representative from the site	☐ Independent CLASS assessment by reliable observer to inform the program's professional development/improvement plan	☐ Independent CLASS assessment by reliable observer with minimum CLASS scores: **Pre-K** ▪ Emotional Support - 5 ▪ Instructional Support –3 ▪ Classroom Organization – 5 **Toddler** ▪ Emotional & Behavioral Support – 5 ▪ Engaged Support for Learning – 3.5	☐ Independent assessment with CLASS with minimum CLASS scores: **Pre-K** ▪ Emotional Support – 5.5 ▪ Instructional Support – 3.5 ▪ Classroom Organization – 5.5 **Toddler** ▪ Emotional & Behavioral Support – 5.5 ▪ Engaged Support for Learning – 4

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[1] For all ECE/CD units, the core 8 are desired but not required.

Note: Point values are not indicative of Tiers 1-5 but reflect a range of point values.
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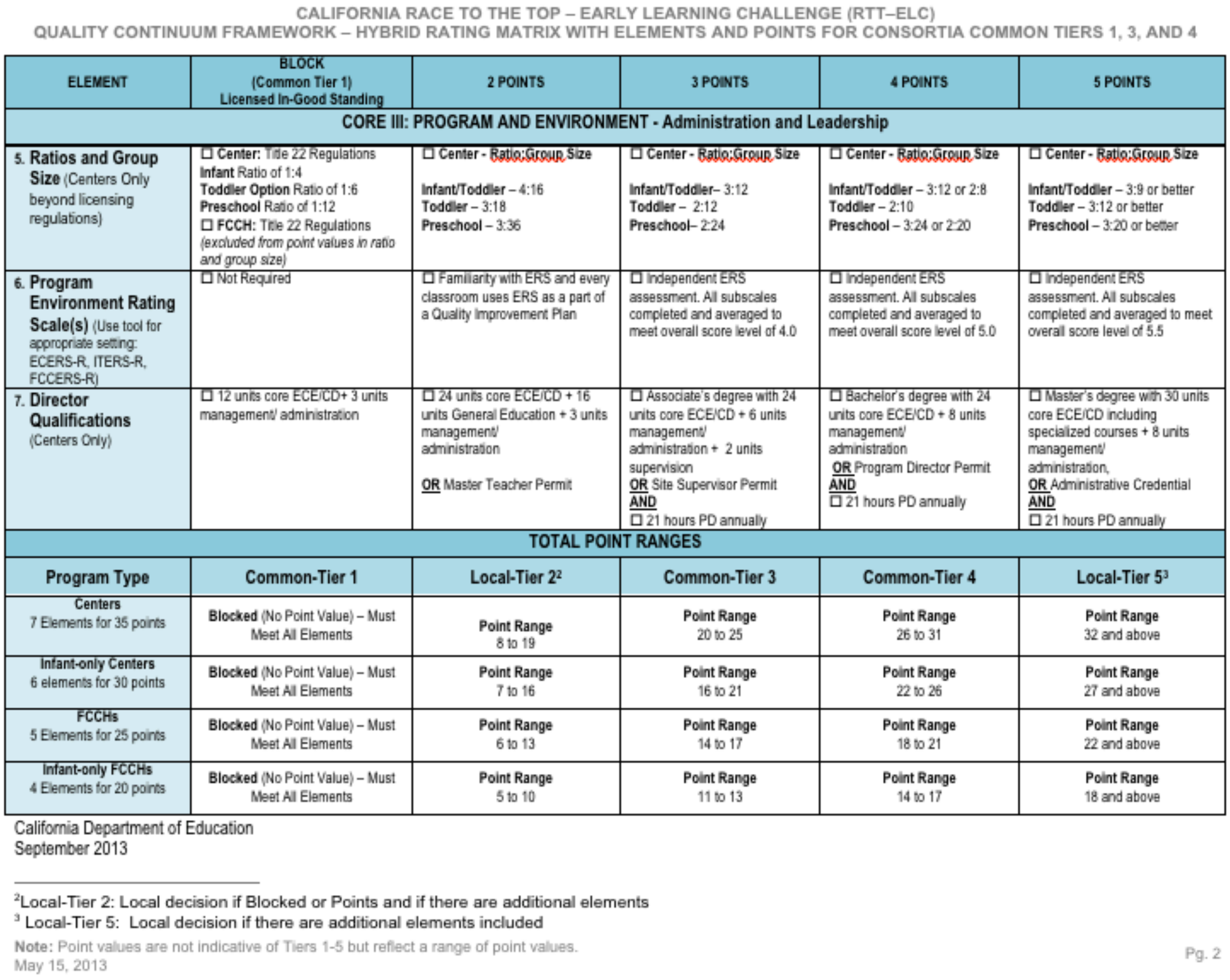

CALIFORNIA RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE (RTT–ELC)
QUALITY CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK – HYBRID RATING MATRIX WITH ELEMENTS AND POINTS FOR CONSORTIA COMMON TIERS 1, 3, AND 4

ELEMENT	BLOCK (Common Tier 1) Licensed In-Good Standing	2 POINTS	3 POINTS	4 POINTS	5 POINTS
CORE III: PROGRAM AND ENVIRONMENT - Administration and Leadership					
5. **Ratios and Group Size** (Centers Only beyond licensing regulations)	☐ **Center:** Title 22 Regulations **Infant** Ratio of 1:4 **Toddler Option** Ratio of 1:6 **Preschool** Ratio of 1:12 ☐ **FCCH:** Title 22 Regulations *(excluded from point values in ratio and group size)*	☐ **Center - Ratio:Group Size** **Infant/Toddler** – 4:16 **Toddler** – 3:18 **Preschool** – 3:36	☐ **Center - Ratio:Group Size** **Infant/Toddler**– 3:12 **Toddler** – 2:12 **Preschool**– 2:24	☐ **Center - Ratio:Group Size** **Infant/Toddler** – 3:12 or 2:8 **Toddler** – 2:10 **Preschool** – 3:24 or 2:20	☐ **Center - Ratio:Group Size** **Infant/Toddler** – 3:9 or better **Toddler** – 3:12 or better **Preschool** – 3:20 or better
6. **Program Environment Rating Scale(s)** (Use tool for appropriate setting: ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS-R)	☐ Not Required	☐ Familiarity with ERS and every classroom uses ERS as a part of a Quality Improvement Plan	☐ Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 4.0	☐ Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 5.0	☐ Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 5.5
7. **Director Qualifications** (Centers Only)	☐ 12 units core ECE/CD+ 3 units management/ administration	☐ 24 units core ECE/CD + 16 units General Education + 3 units management/ administration **OR** Master Teacher Permit	☐ Associate’s degree with 24 units core ECE/CD + 6 units management/ administration + 2 units supervision **OR** Site Supervisor Permit **AND** ☐ 21 hours PD annually	☐ Bachelor’s degree with 24 units core ECE/CD + 8 units management/ administration **OR** Program Director Permit **AND** ☐ 21 hours PD annually	☐ Master’s degree with 30 units core ECE/CD including specialized courses + 8 units management/ administration, **OR** Administrative Credential **AND** ☐ 21 hours PD annually
TOTAL POINT RANGES					
Program Type	**Common-Tier 1**	**Local-Tier 2**[2]	**Common-Tier 3**	**Common-Tier 4**	**Local-Tier 5**[3]
Centers 7 Elements for 35 points	**Blocked** (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements	**Point Range** 8 to 19	**Point Range** 20 to 25	**Point Range** 26 to 31	**Point Range** 32 and above
Infant-only Centers 6 elements for 30 points	**Blocked** (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements	**Point Range** 7 to 16	**Point Range** 16 to 21	**Point Range** 22 to 26	**Point Range** 27 and above
FCCHs 5 Elements for 25 points	**Blocked** (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements	**Point Range** 6 to 13	**Point Range** 14 to 17	**Point Range** 18 to 21	**Point Range** 22 and above
Infant-only FCCHs 4 Elements for 20 points	**Blocked** (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements	**Point Range** 5 to 10	**Point Range** 11 to 13	**Point Range** 14 to 17	**Point Range** 18 and above

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[2] Local-Tier 2: Local decision if Blocked or Points and if there are additional elements
[3] Local-Tier 5: Local decision if there are additional elements included

Note: Point values are not indicative of Tiers 1-5 but reflect a range of point values.
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