



OCT 08 2011

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

To the Members of the California State Senate:

I am returning Senate Bill 547 without my signature.

This bill is yet another siren song of school reform. It renames the Academic Performance Index (API) and reduces its significance by adding three other quantitative measures.

While I applaud the author's desire to improve the API, I don't believe that this bill would make our state's accountability regime either more probing or more fair.

This bill requires a new collection of indices called the "Education Quality Index" (EQI), consisting of "multiple indicators," many of which are ill-defined and some impossible to design. These "multiple indicators" are expected to change over time, causing measurement instability and muddling the picture of how schools perform.

SB 547 would also add significant costs and confusion to the implementation of the newly-adopted Common Core standards which must be in place by 2014. This bill would require us to introduce a whole new system of accountability at the same time we are required to carry out extensive revisions to school curriculum, teaching materials and tests. That doesn't make sense.

Finally, while SB 547 attempts to improve the API, it relies on the same quantitative and standardized paradigm at the heart of the current system. The criticism of the API is that it has led schools to focus too narrowly on tested subjects and ignore other subjects and matters that are vital to a well-rounded education. SB 547 certainly would add more things to measure, but it is doubtful that it would actually improve our schools. Adding more speedometers to a broken car won't turn it into a high-performance machine.

Over the last 50 years, academic "experts" have subjected California to unceasing pedagogical change and experimentation. The current fashion is to collect endless quantitative data to populate ever-changing indicators of performance to distinguish the educational "good" from the educational "bad." Instead of recognizing that perhaps we have reached testing nirvana, editorialists and academics alike call for ever more measurement "visions and revisions."

A sign hung in Albert Einstein's office read "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

SB 547 nowhere mentions good character or love of learning. It does allude to student excitement and creativity, but does not take these qualities seriously because they can't be placed in a data stream. Lost in the bill's turgid mandates is any recognition that **quality** is fundamentally different from **quantity**.

There are other ways to improve our schools – to indeed focus on quality. What about a system that relies on locally convened panels to visit schools, observe teachers, interview students, and examine student work? Such a system wouldn't produce an API number, but it could improve the quality of our schools.

I look forward to working with the author to craft more inspiring ways to encourage our students to do their best.

Sincerely,


Edmund G. Brown Jr.