



GOVERNOR ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

July 8, 2008

Mr. Theodore R. Mitchell
President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear President Mitchell,

I have always been a staunch supporter of California's high academic standards. I am very proud that we as a state have not wavered in our commitment to setting high expectations for our students so that they can achieve their dreams in whatever they choose to pursue, be it college or career.

You have a decision before you regarding assessment of content standards for eighth-grade mathematics that will do nothing less than set the course for California's future. California's standards make it clear that eighth graders should be prepared to master Algebra I – the highest academic bar in the nation. Those who feared we set the bar too high were proved wrong. Since 2003, the number of California eighth graders taking Algebra I has increased from 34 percent to 52 percent, compared with just 30 percent of eighth graders nationwide. We expected more of our students, and they delivered.

The State Board must choose whether we align the eighth-grade mathematics test with our high expectations or perpetuate a two-track system: one for high achievers and one for those of whom we expect less. This fork in the road is a choice between California's bold future and a status quo that is safe, mediocre and unacceptable. I am asking the State Board to do away with the below-grade-level General Mathematics test and designate the state's existing Algebra I exam as California's test to measure eighth-grade mathematics for federal accountability purposes. To do otherwise would lower our expectations and continue to divide our children between those we believe in and those we leave behind. If we don't believe in every child's potential, how can we ask children to believe in themselves?

Algebra is the gateway to critical thinking, pivotal for success in science, engineering and technology. How many times must California hear the warning that if we do not invest in our human capital – in K-12 math and science – we will be unable to maintain our leadership in a global economy? We have made significant gains in enrolling students in Algebra I in eighth grade in recent years, surpassing other states in the U.S. But we must set our goals higher. In 2007, California's eighth graders ranked 44th in the nation in mathematics achievement. Internationally, eighth graders in the United States are outperformed in mathematics by their counterparts in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, as well as Belgium, the Netherlands, Estonia and Hungary. We must prepare our children for a knowledge-based economy in which algebra is the cornerstone.

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I am certain that some will oppose this goal as unattainable and overly aggressive. This same level of alarm – the fear of failure – surrounded implementation of the STAR test and the California High School Exit Exam. In each of these cases we raised the bar, we met the goal and we substantially improved the quality of education for all our students.

I know that this high standard will require an intense commitment and increased investment in the resources for schools and the professional development of our teacher corps. I am committed to prioritizing and expanding the resources necessary to achieve the standards of excellence California deserves – and I know future governors and future legislatures will do the same.

It is hard to reach for something greater when we are having difficulty meeting our current budget needs, whether that means improving our infrastructure, reducing our greenhouse gases or setting higher standards for our students. As I have said before, we cannot be paralyzed by our current budget situation – we must prepare for the future. President Kennedy did not challenge Americans to reach the moon when and if they could afford to try. He said America must set the goal and rise to the challenge, whatever it takes. California must do the same.

I thank you for your great service to our children and our state. Please join me in charting this bold course for our children's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arnold Schwarzenegger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and a long, sweeping tail.

Arnold Schwarzenegger