HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

This report is the third in a series of five publications focused on the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) of 2006. The series draws on data from an ongoing, independent evaluation of QEIA funded by the California Teachers Association (CTA).

Following up on first and second reports, which were focused on an in-depth examination of QEIA in participating schools and lessons learned from exemplary schools, this third report focuses specifically on broad implementation of the reform and the roles of actors at various levels of implementation. This report draws on numerous data sources including case studies of schools, district interviews, county interviews, QEIA-related documents such as monitoring reports, principal surveys, and publicly available CDE data.

What were the roles of key actors and organizations in the implementation process?

The implementation of QEIA involved many key actors and organizational support structures, including county offices, districts, newly created regional technical assistance centers, and schools (see Figure 1 for an overview of the implementation process).

The statutory roles and responsibilities of County Offices were to monitor accountability targets annually and work with district offices on reporting requirements. Two Regional Technical Assistance Centers – one in Northern California and one in Southern California – were funded for the first few years to offer formal technical assistance to both districts and county offices during the initial implementation of the reform. By design, direct provision of technical assistance to schools was not specified in the legislation. Hence, while counties and the technical assistance centers did provide some support to schools during the incremental years of implementation via trainings, webinars, and informational meetings, districts were largely responsible for providing technical assistance and support to schools.

District Offices were largely involved in school site plans, budgets and reporting throughout the implementation of the reform. District offices were also specifically charged with hiring administrators and teachers, providing facilities for class size reduction in Regular Program schools, and for tracking and reporting progress to county offices. Funding for QEIA was provided directly to districts; however, as part of
QEIA, Participating Schools were afforded additional fiscal and local control to create comprehensive and cohesive plans for school improvement. Both Alternative Application and Regular Program schools were responsible for implementing all requirements for the reform and meeting API targets.

To What Extent Are Participating Schools Meeting The Requirements And Accountability Targets As Intended?

REGULAR PROGRAM SCHOOLS

Incremental Implementation

In Year 2 (2008/09) and Year 3 (2009/10), each Regular Program QEIA school was monitored on five criteria (class size reduction, teacher experience index, highly qualified teachers, professional development, and the Williams settlement requirements) to determine if schools substantially met program requirements (one-third of requirements in Year 1; two-thirds of requirements in Year 2). The counselor-to-student ratio of Regular Program high schools was also monitored. Any school that did not meet the program requirements was provided one year to remedy the issue before being terminated.

According to County reports, all but five of the Regular Program schools that were monitored met the interim monitoring requirements for Year 2 (2008/09) (99%). In Year 3 (2009/10), nearly all of the Regular Program schools substantially met requirements (93%). No Regular Program schools were terminated for lack of progress. However, five schools withdrew from the program, and six schools were closed; 473 regular program schools entered the fourth year of implementation.

Full Implementation

In Year 4 (2010/11), schools were expected to have fully implemented QEIA and meet all accountability requirements. An additional requirement was added to the criteria for 2010/11: schools were required to exceed their three-year average API growth target. It is important to note that districts, on behalf of schools, can submit waiver applications to the SBE requesting that all or part of any requirement be waived. In 2010, districts began applying for waivers from requirements; hence, not all schools that were unable to meet requirements were terminated.

Table 1 provides an overview of the monitoring results, released by county offices, from each full implementation year and for each requirement.
WAIVERS

As of January 2014, 315 waivers from requirements had been approved for 228 Regular Program schools. Moreover, 58% of current Regular Program schools have received a waiver from one or more requirements (203 of the 349) since 2010. See Table 2 for an overview of waivers granted.

### Table 2: Waivers Approved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Waivers Approved</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Size Reduction</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Qualified Teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Experience Index</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams Act</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>API</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>315</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class Size Reduction Waivers

The majority of waiver applications were for the class size reduction requirement. *Fluctuating enrollment* was the most common reason for seeking a CSR waiver; districts noted that unusually small class sizes in the reform’s base year created unrealistic class size targets and did not account for student mobility or unpredictable enrollment. *Lack of adequate funding* to support CSR was also frequently cited. Districts exhausted flexible funding sources in an effort to meet CSR requirements, and were unable to hire additional teachers due to budget constraints. Over the course of QEIA, some schools were restructured, combination classes were added, or grade configurations changed. These *structural changes* made it difficult to maintain class sizes in some cases. *Geographical limitations* were also noted, including rural staffing challenges and limited options for transferring students (i.e., proximity to other district schools; neighboring schools already at full capacity). *Staff turnover* was challenging for districts; many struggled with staffing schools appropriately to support CSR. Finally, *community needs* often led some districts to seek waivers; for example, in some cases, families objected to busing students to other schools.

Other Waivers

Waiver requests concerning the requirements for highly qualified teachers, teacher experience index, and the Williams Act were largely concerned with *staffing issues*: many districts experienced staff turnover and found it difficult to recruit and hire highly qualified, credentialed teachers (N=30). *Clerical errors* were also noted in four instances; percentages and targets were miscalculated by district and/or county offices.

All but one waiver application for the API growth requirement (27 total applications) were denied; one school received a waiver because they had recently experienced a large influx of immigrant and refugee English Learners from the Middle East.

ALTERNATIVE APPLICATION SCHOOLS

Alternative Application schools crafted their own unique goals for QEIA. The Alternative Application was designed to provide a funding opportunity for high schools that would have otherwise struggled to meet the Regular Program requirements because of their geographic location (e.g., rural) or physical size (e.g., no space for additional facilities for class size reduction). According to one county representative, Alternative Application schools tended to set goals that were “overly ambitious,” and in many cases, schools struggled to meet the requirements. By Year 6, only five Alternative Application schools (20%) had met their requirements and remained in the program.

EXEMPLARY ADMINISTRATORS

As part of QEIA, districts are required to define criteria for and ensure that exemplary administrators are in place at QEIA schools and also provide professional development for an administrator that is similar in quality and rigor to the Administrator Training Program (Assembly Bill 430). There are no specific hour requirements for the professional development that should be provided to administrators as part of QEIA. Moreover, the county monitoring process does not include the exemplary administrator component. Across survey results, district interviews, and case studies, very few instances of QEIA-specific district-created criteria for exemplary administrators were found, which is unsurprising considering the absence of formalized requirements in the monitoring process.
What are the various contextual factors that influenced policy implementation?

QEIA was designed to provide additional resources to the state’s lowest achieving schools with the intent of improving school performance. The provision of additional resources such as smaller classes, high quality staff and principals, and effective professional development was coupled with local autonomy and reform plans based on community needs. These inputs were intended to enhance the capacity of schools to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

The extent to which schools were able to implement the requirements of QEIA and realize the full intent of the legislation was influenced by a number of contextual factors:

1. Financial Challenges;
2. Staff Turnover;
3. Requisite Capacity, including:
   - An Exemplary Leader
   - A Common and Transparent Vision
   - Collective Accountability
   - Expectations for Teaching and Learning
   - A Collaboration-Capable Culture;
4. Fluctuating Enrollment; and
5. Geography.

Recommendations and Conclusions

An examination of the monitoring and accountability results reveals that numerous schools found it difficult to sufficiently implement core program components and class size reduction, in particular. Moreover, 315 waivers from requirements were ultimately approved for nearly half of the schools funded since 2010. Such results coupled with the valuable insights offered by school, district, and county stakeholders provide several recommendations for policymakers should they craft similar policies in the future.

1. Specify narrow criteria for waivers early on.
2. Build in proper technical assistance and extensive support for districts and schools.
3. Embed quality indicators into accountability targets.
4. Construct criteria for and monitor the placement of exemplary administrators.
5. Simplify monitoring approaches.
6. Provide support to schools for crafting reachable accountability targets.
7. Target an alternative application for small and/or geographically-isolated schools.

Despite challenges and changing policy and economic contexts, stakeholders in participating schools have consistently emphasized the benefits of QEIA – the additional funding, provisions, and opportunity for local control. As one district representative explained: “I think ideally, QEIA helped set up a perfect program in the sense that class size was doable, teachers had support, teachers had time for relief for PLC, they had time for professional development. All of those things that sometimes we don’t afford our teachers the opportunities to do because of just time constraints and funding.” Furthermore, in advice to future policymakers, many stakeholders explained that programs like QEIA – focused on additional resources and local control – afford an opportunity for schools to make effective decisions about teaching and learning. For example:

I would want policymakers to know…that investing at significantly higher levels of funding in our schools can significantly impact all students’ learning, and that being as commensurate to even the national average of funding our schools would allow us to do many, many of the things that the QEIA schools were able to do. And I think secondly, there's always the question from the state department – I'll just simplify it – can we trust folks at the local level to do the right thing…i think for me in our District, with some clear guidance, and then clearly understanding where there was flexibility in parameters and local control, we could make decisions that meet the needs of our kids here. I think those would be the two most important messages. And just that good teaching and learning simply costs money.