

June 9, 2005

Mr. James Mayer
Executive Director
Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Mayer,

Thank you for your invitation to provide written testimony to the Little Hoover Commission in advance of the June 23rd hearing on school governance. There is little doubt that flaws in California's existing educational governance structures are a major impediment to improved student achievement, efficient resource allocation, and strong accountability for results. I applaud the Commission's interest in delving into this challenging yet critically important policy area.

As Chair of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Educational Excellence, I also welcome your overture to coordinate our research agendas in order to best promote constructive and meaningful reforms in the area of school governance. I am fully open to exploring ways to ensure that our efforts minimize redundancy and complement each other to the extent possible. The attached written testimony, provided in response to the Commission's questions, can provide a starting point for identifying options for such coordination. I look forward to continuing an exploration of ways for us to coordinate our work at the hearing on June 23rd.

Sincerely,

Theodore R. Mitchell
President
Occidental College

Testimony to the Little Hoover Commission
June 23, 2005

The following testimony responds to questions presented by the Little Hoover Commission in a letter dated May 6, 2005.

The Governor has asked you to lead a new committee examining finance, workforce and educational governance issues. What will be the focus of the committee concerning educational governance?

In April 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger announced the formation of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Educational Excellence. This non-partisan, public/private partnership group is charged with examining K-12 education in California and recommending steps to improve the performance of public schools. It is the Governor's intention that these recommendations help to build consensus among citizens and state policy makers and inform decisions on the important education policy and funding decisions currently facing the state.

The Committee will focus on four interrelated issues: 1) the distribution and adequacy of education funding; 2) the functioning and effectiveness of current governance structures; 3) teacher recruitment and education; and 4) the preparation and retention of high quality school administrators. In this way, the work of the Committee will engage in a holistic and thorough analysis of California's public school system.

The Committee's overall work plan is to engage in a deliberative process, first identifying policy areas in need of exploration, then commissioning research or otherwise conducting analysis of the topic, and finally developing policy options and recommendations. The Committee will engage in these activities over a period of two years.

To date, the Committee has met three times and begun to develop the research agenda and action plan that will guide its work for the next two years. Initial meetings have focused primarily on matters of school finance, with limited discussion in the other charge areas.

Given that the Committee's work is still in a preliminary stage, I am not able to provide a detailed description of how we will approach the topic of school governance. However, to help prime a conversation with the Commission, I will share that initial conversations have touched on the following topics: the role of school boards; proper alignment of school-level and district-level responsibilities; the bifurcation of state-level governance; the need for better coordination of workforce training and career technical education; and the need for better coordination of teacher preparation, teacher recruitment and retention, and professional development efforts.

Could a study of governance by the Little Hoover Commission complement the work of the committee and if so, in what way?

I believe that a study on school governance by the Little Hoover Commission would complement the work of the Committee on Educational Excellence simply by providing additional context on the related policy questions and challenges. In addition, with further dialogue and planning, it may be possible to coordinate our research agendas in order to best promote constructive and meaningful reforms in the area of school governance. I am fully open to exploring ways to ensure that our efforts minimize redundancy and complement each other to the extent possible.

What areas of educational governance are the highest priorities for reform and what are the most strategic reforms that should be explored?

The Committee's specific priorities for reform of education governance will be set in the full context of all four of its charge areas: 1) the distribution and adequacy of education funding; 2) the functioning and effectiveness of current governance structures; 3) teacher recruitment and education; and 4) the preparation and retention of high quality school administrators. In this way, the work of the Committee will engage in a holistic and thorough analysis of California's public school system. Given that the Committee is still formulating its research agenda and commissioning research, it would be premature at this point to designate priorities or comment on specific strategies in the area of educational governance.

How could the Little Hoover Commission design its project to be a strategic catalyst for needed reforms?

To provide a useful answer to this question would require a more detailed understanding of the Little Hoover Commission's perspective on matters of educational governance. I look forward to further discussing these issues with the Commission at the June 23rd hearing.