California still lags the nation in achievement in reading and math, even when accounting for income and racial/ethnic differences, but the state's students have been performing better over time and have been increasing at a faster rate than the rest of the nation.

The new standards also have broad local support. Moreover, aid for instructional improvement and alignment of aid with standards has improved. However, educators have difficulty assessing quality and selecting the best available options. Many superintendents look to the state for help and information, but the California Department of Education (CDE) does not have the capacity to reliably support the improvement of instruction.

California has greater disparities among student groups than other states. In more affluent California districts, student achievement levels are similar to the average performance in affluent communities nationally, but students in non-affluent districts score, on average, nearly a full grade level behind their national counterparts.

Superintendents, principals, teachers, state and regional education leaders widely support recent reforms. In the areas of finance, standards and information infrastructure, California has improved. However, the state falls short of realizing the potential of these new systems because of serious capacity limitations.

The state's education data system is now richer, with information on student learning over time and mobility across districts, potentially allowing for better decision making. However, access to data is severely limited, significant gaps in data remain and the CDE does not have the capacity to use the data effectively to guide policy decisions.

At least part of these inequalities stem from unequal education in K-12 schools. For example, schools serving less advantaged students tend to have more difficulty filling teaching positions and, as a result, employ fewer experienced and appropriately credentialed teachers and principals. Moreover, many English learners in California do not have equitable access to grade-level core content instruction, partly because ELs may be tracked into lower-level content area classes and because English language development classes often crowd out content instruction.

Initial research provides evidence that Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)-induced increases in school spending led to increases in high school graduation rates and academic achievement, particularly among low-income and minority students. A $1,000 increase in district per-pupil spending experienced in grades 10-12 led to an estimated 5.9 percentage-point increase in high school graduation rates. However, some districts still struggle with how to allocate resources given their new flexibility, and a large group of districts do not have access to necessary supports to build the knowledge and skills that they need.

California charter school policy has led to a diverse sector of schools that, on average, have had positive effects on learning for charter school students who traditionally have poorer educational outcomes, though the broader effect of charter schools on students in other schools is unknown, and charter authors would benefit from more guidance and support.

The learning rates of California's third through eighth grade students are the same or a slightly better than other students nationwide. Low-income students lag behind their national counterparts, however, primarily because of lower school-readiness levels among entering kindergartners. Black and Latino children and dual language learners are less likely to have attended preschool than white children. Children from low-income families are more likely to have child care that is license exempt, not having to meet any quality standards. Child care workers in California receive low wages and benefits; 58 percent depend on at least one public income support.