

[Get Into the Act of Closing the Achievement Gap](#) Transcript

TICAL Interviewer: Welcome to Radio TICAL, an audio podcast helping busy administrators get the most from technology. I'm your host, Rowland Baker, Director of the TICAL Project. My guests today are Jack O'Connell, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Rozlynn Worrall, Administrator for the California Department of Education's Middle and High School Improvement Office. They are going to share with us an exciting new resource for middle grade educators that will be an invaluable tool in helping to ensure success and closing the achievement gap. Welcome, and thank you for joining us on Radio TICAL.

Jack: Rowland, it's nice to be with you today and thank you very much for hosting this event

TICAL Interviewer: California's economic and social success is dependent on the preparation of all students. Superintendent O'Connell, why are the middle grades so critical to closing the achievement gap?

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Jack: California does serve more than six million students in our public schools. Now of this number, about 1.5 million are currently in our middle grades: grades six, seven, and eight. Now we know that our state has very challenging demographics.

- We have 56 different recorded language groups.
- Over 40 percent of our middle grades students are being raised in poverty—many by single parents or grandparents.
- One-third of our middle grades students are classified as English language learners.
- Only four out of ten students tested academically proficient on the California state standards tests.

Now our state's success really is directly related to having an educated workforce—have to be well skilled, have to be analytical-- and our citizens also need to exhibit civic responsibility. Now being well prepared to graduate from high school really starts in pre-school, but the middle years are particularly important. It is during this particular time period that our students begin to make decisions and make choices. It is the time when they decide they want to be learners and attend school or when they begin disengaging from

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school because they decide that school really might not be meeting their particular needs.

Now unfortunately –and this has been well documented-- the dropout rate in high school is determined in many cases as early as sixth grade. Disadvantaged students, students of color, and English language learners who have not yet had access to the best teachers, best strategies, and a truly supportive environment are most vulnerable to dropping out of school. These students are already behind their more affluent, English speaking, white and Asian peers who might come from more affluent families. As the achievement gap widens, it seems to the young people at the bottom of the gap that school might be pointless. They wonder, “Why bother?” “Why even try?”

TICAL Interviewer: Keeping in mind that students make that decision to drop out before high school, what is it you’re doing at the Department of Ed to help close the achievement gap and reduce the dropout rate?

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Jack: Dropout prevention is a critical issue and a very high priority for our department. You are certainly correct about students starting on the path to dropping out even before they enter high school. In fact, some research indicates that drop outs can be predicted as early as fourth grade.

Our state offers a wide range of options and multiple pathways to meet the needs of students. Some of these options include:

- Community day schools
- Opportunity schools
- Alternative schools of choice
- Magnet schools
- Charter schools
- The AVID program, and-- I'm a big believer and so is our Governor, in--
- Career Technical Education programs

The department also administers numerous programs at site and county levels. These recognize exemplary practices that enable

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students to stay in school, graduate, and prepare for their successful future.

TICAL Interviewer: What recommendations does the California Department of Ed have specifically for middle grades success and closing the achievement gap?

Jack: In 2006, the California Department of Education released 12 recommendations for middle grades with specific strategies on how to ensure success for every student and close the achievement gap. We developed these foundational recommendations with the help of our California Middle Grades Alliance partners. Members come from state level educational organizations that represent teachers, school boards, school administrators, our classified personnel and so many others that foster middle grades education. TICAL is another one of our partners and remains incredibly helpful in providing technical support to promote the recommendations.

The recommendations are organized into four focus areas that include Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness,

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Social Equity, and Organizational Structures and Processes. Last year the California Department of Education and the P-16 Council held an Achievement Gap Summit in which Access, Culture and Climate, Expectations, and Strategies (ACES) were the key themes. These 12 middle grades recommendations dovetail with ACES. And the school-based recommendations from the P-16 Council for closing the achievement gap are already embedded components of the 12 recommendations for middle grades educators.

TICAL Interviewer: As you know, TICAL is one of the statewide education technology services funded through the Department of Ed. This project is for administrators with a lot of resources posted by administrators and focuses on using technology to assist with school leadership. What role does technology play in implementing the TCSII recommendations?

Jack: The 12 recommendations I just mentioned a moment ago are the foundation for a fabulous Web portal that the department recently launched for middle grades educators. It is called Taking Center Stage—Act II (or T-C-S-2) and we had a great event in Sacramento

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to help launch this. The portal is organized around the 12 recommendations and is filled with research, practical information, and guidance for educators on how to implement the recommendations. And in these tough economic times, TCSII provides an efficient way for middle school educators to view best practices, get the benefits of free excellent professional development at any time, and share their ideas with each other. The web portal is organized intuitively like a book and dynamically with hyperlinks and multimedia. In order to access the information, educators must use just basic technology.

You asked how school leaders can use this tool. First, I encourage district leaders (superintendents and school boards) and every middle grades school administrator to visit the site and browse around. I think it will become apparent to the school leadership how this incredible resource can be used in the school's professional development plan to positively affect continuous improvement to ensure success, and close the achievement gap for every middle grades student.

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This is a free resource from the California Department of Education. Since its launch, the TCSII Web portal has received hundreds of thousands of hits from across the United States and around the world and has garnered rave reviews from middle grades educators.

TICAL Interviewer: That really sounds like a great integration of content and technologies. How would listeners find it on the Web and what are some specific examples of what administrators and school leaders as well as teachers can find once they get there?

Jack: Your questions keep getting harder and harder! So, since Roz is the administrator of the Middle and High School Improvement Office and head of the TCSII project team, I would like to give Roz a chance to jump in here and earn her keep for today.

Roz: Thank you, Jack, and Rowland. It's my pleasure to talk about TCSII—it has been four years in the making. First, I want to acknowledge the TCSII team and in so doing, let the listening audience know that this is not the product of bureaucrats but of middle level educators and writers and multimedia experts who are

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passionate about ensuring success for all of California's middle grades students. Our team could not have done this work without the input of hundreds of administrators, teachers, school board members, county offices of education, and organizational partners across the state contributing to this effort. We really mean it when we say TCSII was created by educators for educators. And you will see that when you get online.

The Website address is: <http://pubs.cde.ca.gov/TCSII>. However, the easiest thing to do is to go to your Internet search browser and key in TCS (Roman numeral II which is ii)—TCSII. The first link in most cases will be the home page of Taking Center Stage—Act II.

So let me share three specific examples of what our growing audience loves. You know, first of all it was exciting to get TCSII out there, but this next best thing is to really find out how people are learning and what they're doing with TCSII.

1. The very first thing is the videos and Webcasts! We've had tens of thousands of hits on the videos and Webcasts. We started with a

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collection of 12 video vignettes that are five to seven minutes long and demonstrate replicable practices (one for each recommendation). Professional learning communities are watching these together as a springboard for dialogue.

In the near future, we will have a series of Get into the Act! videos that will stream from TCSII featuring educator and researcher Dr. Doug Reeves, academic literacy and language professor Dr. Kate Kinsella, and brain researcher and neuroscientist Dr. Janet Zadina sharing practical strategies for use in the classroom. We have already taped these interviews. They're fabulous, we're really excited about getting them out there and I know that the educators in the field will love them.

2. In the Spotlights! TCSII has hundreds of spotlighted practices, several within each recommendation and chapter. A Spotlight illuminates a school and a replicable practice with a short written vignette. Schools that are spotlighted are taking great pride in sharing these practices with others.

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3. Searching and Researching! TCSII is set up to search on key words and to provide direct links to original research and reports. For instance, if I key in English language learners into the TCSII search engine, I will be linked to more than 90 indexed pages where information and strategies can be found for teaching adolescent English language learners.

- If I am on a page that has a quotation from an original report or research paper and that paper is available electronically, TCSII will take me directly to the primary resource.
- Another great search feature is the A-Z Hotlinks, that link me out of TCSII to thousands of related outside resources. Our TCSII educators are using specific keywords and topics to develop focused, researched-based presentations and professional development opportunities for their staff on key issues facing their school.
- I could go on and on, but part of the excitement is for educators to explore the possibilities on their own.

TICAL Interviewer: You know, I need to tell you that sounds like such like a great resource because one of the things we hear busy administrators say is that they don't have time to go on to a search

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engine and get 90,000 resources on middle grades schools, so to go through and have a selected group of resources in one location sounds like a real asset to help us in California. Before we close on this topic, are there any last comments that you would like to share with our listeners?

Jack: Rowland, I'd just like to again encourage all middle school educators to hop online and find the TCSII portal. This truly is a wonderful resource and, perhaps best of all, the price is right -- it's free!

Roz: Thank you, Jack, thank you, Rowland. It's been a pleasure to be here today. To Get into the Act, listeners just need to key in T-C-S-I-I for Taking Center Stage—Act II in your Web browser. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact us at tcsii@cde.ca.gov. And, I think this is a wonderful resource and thank you again very much for allowing us to share this and we hope that everybody out there Gets into the Act.

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TICAL Interviewer: Well, Superintendent O'Connell and Roz, thank you very much for agreeing to be on Radio TICAL.

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