Remarks of Carl L. Brodt

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I wish to thank the Senate Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education for the opportunity to give e-testimony on the proposed Master Plan. I shall confine my remarks to the Final Report of the Finance and Facilities Working Group K-12 Education.

I should begin by saying that the working group clearly put a considerable amount of time, thought, and effort into the proposals contained in report. I was particularly pleased that the effort focused upon trying for "the first time" to "draw a direct, explicit link between our expectations and the resources needed to achieve them"—the Holy Grail of any central planning like California's public education Master Plan. A number of other ideas contained in the report are commendable too.

- The report's recommended shift from funding "equity" to "adequacy" in funding to achieve educational goals makes considerable sense, at least in theory.
- The report's recommendations to simplify funding with more block grants and fewer categorical can only help shift the orientation of education administrators back from compliance to servicing the children.
- And although I think constitutional spending guarantees are generally bad policy, incorporating an additional component into the per-pupil allocations to each district to cover capital and major maintenance needs would have the advantage of helping to stabilize districts' long-term capital planning environment.

Despite the positive character of these recommended changes, my principal worry about the report recommendations focuses upon the weak cornerstone upon which they by-and-large rest : That cornerstone is the proposed California Quality Education Model. I simply do not believe that the model will lead to establishing a "direct, explicit link between our expectations and the resources needed to achieve them" by providing a solid estimate of "what level of funding is adequate to provide every pupil with an opportunity to meet adopted content and performance standards."

First of all, the working group presented no evidence that the model will provide that link. In fact, little discussion occurs at all in the report about the successes or failures of the one and only use of a similar model by the State of Oregon because the approach there is too new and untested to yield meaningful results to report. Even school vouchers—deemed a "risky scheme" by some people--actually have more evidence to suggest that they improve public education than the Oregon Quality Education Model!

Secondly, the report's anticipation that "expert practitioners and researchers" would provide the basic input into the California Quality Education Model implies that the Quality Education Commission (QEC), responsible for implementing the model, will gather information to set funding targets given current public school spending practices. By implication, then, research into the fiscal impact of existing institutional arrangements, spending priorities and mandates (some of which are open-ended), and inefficiencies in the public school system will largely be beyond the scope of the QEC's charter.

Yet, any QEC attempt to define funding adequacy without considering spending reforms to ensure that the public school system efficiently uses the monies ignores study after study which have reported that without such reforms little, if any, correlation exists between total per pupil spending on K-12 education and academic results. As a result, I believe it is premature to "explore local revenue options"—that is, to set the stage for raising local taxes to fund education, as the working group recommended--until fundamental restructuring of the institutional arrangements and priorities within the public school system occurs.

Thirdly, even if such reviews of current spending practices were within the QEC's charter, the proposed structure of the QEC raises considerable doubt as to whether it would have the political will to recommend efficiency-oriented spending reforms. Regardless of whether the QEC is composed of "business, parent and education community leaders" as indicated on the top of page 13 or of appointees representing "industry, practitioners, administrators, researchers, and labor" as indicated at the bottom of page 13 and the top of page 14, at least the majority, *if not almost all*, of the members of the QEC would hold direct or indirect vested financial interests in preserving the institutional status quo regarding spending priorities and practices.

A better approach than the one outlined by the working group would be the following:

- to broaden the charter of the QEC to include researching and recommending cost-saving reforms,

- to staff the commission with people who have no direct or indirect financial ties to the public school system and therefore who have have no conflict-of-interest in evaluating its funding and spending, and

- to broaden the scope of gathering input beyond "expert practioners and researchers" by including the experiences from the most successful schools from around the state, including charter schools and non-public schools.

If the QEC would follow such an approach, the Legislature might find itself presented with more meaningful alternatives to ensuring "adequacy" funding than just raising taxes year after year.