

Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools David W. Gordon
Remarks at the Sacramento County Williams Settlement Media Briefing
Jedediah Smith Elementary School, Sacramento, CA • March 18, 2005

Good morning. It is a pleasure to welcome you to Jedediah Smith Elementary School, which is among the first schools in our area to be inspected under the landmark Williams legislation. The package of bills signed by Governor Schwarzenegger in August, now referred to as the “Williams legislation,” is designed to shore up the foundation needed to improve low-performing schools. I applaud the efforts of Governor Schwarzenegger and the legislature and the new focus of attention and resources on low-performing schools. But simply counting textbooks alone won’t improve student achievement, which — after all — is why we are here today. We at the Sacramento County Office of Education are taking this new opportunity very seriously to partner and work collaboratively with districts that have low-performing schools in a way that goes far beyond simply counting inputs.

We launched this new school inspection program this past Monday visiting some of the lowest performing schools in our county. We fulfilled the Williams requirements and counted textbooks to make sure that all of the students had what they needed. This effort also includes a team to inspect the facilities and verify that they are in good repair, giving the students a clean, well-maintained learning environment. And back in our office we are checking to verify that teachers have proper certification.

Because of this new inspection requirement and the funding provided through the legislation, we have increased our capacity to give our local districts the support they need to improve the performance of the students in these Williams schools.

This new work complements what we are already doing with our districts and schools. Right now we are actively training teachers to use the textbooks effectively for all children. We also provide intervention teams partnering with schools and districts to improve student achievement in low-performing schools.

All of these efforts combine to help us help districts turn around those schools most in need of improvement. Our primary goal is to assist districts with schools like Jedediah Smith to resolve any problems that are found and identify areas in which we can help them improve instruction.

There are 71 schools in our county that we will review as Williams schools. These schools are in the bottom third of the state's 2003 academic rankings. Our findings will be sent to the district and posted on our Internet site for parents and the community to see.

What will we be looking for today in our inspection? Our teams are going to count textbooks and make sure that there is a sufficient amount so that each student has a book. Our facilities inspection will include classrooms, all common areas, and restrooms.

Because our teams have done significant documents review prior to the inspection, they are familiar with the enrollment numbers in each class, and the materials adopted by the local school board for use by each student, and have a copy of the school accountability report card given to the community. This preparation work lets the teams work quickly so that the classes experience only minimal disruption as we examine materials and check the facility.

To prepare our districts for the visits like the one that you are participating in today, we held a series of staff training sessions and conducted a pilot involving seven schools during February. I'm proud to be joined here today by legislators, superintendents from some of our school districts, state education leaders, and a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union, which represented the plaintiffs in the Williams lawsuit.

This work has truly been a team effort. Today we are making sure that the building blocks for success are here: for the students and for the teachers. Textbooks, clean and functional facilities, and prepared teachers — that is simply where we are starting; it is only our beginning in the effort to improve instruction and ensure that all our young people become high performers. Thank you for joining in this effort.

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