



Making California's Schools Work Again: Steve Hilton's Plan to Fix Public Education by 3rd Grade

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MAKING CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOLS WORK AGAIN: STEVE HILTON'S PLAN TO FIX PUBLIC EDUCATION BY 3RD GRADE

THE PROBLEM

California's public schools are failing millions of students. Only 47% of students meet English language standards, and just 35% meet math standards, compared to the roughly 60% of students nationwide that meet their state's English standards and 65% that meet state math standards. For Black and Latino students, the numbers are even worse. Nearly 70% of Black students and 64% of Latino students do not meet basic standards in reading. These failures are concentrated in the early grades, where students are falling behind and never catching up. Research shows that if a child cannot read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school. That is why fixing early education and ensuring literacy by 3rd grade must be the cornerstone of any serious education reform.

HOW WE GOT HERE

California spends more than \$22,000 per student each year, among the highest in the nation, yet outcomes continue to decline. This is not a funding problem. It is a leadership and accountability problem. Politicians backed by teachers unions have removed phonics-based reading instruction, abandoned Algebra in middle school, stripped away consequences for failure, and added ideological curricula that crowd out basic skills. At the same time, the state has made it nearly impossible to reward good teachers or remove ineffective ones. Schools are no longer judged by whether students learn, but by whether bureaucratic boxes are checked. In too many places, especially low-income communities, the system seems designed to protect itself rather than serve children.

STEVE HILTON'S SOLUTION: 3RD GRADE FIRST

As governor, Steve Hilton will make 3rd grade literacy and numeracy a top education priority. His plan includes structural change, immediate classroom reforms, and full accountability to parents. This approach does not require more spending. It requires a new focus on results.

- 1. Restore phonics-based reading instruction in all K–3 classrooms.** Phonics is the most proven method to teach children to read, but California does not require it. Steve Hilton will use executive action and pro-reform appointments to the state Board of Education to mandate phonics instruction statewide.
- 2. Hold schools accountable for 3rd grade reading results.** Every school will receive a clear, public letter grade each year based on student proficiency, starting in 3rd grade. Schools that fail to show improvement will be placed in state-directed "special measures" with new leadership, strategies and greater accountability.

- 3. Reform tenure, teacher evaluations, and dismissal policies.** With Steve Hilton as governor, California will require at least five years of classroom experience before granting tenure. Low-performing teachers must be removed quickly and excellent teachers rewarded.
- 4. Bring back and expand the Parent Trigger law.** Parents will once again be empowered to force reforms at failing schools. If a school receives a D grade two years in a row, parents will have the right to trigger administrative changes, curriculum overhauls, or conversion to a charter model.
- 5. Launch Education Savings Accounts and cross-district open enrollment.** To give parents immediate options while traditional schools improve, Hilton will expand choice through ESAs, starting with low-income and special needs students. Parents will be free to move their children to any public school that performs better, regardless of zip code.

Steve Hilton believes California can lead the nation in education again. But it starts with getting every child reading properly by 3rd grade.