

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FINDING COMMON GROUND IN EDUCATION VALUES

### Influential Californians Speak on the Purpose of Public Education

A new UCLA study reveals important common ground among influential Californians about the knowledge and skills students should acquire from the state's public schools. The points of agreement between stakeholders who span the political and ideological spectrum differ from the lofty rhetoric that characterizes much of today's education debate, and offer hope for improving California's public schools.

The white paper *Finding Common Ground in Education Values* reports on a study by UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. IDEA researchers interviewed 50 influential Californians about their thoughts on the purposes of public education. The individuals included state legislators and legislative staff from both political parties, business and labor leaders, and representatives of civic organizations.

The interviews point to a set of *valued practices in teaching and learning*:

- Personalized teacher-student interactions
- Teaching that creates and draws upon students' interests
- Active learning that allows students to participate in projects or simulations
- Learning that can be applied in "real-world" settings

The interviews identify a set of *valued knowledge and skills*:

- Using technology and working in teams to solve problems
- Advanced skills for organizing and analyzing information from multiple sources
- Informed civic participation, including the understanding and commitment for voting and community-based problem solving

The interviews recognize *shortcomings* in public schools:

- 95 percent said California public schools do not promote the understandings and skills that they value most
- Most said an over-reliance on high-stakes testing has resulted in schools narrowing their curricula

California schools have been wracked by the pitched battles of lawmakers, educators, and communities over education funding, school management, curriculum, the teacher workforce, and more. But, as the UCLA IDEA white paper reveals, important principles are held in common. Californians can use these shared educational ideas and values to engage in practical, specific, and generative discussions.

