

Key California school reforms signed into law by the Governor January 7, 2010.

Teacher evaluations: Students' academic performance may be used to evaluate teachers and principals in California. School districts must get their local teachers unions to agree to this plan for it to take effect at the local level, but the new state legislation provides the legal framework.

Open enrollment: Students at the 1,000 lowest-performing schools in California may transfer to a better school anywhere in the state, including in the same school district. Previously, students' transfer options at California's worst schools – as defined by their Academic Performance Index score – were limited.

Failing schools: School districts will be forced to adopt a specific Obama-backed reform plan for failing schools. The reform plan could mean closing the school, firing the principal and up to half of the teachers, or turning the campus into a charter school.

Parent empowerment: At poor-performing schools, a school district must adopt a reform plan if at least half of parents at the school sign a petition demanding a turn-around. The initiative will be limited to 75 schools.

Charter school cap: California will no longer cap the number of independent, public charter schools allowed to operate in the state. Lifting the cap on charter schools is largely symbolic – that is, intended to demonstrate the state's commitment to Obama's education reform agenda – as California has yet to reach its own previously set charter school cap.

Student assessment: California will create new framework and support measures for a fledgling state program that aims to track students' academic progress from elementary school through college. Typical school data reporting systems tend to look at, for example, how eighth-graders perform from year to year, but the state's longitudinal educational data system will track how a student performs in eighth grade and then ninth grade and so on.