

Davis and education: Can he move the mountain?

By Sigrid Bathen

"The voters have thrown us the ball. We'd better not drop it."

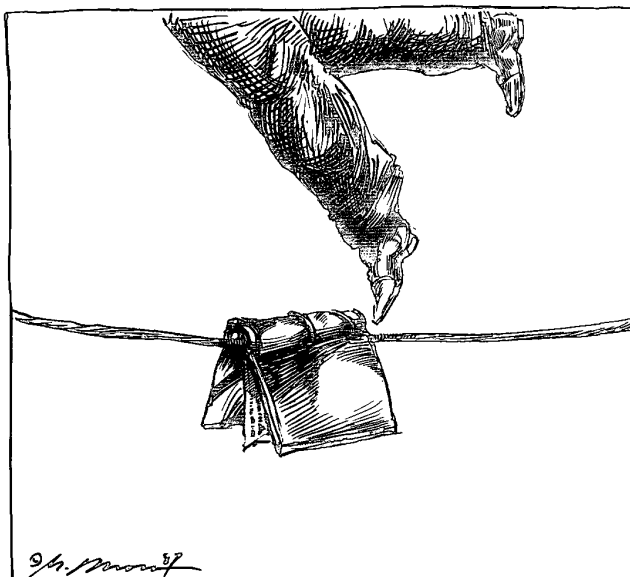
— Kerry Mazzoni
(D-San Rafael)
*Chair, Assembly
Education Committee*

As he faces looming deadlines to create an administration, a legislative agenda and a state budget, Governor Gray Davis has moved swiftly on his priority campaign issue, naming two top state educators to key transitional and cabinet positions and appointing a 13-member task force of luminaries in education and business to flesh out his admittedly vague education agenda.

Former state Senator Gary K. Hart (D-Santa Barbara) — a Stanford University classmate and fraternity brother of Davis, a legislator for two decades who chaired the Senate Education Committee for 12 years and then headed the California State University Institute for Education Reform — became Davis' first cabinet-level appointment December 1, even before a chief of staff or a director of finance was selected. Barry Munitz, the charismatic former CSU chancellor who heads the J. Paul Getty Trust and got to know the then-lieutenant governor at meetings of the CSU Board of Trustees — "We agreed as often as we disagreed," said Munitz — was named the new governor's transition director.

Munitz' mark on the task force is unmistakable: Of the 13 members, seven, including Hart, are in some way connected with higher education, the most prominent being University of California President Richard C. Atkinson. The panel reflects growing concern about the sorry state of teacher training in California — a task falling mainly to the CSU, and a major focus of Hart's institute — as well as the heavy demands placed on higher education by unprepared high school graduates requiring expensive remedial education. With a burgeoning and increasingly diverse student population and the pressures of class-size reduction, California must train considerably more, better-prepared teachers for a public school system that ranks near the bottom in the nation in achievement and resources.

Mary Bergan, the California Federation of Teachers president who is one of three teachers' union leaders on the education task force, called the panel's charge, with some understatement, "a pretty daunting task."



Clearly, despite his avowedly cautious, moderate approach to governing, Davis hopes to shake up the education establishment, an entrenched bureaucratic behemoth if ever there was one. Although his blue-ribbon advisory panel represents a broad spectrum of the education community — the teachers' unions, a pioneering elementary school principal, the superintendent of a large district (San Diego), and charter school advocates — it also includes prominent business leaders and pointedly does not include the heads of major statewide education groups representing school boards and administrators. Even the lone school superintendent, Alan Bersin, is something of a maverick, a former U.S. Attorney and "border czar" rather than a career educator.

Acknowledging some hurt feelings in the notoriously thin-skinned education community over the composition of the task force — "some were clearly annoyed," he said — Munitz is unapologetic: "This is not like a two-year study commission to look at the root causes of problems in K-12," he said in an interview. "We have key deadlines to meet, and we have to move quickly." Most important, he said, is to call a special concurrent legislative session on education — and actually craft legislation for Davis' many, potentially pricey, education proposals.

Notably absent from the dominant higher-education component of the task force are the state's community colleges, with their maze of locally elected boards and a

statewide governance system with limited authority. "Unlike the CSU and the UC," says Munitz, "it is a state system that cannot govern."

While the fact that both higher and "lower" education leaders are sitting down at the table together sets a major precedent in state education planning, perhaps the most daunting task for the Davis education advisers is reforming California's unwieldy system of K-12 governance. It is a quirky, Rube Goldberg-like bureaucratic contraption, created over decades, spilling over into the two-year college system and hardly mentioned in any of the quick-fix political reform proposals — though clearly at the heart of the state's education quagmire. There are some 1,000 local school boards overseeing nearly 8,000 schools in California, with wide variations in district size and, many critics say, general competence. Add to that the 58 obscure county boards of education, all elected save Los Angeles, which is appointed by the Board of Supervisors, overseeing separate county education bureaucracies. For the 106 community colleges, there are 71 locally elected boards to oversee district bureaucracies, plus a state chancellor's office.

At the state level, California also has a constitutionally mandated, ostensibly non-partisan, state superintendent — Delaine Eastin, elected to a second term — who heads the state Department of Education but has little real power over either the state education budget or the local schools. Policy authority is vested by court order in an 11-member state Board of Education appointed by the governor.

"It's got to be streamlined," says Munitz of the state's education bureaucracy. And, at some point, he adds, "We have to take a look at this massive truckload of an education code."

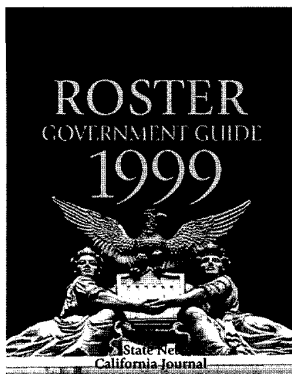
It is ironic that Hart will fill a cabinet-level position created by Wilson to further blunt the already limited authority of the state superintendent. Wilson was repeatedly rebuffed by the Legislature in his efforts to form a new education agency, and created the position by executive order. It is unlikely that Democrats Davis and Hart, despite their occasional differences with Eastin over the years, will want to alienate her. While Hart has said he believes the superintendent's position should probably be abolished, he is nonetheless widely touted as a candidate for the post in 2002.

Hart says the diverse backgrounds of Davis' key education advisers on the task force represent both "its strength and its challenge" in reaching consensus on front-burner issues such as teacher preparation, early reading instruction and the twin reform buzz words of "accountability" and "excellence."

"We have to explore many options," says Hart. "No one has a corner on this market. If you want to put together a package that is credible, and will get through the Legislature, all sides have to come to the table. Everyone will have to give up something." 🏛️

Senior Editor Sigrid Bathen covers education for the California Journal. She can be reached at sigridb@statenet.com.

THE 1999 ROSTERS



California Journal's best-selling **Roster & Government Guide** has grown so much that for the first time it will be only offered as a separate publication in 1999. This publication will reach more than 85,000 government affairs professionals. Completely revised for 1999, the *Roster* contains the name, address, telephone number, top staff and district offices of every member of the Assembly, state Senate, and Congress plus Constitutional officers and state departments. \$3.50 each.

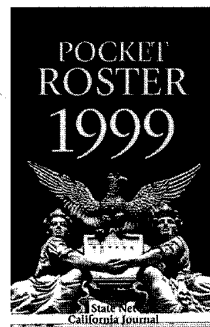


Pricing:

Roster:

1-2 copies	\$3.50
3-49	\$2.10
50-99	\$1.20
100+	\$.90

The Pocket Roster sold out in 1998 due to overwhelming demand! This handy booklet makes it possible to carry a full state government information access system in your pocket, purse, or tucked into your daytimer. The *Pocket Roster* contains everything in the *Roster* plus brief biographical information, district descriptions, select and special committees, offices of the legislature, top executive department staff and much more! \$9.95



Pocket Roster:

1-2 copies	\$9.95
3-9	\$7.45
10-29	\$4.95
30-99	\$2.25
100+	\$1.50

California Journal. 2101 K Street, Sacramento CA 95816. (916) 444-2840.