

OUR OPINION

# Accountability and education

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Education, at all levels, keeps us paying attention. Witness, for instance, the brouhaha at Victor Valley College over the course of the past several weeks, or current arguments in Sacramento about how much of the budget should go to primary and secondary education, or even in Chicago, where that school system's president has called for a new program to educate parents about how important they are to their children's success in school.

In the VVC instance, the back-and-forth arguments come down to who's in charge, in the classroom, in administration, and in the trustees' board room. One of the contentious issues there this week has been whether or not to post a video of the recent special board retreat so the public could gain some understanding of how the board is addressing the school's problems.

The reason for education's preeminence in public consciousness? Because it's vital to each individual's future, which means it's vital to the future of Americans generally, and America as a nation. It's so vital that an enormous share of what government spends — locally, statewide and nationally — goes to education. Nearly half of California's budget, for instance, is spent on education, from kindergarten through graduate school.

Which gets us, sort of, to Jerry Brown. He's to be commended for re-jiggering the budget so as to direct more help to the millions of students in California who struggle with English. It's estimated that 25 percent of them have trouble with the language, and thus are a drag on the workforce — and their classmates. So getting them up to speed in English gives them a leg up on their future, and makes for better schools.

And that, sort of, gets us to Chicago. There, Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett unveiled a five-year "action plan" to help kids graduate. We first thought her "action plan" would call for higher pay for teachers, more classroom concentration on the basics — the usual fluff about how to fix things. Not so. What she proposes is, in her words, holding "every adult accountable to make decisions in the best interests of our children." And the adults she has most in mind? Parents.

She wants to launch "Parent Universities" across her city to "help parents understand expectations at each grade level, how to build children's academic and social-emotional skills and how to support their college and career plans."

So the real story is that Chicago is attempting to break the cycle of uneducated children becoming parents and producing more uneducated children.

Do we have the same problem in California? Surely the answer is yes in many places, and VVC is here to help remedy it, in our view. Fortunately, we already have adults who want to be "accountable." But they can't if they don't know what's going on in the first place. Posting the video would be a step in the right direction.

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