Opinion: California education bill gets an A

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California's system for measuring improvement in schools was always better than the federal government's, and a bill by state Senate leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) would enhance it in some long-overdue ways, perhaps providing a national model for school accountability.

SB547, which has passed the Senate and deserves to become law, would still use test scores as one of the major yardsticks for improving schools, but it would add other important factors: graduation rates and the readying of students for college or careers. If implemented correctly, the bill also could encourage schools to shift away from what has become an overemphasis on test-oriented "drill and kill" in basic subjects.

The lack of emphasis on dropout rates has been the shame of school accountability systems. The single-minded focus on testing actually gives schools an incentive to encourage their lowest-achieving students to leave so they won't drag down schoolwide results. This bill would fix the problem; schools could not get high ratings for raising test scores while dropout numbers were increasing.

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