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Holding state to its vow to schools

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GUEST COMMENTARY

WE CAN DO better. Every California public school can be first-rate.

The recent settlement of the Williams lawsuit against the state regarding poor conditions in 2,400 low-performing public schools was a step forward, but only a single step. We must continue to move forward to make our schools places we can be proud of. This is a commitment we should all make to our children and to our community.

My four children attend struggling schools across Contra Costa County. Over the years, my children have been blessed with many dedicated teachers who have inspired them to learn. As a parent, there are few more satisfying moments than seeing your daughter finally solve that difficult algebra problem with a talented teacher's help. Children do love to learn.

But too often my children, like so many other children, do not feel pride in their schools. Poor school conditions leave our children with the impression that adults do not care about their learning.

Can our children feel pride in their schools when their classes are left to a different substitute instructor every month? Can they feel pride in their schools when they are told there are not enough textbooks to take home to study? Can they feel pride in their schools when the athletic track has dangerous potholes?

In settling the landmark Williams lawsuit after four long years, the state of California has finally recognized we can do better in our struggling schools. So that our children can learn, the state has promised that every class will have a "highly qualified teacher," that every child will have a textbook to study with, and that every school in disrepair will be fixed.

And in settling the Williams lawsuit, the state has empowered parents and the community to hold our schools to these promises. Our schools are now required to issue a report card detailing their progress. The local school districts and the County Offices of Education are also now required to regularly inspect our schools. We must all carefully study these reports. We must promptly review the results of these inspections. And if we determine any of these promises have not been kept, we can now file formal complaints that must be immediately investigated.

More resources and more accountability are a step forward for our most troubled schools. But much hard work remains to be done for all our schools. The problems are not just in low-income schools. If the truth were told, low- and middle-income schools share many problems. To take one example: 57 percent of California teachers in low-income schools report not

having enough science lab equipment; in middle-income schools 59 percent of teachers report the same problem.

We need all of our public schools, in lower- and middle-income neighborhoods to be as good as the best schools. We need all of our schools to have talented teachers, cutting-edge computers and science labs and more. We need all of our schools to enable our children to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. We also need all of our schools to prepare our children to succeed in the ever-changing high-tech economy taking shape here in the Bay Area. Then, and only then, will we have schools that we can be proud of again.

Tinley is a resident of Bay Point and a member of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.