



May 4, 2021

The Hon. Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. Toni Atkins
Senate President pro Tempore
State California, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: School Year 2021-22: Budget and Policy Priorities

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate pro Tem Atkins and Assembly Speaker Rendon:

The [California Association of Suburban School Districts](#) (CALSSD) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments as more schools re-open and plan for school year 2021-22. Education system leaders and communities look forward to more students returning for in-person instruction, acceleration of learning and supporting social emotional and mental health and wellness of students. Suburban schools are eager to look to the future, not the past, to re-envision the education system to build more equitable learning environments.ⁱ

Suburban schools serve a diverse student population of 2.6 million students in California. A [recent report](#) from the [California Education Lab](#) highlights the diversity of students across suburban districts in California: 52% of students are Latinx, 24% are White, 10% are Asian American, 5% are Black or African American, 4% are multi-racial and 3% are Pacific islander or Filipino. As further noted in the report: Almost half of suburban districts serve a student body where more than 55% of students are included in at least one of the state's unduplicated student subgroups resulting in additional state funding to support student needs. But the needs of students and thus the funding needs of districts, even in suburban districts, are often greater. In one-quarter of suburban districts, nearly 75% of all students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and in 15% of suburban districts the rates of student homelessness are more than double than the statewide rate, indicating financial hardship which may negatively impact student learning. In about 10% of suburban districts, more than one-third of students are English Learners who may require extensive instructional resources. Finally, across California suburban districts, there are great differences in students' performance on standardized assessments, high school course-taking patterns, and college enrollment.ⁱⁱ

Given the diversity of students and their experiences during the pandemic, schools are engaging parents and students as they plan instructional programs for the 2021-22 school year. As they do so, districts urge state policymakers to act swiftly to clarify guidance and requirements related to physical distancing and safety mitigation measures, including those for students and for employees. This will affect logistics and scheduling for schools to accommodate all students for full five day in-person learning.

A number of suburban districts offered in-person instruction throughout 2020 and the default going forward is in-person, but there continue to be families who want a virtual learning option. Many schools and districts are expanding independent study options to meet capacity needs for these students. We have had informal estimates of up to 20% of families in some districts that may chose virtual learning in summer 2021 and/or the 2021-22 school year.

As the May Revision details are finalized, CALSSD also provides budget and fiscal policy recommendations. State revenues continue to be strong and outpace projections; the following are prudent state investments that will address pressing budget and policy challenges facing local educational agencies:

- Pay off deferrals.
- Provide relief from the employer pension rate increases.
- Use additional state or federal funds for Special Education. CALSSD supports funding for special education services for preschool age children and to meet the additional funding necessary for compensatory education services related to COVID-19.
- Increase the LCFF Base Grant. As noted above, suburban districts are diverse. Some receive concentration funds, some are on the cusp and go back and forth, some have lower rates of Unduplicated Pupils. They all see a need to increase the Base Grant amount so they can provide a quality core program to all students. This is especially important at the present time. Because of the use of Title 1 formula for allocation of federal COVID-19 relief, a number of suburban schools are receiving a smaller share, and this compounds their concern over the LCFF Base Grant amount. All districts have had to address costs and spend funds on COVID-19 related safety procedures such as PPE, physical distancing, cleaning, HVAC, and technology needs.
- Fund additional student mental health and social emotional learning efforts including expansion of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) training on school level implementation.
- Funding for professional development for teachers and other school staff. Opportunities for professional learning and collaboration among educators and other school staff is more important as schools address learning acceleration and the return to in-person instruction.
- Teacher recruitment and retention continues to be a challenge. School districts have seen an increase in retirements during the pandemic, exacerbating the need for recruitment and retention support. The issues of equity and diversity have heightened schools' efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce.

CALSSD has also identified five policy issues to support the restart of schools in the 2021-22 school year:

- Provide a hold harmless in 2021-22 for unduplicated pupil counts. During the pandemic, districts actively sought to reach families to get information on unduplicated pupil status because the traditional methods were difficult to implement while students (and parents) were not on campuses. The changes in nutrition program rules also meant that families were not required to complete meal applications which have been one the ways schools obtain information on family income status.
- Adopt policy measures to address the challenge of finding substitute teachers for summer and 2021-22 school year. CALSSD recommends the state exempt retired teachers from the 180 separation from service requirement. In March 2020, PERS retirees were exempted from the separation from service requirement in order to meet the need to fill positions related to COVID-19 response and recovery. A similar need exists now to ensure students have experienced, credentialed teachers as they return to in-person instruction in the post-pandemic school year.
- Close the Digital Divide. CALSSD appreciates the leadership from state policymakers to get internet connectivity and devices for students. While progress has been made, there remain areas of the state where connectivity is still not available and households that still lack reliable, affordable internet at the speeds necessary for educational purposes.

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- Routine Restricted Maintenance Account calculation. CALSSD urges the legislature to adopt language excluding the federal COVID-19 relief and any pension rate buy down from the total amount on which districts calculate the 3% RRMA. This was done in past years and we urge a consistent approach to these special allocations and the pass-through amounts on pension rates.
- Address the great increase in unemployment insurance rates. Districts report increases in these rates of significant percentages.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the recommendations of suburban district leaders. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us via e-mail at andrea@ballfrostgroup.com and jeff@ballfrostgroup.com.

Sincerely,



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Legislative Advocate
California Association of Suburban
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ⁱ Distance Learning Curriculum and Instructional Guidance Project Draft ([State Board of Education May Agenda Item 2, Attachment 1](#)) (p. 9)

ⁱⁱ Reed, S. (2021, March). [Beyond the White Picket Fence: A Picture of Suburban Schools in California](#). (p. 5; p. 14)