



December 16, 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: Policy and Budget Priority Recommendations for the 2022 Legislative Session

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

I write on behalf of the California Association of Suburban School Districts (CALSSD) to share the association's recommended 2022 policy and budget priorities to accelerate student learning, support efforts to meet the array of challenges our students continue to face from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to ensure fiscal stability of suburban school districts.

The dramatic rise in state revenues reflected in the forecast by the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO), provides a unique opportunity to make visionary investments in public education and the well-being of California's children and youth. Addressing the impact of the pandemic on student learning and well-being will take sustained effort and support for educators and programs and services needed to meet the needs of the close to 6 million children and youth in California's public schools. Suburban school district leaders continue to work with staff, parents and communities to support all students, provide enhanced attention to the challenges of those most affected by the pandemic, and to address the concerns of parents for the mental and physical health and wellness of their students.

Suburban schools serve a diverse population of 2.6 million students in more than 260 school districts in California; this is about equal to the number of students in California's urban schools. Fifty-two percent of suburban 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. In one-quarter of suburban districts, 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 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 need extensive instructional resources. ([Beyond the White Picket Fence: Suburban Schools in California](#), California Education Lab, UC Davis School of Education, March 2021)

CALSSD urges policymakers to consider the following policy and budget priority recommendations to address important student needs in the upcoming legislative session:

Adhere to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Provide A Base Funding Increase.

eliminated the myriad of categorical programs that had developed over time and provided greater discretion to school districts to meet local context and the needs of students and schools with strong input from local communities. The LCFF did not establish the base grant at a level that allows school districts to meet their costs and expenses for a high-quality core program for all students. Districts face rising costs in employer pension contributions and health care premiums, utilities, transportation, technology, and special education services in addition to COVID-19 related expenses. Growth in costs has outpaced the LCFF base grant, including cost-of-living adjustments (COLA). The impact of these increases has been of even greater magnitude during the pandemic. *CALSSD supports*

- Increase to the LCFF Base to address the across-the-board costs that are not funded via supplemental, concentration or other special funds
- Funding the statutory cost of living adjustment estimated by the LAO at 5.35%

Establish Adjustments and Graduated Decrease of ADA Funding. Most California school districts including suburban districts have experienced declining student enrollment and average daily attendance (ADA). Without state action, funding to districts will be reduced to actual 2022-23 ADA down from the current level which is in many instances based on 2018-19. Districts have experienced steep drops in ADA through the pandemic and it will be deeply challenging for them to accommodate a stark drop in funding in one year. This is especially so, given the rise in costs for expenses that may not be supported with supplemental and concentration funds and for those districts that receive lower proportions of these grant funds. *CALSSD supports* a multi-year phase down of the reduction in ADA so that districts can adapt to the changes in employment that this drop will require.

Use State Revenue Surplus to Address the Jump in Employer Pension Rates. School districts continue to face rising contribution rates in STRS and PERS that outpace increases in state and local funding. Steep increases in employer rates set by the state are scheduled for 2022-23 unless action is taken by state policymakers. *CALSSD supports* additional funding from the state to address the rate increases. As with the earlier state STRS and PERS allocations, these funds should not come from Proposition 98.

Increase Special Education Funding. COVID-19 has significantly disrupted the education and related aids and services needed to support academic progress and prevent regression for students with disabilities. ([Education in a Pandemic](#): Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students. U.S. Department of Education. June 2021). Schools are addressing the impacts of COVID-19 by providing tutoring, services and supports. State funding in the 2021-22 budget was a one-time allocation yet the need for services and work to address and accelerate student learning, continues and merits attention. *CALSSD supports* ongoing increase in special education funding including equalization and a statewide target rate based upon ADA consistent across Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) as well as funding for preschool-age children with exceptional needs.

Sustain Funding to Address Student Well-Being and Mental Health. Schools faced rising student mental and behavioral health needs even before the pandemic. During the pandemic, rates of student depression, anxiety and suicide and behavioral health issues have increased. Since the beginning of school year 2021-22, district leaders report even greater need to support student mental health, social

emotional learning, and whole child approaches to supporting students. *CALSSD supports* additional
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on-going resources to build capacity to establish and sustain programs on school campuses to address student health and wellness. Schools across the state need ongoing support to implement whole-child approaches such as California's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

Expanded TK and Early Childhood Programs. School districts face costs in implementing expanded transitional kindergarten, especially in facilities and staffing. California's specific facilities requirements for 4-year-old children and lower teacher-child ratios all place additional financial costs on districts. The 2021-22 facilities grant program, and the planning and expansion grant are good starts and funding will be needed for schools to accommodate more and younger students.

Home to School Transportation. The costs and logistics entailed in getting students to and from school have continued to increase in California. The LCFF was rooted in a commitment to funding equity recognizing the unequal and disproportionate costs facing school districts. However, the LCFF has not addressed the lack of growth funding in transportation formulas and in the disproportionate transportation costs borne by districts must be addressed. *CALSSD supports* reforms to the state's home-to-school transportation formula reimbursement rates and to provide an annual COLA for all school districts providing transportation.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to California's children and youth. We appreciate the opportunity to share the recommendations of suburban district leaders. If we can be of further assistance, please contact me via e-mail at andrea@ballfrostgroup.com or phone at (916) 616-3116.

Sincerely,



Andrea Ball
Legislative Advocate
California Association of Suburban School Districts
Copies to:

Ana Matosantos, Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Jim DeBoo, Executive Secretary, Office of the Governor
Angie Wei, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of the Governor
Ben Chida, Chief Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Keely Martin Bosler, Director, Department of Finance
Christopher Ferguson, Principal Budget Manager, Education Systems, Department of Finance
Brooks Allen, Executive Director, State Board of Education
Jessica Holmes, Chief Deputy Executive Director, State Board of Education
Kimberly Rodriguez, Policy Director, Office of the Senate pro Tem
Chris Woods, Chief Fiscal Advisor, Budget Director, Office of the Senate pro Tem
Myesha Jackson, Policy Director, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Misty Feusahrens, Policy Consultant, Education, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Jason Sisney, Budget Director, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Elisa Wynne, Deputy Staff Director, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee

Erin Gabel, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee