



December 21, 2022

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Suburban School Districts 2023-24
State Budget Recommendations**

Dear Governor Newsom:

As your administration finalizes proposals for the 2023-24 State Budget, the [California Association of Suburban School Districts \(CALSSD\)](#) thanks you for your leadership and the state investments in our public education system. Suburban district leaders are resolved to address the impacts of the pandemic and accelerate students' academic and social emotional learning.

CALSSD advocates to improve the quality of education for our diverse student population by advancing policies that support the academic achievement and social-emotional learning of students and the fiscal solvency of school districts. Challenges continue for California's students, educators, staff, families, and communities to address the impacts of the pandemic. Schools are central to accelerating student learning, supporting social emotional learning, and preparing students for success in college, career, and life. CALSSD advocacy in 2023 focuses on ensuring funding for TK-12 education, commitment to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the foundation of local control, and implementation of programs to close gaps in student achievement and opportunities.

Commitment to Local Decision-making and Flexibility to Advance Student Outcomes.

California's historic level of state revenues for the past several years and the infusion of federal COVID-19 relief dollars provided critical resources to schools through the pandemic. Suburban districts deeply valued this funding and are using it to address whole child supports, engage students, accelerate learning and to recruit and retain staff. A significant portion of these funding streams are one-time. Given the projections for lower state revenues, continued inflationary pressures and the growing likelihood of economic slowdown, suburban leaders understand the responsibility to consider sustainability and fiscal stability as they establish and continue vital programs and services. CALSSD 2023 priorities are developed with this in mind.

Local Control Funding Formula & COLA Are Critical Priorities. *CALSSD supports* adherence to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), ensuring state funds continue to be allocated via this equity-based formula and that the statutory Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is funded. Enactment of LCFF almost a decade ago eliminated the myriad of restrictive categorical programs and provided discretion to school districts to meet local context and promote student achievement, access, and engagement in collaboration with stakeholders and partners. The

equity basis of LCFF and the Local Control Accountability Plan put the focus on addressing student progress. *Funding the LCFF and statutory COLA are high priorities for CALSSD.*

Address Staffing Challenges in Certificated and Classified Positions. California schools continue to face unprecedented shortage of employees. Past limited flexibility for schools to hire STRS retirees has been instrumental in helping to alleviate classroom vacancies. These retirees served as substitute teachers, mentors and coaches for new teachers and administrators. Retirees also take on projects such as assisting in the implementation of the Extended Learning Opportunities Program and Universal PreK; projects that existing personnel do not have the bandwidth to take on. In some instances, retirees are also temporarily filled in for critical open administrative positions until qualified active STRS employees can be found. The benefits of this include having positions filled by individuals who are familiar with the districts and schools, allowing them to hit the ground running. Lifting the earning limit for retirees will continue to allow school districts to meet the needs of their students, staff, and communities at a savings as they continue to try and fill a large number of open positions.

State funded pipeline programs, grants and loan forgiveness are valued, and it will take time to see the results as programs are established and expanded. These shortages necessitate multiple approaches, including removing barriers for those seeking to enter the education sector and flexibility to hire retirees, as was provided during the pandemic. The impact of rising minimum wage in non-education sectors also highlights challenges especially in recruiting and retaining for classified positions.

Special Education Funding Has Improved; Services and Costs Continue to Rise, Early Intervention and Training are Critical. The 2022-23 budget increase to the special education base grant, bringing the rate to a minimum of \$820/ADA, is a significant improvement and CALSSD appreciates the action by the Newsom Administration and the Legislature. As schools focus on “first best instruction” and providing universal services, they are also faced with increasing numbers of students with special needs. A recent [Education Week story](#)¹ noted the impact of the pandemic and the increase of our youngest learners entering PreK and K with delays in language and fine-motor skills. For some students this may be due to missed schooling rather than a specific learning disability. Schools are working to identify and serve students with disabilities while also coping with broad school-readiness delays that complicate identification. Providing additional resources for student screening, early intervention services and teacher training is vital.

Student Well-Being and Mental Health Require Ongoing Attention. The [crisis in children and youth mental and behavioral health continues](#). CALSSD supports additional on-going resources to sustain programs on school campuses and establish collaborative relationships with community and local providers to connect families to services. Schools across the state need ongoing support to implement whole-child approaches and recruit and retain trained staff to support students. The inclusion of school systems in local health and behavioral health efforts has improved recently and requires ongoing attention by policymakers.

¹ [Special Education & the Pandemic: Making Up for Lost Time and Lost Opportunity](#). Education Week. October 17, 2022

Rising Pension Costs Continue to Rise at State-Determined Levels. School districts continue to face rising contribution rates in STRS and PERS. These rates are set by the state and the steep increases mean local districts must spend more local dollars to cover these costs. Rates for CalSTRS and CalPERS increased from 16.9% to 19.1% and 22.9% to 25.4% respectively. While rates in future years are not yet confirmed, [projections earlier this fiscal year showed 2023-24 for CalSTRS remaining at 19.1% and CalPERS increasing to 27.0%](#). Past investments by the state with non-Proposition 98 dollars allowed districts to retain more local dollars for direct student services.

Collecting Data on Free/Reduced Price Meals (F/RPM) and Unduplicated Pupil Counts for LCFF. Eligibility for free and reduced-price meals determines important funding for local educational agencies under LCFF and affects the amount of federal nutrition funding the state receives. The LCFF uses F/RPM to determine the Unduplicated Pupil Percentages of children from low-income families in each local educational agency. This information is an important criterion that forms the basis for LCFF supplemental and concentration grants. As California implements universal meals for students, families have less incentive to complete the F/RPM forms or the alternate income forms. Undercounts result in fewer resources to provide services and support to a vulnerable student group.

Home to School Transportation. The 2022-23 budget vastly improves the funding formula for Home to School Transportation. CALSSD appreciates the investment in this program. In light of the significant on-going increases to fuel and energy costs, CALSSD supports a COLA for this program in 2023-24. Challenges also remain for districts across the state in finding bus drivers. *CALSSD supports state policies inside and outside the education sector that can assist recruitment, retention, training, and licensing for bus drivers.*

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at andrea@ballfrostgroup.com and jeff@ballfrostgroup.com or via phone at (916) 447-8420.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to California's students.

Sincerely,



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