June 2, 2021

***The***

***Education***

***Coalition***

Working together to support and

improve California’s public schools

**Memorandum**

TO:CA State Policymakers

FM: The Education Coalition

**Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)** representing more than 17,000 school administrators

**California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO)** representing more than 23,000 school business officials

**California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)** representing all 58 county superintendents throughout California

**California Federation of Teachers (CFT-AFL-CIO)** representing nearly 120,000 education employees

**California School Boards Association (CSBA)**

representing nearly 1,000 K-12 school districts and county offices of education throughout California

**California School Employees Association (CSEA)**

representing more than 250,000 classified school employees

**California State PTA**

representing 700,000 parents, teachers, and students in California

**California Teachers Association (CTA)**

representing over 325,000 educators

**Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**

representing more than 50,000 school employees in California

**Legislative Consultant:**

**Dale Shimasaki** 916.441.3909

RE: Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice - Work Plan

The Education Coalition is comprised of the nine statewide K-12 education associations to provide consensus positions protecting the integrity of Proposition 98 and funding in the budget for K-12 public education.

The nine statewide organizations include:

* Association of California School Administrators [ACSA]
* California Association of School Business Officials [CASBO]
* California County Superintendents Educational Services Association [CCSESA]
* California Federation of Teachers [CFT]
* California School Boards Association [CSBA]
* California School Employees Association [CSEA]
* California State Parent Teachers Association [PTA]
* California Teachers Association [CTA]
* Service Employees International Union [SEIU]

Each year, the Education Coalition issues budget position papers and meets with legislative members of the budget and policy committees to share our consensus position on the major budget proposals in education in the state budget.

For further information contact Dale Shimasaki, the Consultant to the Education Coalition at 916-441-3909.

**Education Coalition Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice**

**Work Plan**

**Background on Ad Hoc Committee**

The Education Coalition Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice was established in the Fall of 2020 in response to the ongoing violence against and extrajudicial killings of American citizens – particularly people of color – by United States law enforcement. The Coalition’s leadership committee determined that our collective must dedicate time, funding, and resources to produce structural change in society at large by addressing the practices in K-12 education that reflect racist attitudes, unconscious bias, and systemic discrimination against students, staff, and families of color. To that end, the leaders of the Education Coalition’s member organizations directed staff to identify opportunities for the Coalition to provide leadership in dismantling the systemic and structural racism that exists in California public schools.

As it is throughout society, racism is interwoven into every aspect of our educational system. It is our respective organizations' responsibility to advance reforms in the identified areas to advance the cause of racial equity. These reforms will improve student outcomes by boosting attendance, facilitating positive school culture, and increasing engagement, all of which will contribute to improved academic performance.

The Ad Hoc Committee considered different opportunities to begin uprooting structural racism in schools to improve student experience and outcomes, particularly for students of color. After careful deliberation, the Ad Hoc Committee decided to focus its efforts on:

* racial bias in school policing,
* the disproportionate discipline of students of color,
* the whiteness that permeates school curriculum, and
* the implicit bias that affects hiring and training of school personnel.

The Ad Hoc Committee believes there are opportunities for meaningful and impactful changes in each of these areas. We provide brief summaries of each of these policy areas below. We also plan to release more comprehensive policy papers, including substantive proposals, in each of these areas in the coming months. The first of these papers on school policing is attached to this document. As the Ad Hoc Committee completes its work on each of the topics, we will issue papers outlining our analyses and proposals.

**School Policing**

The Ad Hoc Committee has completed its work on School Policing and has issued a paper on this topic which accompanies this document. A summary of the findings are as follows:

In order to ensure that schools are a place where students are comfortable and ready to learn, there must be a statewide clarification of the role of school police and additional training to ensure officers are prepared to work with TK-12 students and improve the safety and educational experience in schools, particularly for Black and Latinx students.

In most cases, LEAs are not able to access a police officer’s personnel files before hiring, a major shortcoming as districts try to identify suitable candidates for this unique line of work with children. Therefore, it should be required that all civilian complaints and personnel disciplinary actions be made available to the district before hiring to prevent a district from unknowingly hiring an officer with any history of excessive force or other incidents which suggest a potential threat to student well-being.

Districts need to clarify and enforce the appropriate role of school police officers. Too often, educators call upon law enforcement and school police to respond to matters that fall outside the scope of police responsibility. School police should be responsible for enforcing penal code, not for enforcing student disciplinary matters, which are the responsibility of school administrators. Contract language should explicitly outline, and staff training should reflect the role of school police, including specifying matters that are to be handled by other personnel.

There is a significant disparity in the number of hours some police officers receive in training specific to working in K-12 school settings versus others. A police officer who works for a municipality and is assigned to a school campus might have no training specific to working with students while there is a legislative mandate that police officers hired directly by LEAs receive 40 hours of training specific to schools-based police work. A minimum standard for initial and ongoing training must be required for all school-based police officers. The training should include childhood development, mental health, de-escalation techniques, history of school policing, restorative justice practices, and the unique lived experiences of the diverse populations within the local school community.

Finally, in order to ensure that LEAs are implementing school policing practices related to hiring, training, and data reporting as prescribed, a biennial audit of California LEAs by a third party should be required with implementation assistance available for districts that demonstrate need.

**Disproportionate Discipline of Black and Latinx Students**

Punitive discipline and zero-tolerance policies have resulted in alarmingly disproportionate discipline rates of Black and Latinx students compared to the rest of the student population. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, during the 2015-16 school year, Black students accounted for 17% of student suspensions in California despite making up only 5% of the student population.

Zero tolerance policies reinforce racism through harsh punishments, which increase dropout rates and feed the school-to-prison pipeline. Restorative justice practices, however, are found to reduce suspensions and expulsions while improving academic outcomes and decreasing violence. By focusing on accountability and repairing harm, school-based restorative justice fosters a sense of community and cultivates a climate where destructive responses to conflict are less likely to occur.

Schools must invest more resources into programs that support mental health, social emotional learning, and restorative justice. Data on disciplinary interactions between students and staff or peace officers must be collected and reported to the Department of Education. This data must be disaggregated by student demographics and be made publicly available.

**School Curriculum** **and Course Access**

School curriculum is predominantly written from the frame of reference of a dominant group or white viewpoint. This formulation excludes, misrepresents, or presents communities of color as less than or as “the other.” A racist curriculum furthers the status quo in which the dominant group retains its power and privilege. Overt and covert forms of racism in school curriculum are internalized and normalized and can have lifelong impacts on students and staff.

School curriculum must empower students to identify and challenge racism. It must acknowledge the racist history of the state and country and the forms of oppression that persist today. The state should implement an anti-racist curriculum that focuses on the intersectionality of race and gender and challenges existing colonialist perspectives.

Another aspect of school curriculum is the role ethnic studies should play in the K-12 school system. The State Board of Education has recently adopted a Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum and legislators have introduced bills on ethnic studies requirements in the K-12 and community college system. This comes on the heels of legislation signed by Governor Newsom requiring CSU students to take an ethnic studies course in order to receive a baccalaureate degree. How ethnic studies can address racial justice issues merits further research and analysis.

In addition to evaluating school curriculum from an anti-racist perspective, schools must also ensure that students of all races, genders, and background have access to said curriculum. Inequitable course access is a persistent barrier to academic achievement for many students, particularly rural and low-income students and students of color. Whether the subject is A-G curriculum, Advanced Placement classes, music and arts, extracurricular offerings, or career technical education, schools should provide all students with broad access to the full breadth of curricular options. The state can facilitate this goal through higher per-pupil funding levels overall and by funding course audits in local districts on a semi-annual basis.

**Hiring, Training,** **Placement, and Retention of School Personnel**

Research from the Learning Policy Institute suggests that when hiring reflects the ethnic and racial diversity of the student population, student academic performance improves. Teachers of color help close achievement gaps. Where recruitment barriers exist and even in places where they do not, implicit bias and cultural competency training can help school personnel value the perspectives of students of color and approach misbehavior as a learning opportunity rather than a time for disciplinary action.

School administrators must make intentional efforts to recruit, hire, and retain personnel who reflect the population of the communities they serve. All school personnel should receive implicit bias and cultural competency training. Educators should engage in culturally responsive classroom management and use restorative justice practices.

Furthermore, the role of and expectations for site administrators must be clarified. School officials may refer student incidents to police officers and security personnel when the conduct is more appropriately addressed with a referral to mental health professionals or school administrators. To mitigate against this, LEAs should train school site personnel on when and when not to call police to reduce encounters with law enforcement that can lead to unnecessary physical conflict, arrests, and involvement with the juvenile justice system that diminishes academic and life outcomes.

Research also shows that individual teacher quality has a profound effect on student outcomes. This is significant in light of the disparity between inexperienced teachers working in schools in low-income communities, predominantly attended by students of color, and their counterparts at more affluent and largely white schools. According to the California Department of Education’s 2016 “Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators,” about 1 in 7 teachers at schools with high student poverty rates were inexperienced (defined as two or fewer years on the job), compared with roughly 1 in 10 at schools with relatively few students from low-income households. In addition, the percentage of teachers with an emergency or temporary licenses at schools in low-income communities was nearly three times that at schools with wealthier student populations. Given the critical role instruction plays in equitable, high-quality outcomes, the state and LEAs should explore strategies to increase the number of experienced and licensed teachers in low-income school communities, both in absolute terms and relative to more affluent schools. The state should also examine ways (financial, cultural, etc.) to increase teacher retention, particularly at high-turnover schools in low-income communities as this would reduce the concentration of inexperienced teachers at these sites.

**Facilities and Physical Plant**

Students spend more than 1,300 hours in school facilities annually (second only to the amount of time spent at home), but approximately 50% of all public schools—and disproportionately urban schools and schools serving students from low-income households or students of color—have at least one “unsatisfactory environmental condition,” according to the American Journal of Public Health. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on working-class families and people of color has only heightened the importance of addressing longstanding disparities in the physical environment experienced by students in low-income communities, students of color and their peers in more affluent schools. In August 2020, a PPIC study found that, statewide, 38 percent of students go to schools that do not meet the minimum facility standards because of problems such as damaged walls or ceilings or malfunctioning electrical systems. According to the same report, 15 percent of students attend schools that have at least one extreme deficiency such as gas leaks, power failures, and structural damage, safety risks that are more common in LEAs with lower capital spending and smaller tax bases. This is compounded by the threat of COVID-19 and the effect of future pandemics in school settings with inadequate ventilation.

In addition to health and safety considerations, disparities in a school’s physical plant have significant implications for instruction and academic achievement as many LEAs lack the infrastructure to support modern science classes, digital learning, career and technical education or early childhood education or to accommodate higher enrollment in growing districts. To remedy this problem, the state must increase funding dedicated for facilities and physical plant with preferential status for LEAs in low-income communities that disproportionately serve poor students and students of color.

**Conclusion**

Schools need to invest in a comprehensive approach to combat the legacy effects and present-day impact of systemic racism. This includes a commitment to restorative justice practices and other alternatives to discipline strategies and to collect data regarding disciplinary action against students based on their demographics. The recommendations provided could potentially have a fiscal impact, and we recognize that any approach to structural racism reform should ensure funding supports the resources, programs, and services LEAs need to advance racial equity.

The role of police officers on K-12 school campus needs to be refined and clarified. Specifically, LEAs should train school site personnel on when and when not to call police as this would reduce unnecessary encounters with law enforcement. School police officers must receive ongoing training specific to the K-12 setting from professionals with the right competencies. School curriculum must acknowledge racism and empower students to confront racial injustices, and students of all backgrounds must be given access to the full breadth of courses needed to reach their potential and drive achievement. The hiring and training of school personnel should be guided by the communities they serve and include implicit bias training. At the same time, LEAs must have access to relevant information that will help them make proper hires that protect the health and safety of students and staff and contribute to the development of positive school culture.

The physical environments into which we welcome students must not replicate the inequities prevalent in the surrounding communities and expose students to crumbling walls and ceilings, structural deficiencies, broken electrical systems, lead pipes, and fumes from nearby freeways. Rather, they should provide a leveling effect that mitigates safety risks and environmental threats with healthy climates that exhibit the principles of environmental justice and make the school a safe haven. We are confident that our recommendations, as a collective, will improve school climate and safety on school campuses for students of color, which will ultimately result in improved academic performance and success. Finally, it important to note that any approach to structural racism reform should ensure funding supports the resources, programs, and services LEAs need to advance racial equity.