

California County Superintendents' Response to Governor's 2022–23 Budget

Following last year's ambitious educational agenda, the Governor's Budget aims to prioritize consistency and continued investment to promote the successful implementation of multiple transformational programs. This approach is critical to allowing local educational agencies (LEAs) the bandwidth to accelerate learning and meet students' social-emotional needs.

Currently, schools are facing strained capacity due to staffing shortages, attendance disruptions, inflationary cost pressures, and the need to develop and implement new programs. It is through this dual lens—prioritizing educational equity and acknowledging the real-world constraints facing school leaders today—that we respond to the Governor's Budget.

1. The Governor's Budget invests heavily in the LCFF and core services. It should go further.

We strongly support the administration's investments in core educational programs. The budget proposes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) of 5.33 percent to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), with total LCFF funding increasing to \$70.5 billion inclusive of the additional Transitional Kindergarten students that become eligible for LCFF funding in 2022-23.

We recommend additional investments in the LCFF.

The state's equity-driven funding formula supports core educational and social-emotional services. Inflationary cost pressures and rising fixed costs (including scheduled pension rate increases) dramatically undercut the impact of the proposed 5.33 percent LCFF COLA. Beyond the program improvements and learning acceleration facilitated by such an investment, bolstering the LCFF helps California schools address the statewide staffing shortage. Amidst competition with other sectors, we must ensure the wages for certificated and classified personnel reflect their value to our state's children. This recommendation extends to the students served by a county office of education.

We recommend allocating one-time state General Fund resources to address school employers' long-term unfunded pension liabilities.

Addressing outyear pension liabilities will build budget resiliency for every local educational agency in the state. Among the best uses of one-time General Fund is to pay down the employer's share of long-term, unfunded actuarial liabilities in the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) and California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS). Now is the time to invest in the retirement security of our educator workforce while bolstering the resiliency of local educational agencies to focus on core educational services.

2. Fiscal stabilization is critical for programs serving students in both school districts and county offices of education.

We support the administration’s proposal to stabilize the LCFF average daily attendance (ADA) calculation. California utilizes a rolling average formula to smooth changes in annual funding eligibility throughout the Education Code, including the formula for the LCFF unduplicated pupil percentage. Given the unprecedented disruptions to attendance over the past two school years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor’s proposal is prudent. It recognizes enrollment growth while stabilizing year-over-year declines.

County offices directly serve California’s at-risk youth. These include justice-involved students, expelled students or those at risk of dropping out, students with disabilities, and more. For nearly all these students, the intent is for the students to return to their district of residence, meaning county office enrollment and attendance fluctuates significantly. But county offices must nevertheless staff and operate high-quality educational experiences in a manner that follows the overall demand for these programs over time. Unlike school districts, however, county offices are not permitted to use the greater of current or prior year ADA.

We urge the inclusion of students served by county offices of education in any funding stability proposal.

The Governor’s proposal to consider the greater of a school district’s current year, prior year, or the average of three prior years’ ADA, would significantly improve the ability of county office programs and educators to serve students, while also accounting for overall changes in program demand.

3. Now is the time to build additional capacity to nurture the social emotional well-being, development, and academic success of California’s diverse learners.

Three school years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning disruptions that have taken place require a more precise and focused response to ensure California’s System of Support is prepared to nurture the growth and development of the diverse students we serve. This is particularly true for students who faced disadvantages before the pandemic, including students who are low-income, foster youth, experiencing homelessness, English learners, and students with disabilities. Now is the time to invest in the supports and interventions to help school districts and charter schools meet the equity needs of their students.

County offices of education are grounded in supporting California’s objectives for every child to have the opportunity to succeed. Since the implementation of California’s System of Support in 2017, county offices of education have leaned into their critically important role the statewide system. They actively work to improve outcomes for students with the greatest learning needs by

working directly with district and school educators and leaders. From technical assistance to professional development, to Differentiated Assistance, to Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) support, to providing training and support in the use of Universal Design for Learning and inclusive practices for students with disabilities and addressing the critical needs and challenges that have emerged as a result of the pandemic, the role of county offices has expanded exponentially.

The overarching goal of California's System of Support is to help LEAs and their schools meet the needs of each student they serve, with a focus on building local capacity to sustain improvement and to effectively address disparities in opportunities and outcomes. When done well, California's System of Support is not just a reactive intervention to help LEAs exit out of Level 2 Differentiated Assistance. Instead, capacity building starts and continues through universal support for all to help LEAs avoid more significant interventions altogether. The provision of universal support requires various state and local agencies to provide an array of support resources, tools, and technical assistance that all LEAs may use to improve student performance at the LEA and school level and to narrow disparities among student groups across the LCFF priorities, including recognition for success and the ability to share promising practices. This is no simple task.

The work of DA is systems-changing, individualized, and about cultivating capacity so that lasting changes and improvements can be realized. The base grants for this work are unchanged since 2013 and have not been adjusted for COLA. Currently, county offices of education are responsible for providing universal support, including LCAP development support, to all of their districts and charter schools, regardless of their DA status. And while the DA formula is established such that only districts who are eligible for Level 2 DA generate funding, all districts require and receive universal support from their county office of education. Moreover, as a change in legislation shifts the responsibility of DA support from the charter authorizer to their county office of education or their Geographic Lead agency, we urge policymakers to proactively build capacity to meet these needs.

This work and individualized support takes a significant amount of staff time and effort, when done well. To better support student performance at the LEA and school level and narrow disparities among student groups, we must make ongoing investments in the Differentiated Assistance base grant toward increasing universal supports.

We urge the state to (1) significantly augment and (2) apply COLA to the Differentiated Assistance funding formula to create the capacity to deliver on statewide equity, access, and achievement goals.

This budget request is urgent for the following reasons:

- Based on the locally collected and reported data in the 2021 California School Dashboard, county offices of education are preparing for a significant increase in the number of school districts and charter schools eligible for Differentiated Assistance in 2022.

- County offices in which a charter school is located “shall provide” technical assistance to qualifying those charters beginning July 1, 2022, based on State Dashboard results (AB 1505, Ch. 486, Stats. 2019). Charters authorized by the county office will obtain technical assistance from the Geographic Lead agency (also a county office of education). In contrast to school districts, however, charter schools generate no per-agency Differentiated Assistance funding.
- For district-served students with disabilities, county offices are committed to advancing state and federal inclusion goals to increase inclusion for both students served by county offices and students served within districts and charter schools, by offering helping to strengthen Level 1 universal instruction and supports for universal services for all students. These are being delivered by county office teams of special and general education technical assistance providers. (See Item (5), below, for more on special education.)
- County offices are experiencing the same rising operational costs and staffing pressures as school districts, but are distinctively impacted by enrollment declines due to a lack of one-year ADA soft-landing and significantly greater fluctuations in attendance and enrollment.
- More broadly, the pandemic has required county offices to play a significant interstitial role between school districts and state and local public health agencies (a condition recognized in the Budget Act of 2021–22, but not in the Governor’s Budget).

We hope the legislature and governor will invest the means necessary to improve student performance and narrow disparities within our educational system.

4. The need for further investments in the educator workforce remains critical.

The investments included in the 2022-23 Governor’s Budget, are reflective of the Administration’s dedication to supporting California’s educator workforce. CCSESA is appreciative of this support, as the demand for credentialed and classified staff remains urgent. This ongoing need has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of Universal Transitional Kindergarten and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program. The state should use this opportunity to strengthen and clarify clear pathways into the teaching profession at multiple junctures, including in high schools, higher education, and among classified staff. With these goals in mind, CCSESA makes the following recommendations:

We support the administration’s efforts to eliminate barriers to entry for new teachers.

The numerous tests and fees incurred by prospective teachers serve as barriers to entry into the profession. In order to recruit individuals into the educator workforce, these barriers must be

addressed. When coupled with other supports, such as the local pathway programs and coherent guides for interested applicants to navigate the process (see below), this is a powerful recruitment tool. We look forward to receiving more detail on the Administration’s proposal to waive the costs of teacher assessments and initial credentials for specified populations.

We recommend further investment in local pathways into the educator workforce.

CCSESA recommends further investment in programs to recruit or upskill local members of the community into the teaching profession. “Grow your own” initiatives, such as teacher residencies, the Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program, and the Local Solutions Grant, lead to growth in the teacher workforce that is regionally and demographically reflective of the community.

We recommend creating a more coherent process for candidates.

A number of LEAs and LEA consortia have created robust teacher and administrator preparation programs, which provide direct and local pipelines and meeting immediate needs in the communities they serve. Given the complexity of pathways, grant opportunities, exams, and other steps to enter the teaching profession, CCSESA further recommends an end-to-end educator workforce guide. The purpose is to show applicants the pathways into the system and help them locate financial and other resources to navigate that process, thereby giving greater relevance to the many grants, fee waivers, and programs offered by the state. Locally, county offices and school districts could modify the statewide template to integrate opportunities provided by local institutions of higher education, including and especially CSU and community colleges, workforce development boards, and local educational agencies. This also helps potential applicants identify gaps in the process where they may need assistance. By helping potential applicants navigate the system and locate disparate resources, we hope to reduce barriers to the profession.

5. We appreciate the Governor’s attention to students with disabilities and recommend additional steps to improving access, inclusion, and outcomes for all students.

We are pleased to support multiple proposals intended to improve access and outcomes for students with disabilities:

- \$500 million (ongoing) Proposition 98 general fund.
- Calculating base funding amounts at the LEA level to heighten transparency and stakeholder engagement.
- Requiring the membership of Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) District Parent Advisory Committees to include parents or legal guardians of currently enrolled pupils with disabilities.

- Alternative pathways to a high school diploma.
- Significant investment in early learning and care to ensure our youngest learners and their families are provided nurturing and inclusive opportunities beginning in preschool.

We acknowledge the positive intent behind all the special education proposals and offer the following recommendations.

Students with disabilities should be included in the LCAP directly and not as an addendum to the LCAP.

The LCAP is a critical strategic planning process for LEAs, their communities, and the students they serve. To support a coherent system of education that recognizes the multiple identities and diverse needs of each student, the county superintendents believe students with disabilities should be integrated in the LCAP directly. While students with disabilities are inherently part of the LCAP process, the effect of an addendum is to otherize.

To the extent the addendum is intended to focus on federal monitoring tasks, the issue may be one of framing and we look forward to conversations about this.

The LCAP should model the inclusivity the state has signaled it has prioritized and LEAs should be expected to have integrated conversations about how to serve all students well within one system. An integrated LCAP template would better support students with disabilities and their families in understanding how the LEAs' goals include their unique needs and circumstances.

We appreciate the inclusion of county offices as resource leads. The state should build that capacity across all county offices.

The trailer bill language proposes to add county offices of education to the list of up to ten special education resource leads to "improve outcomes as part of the statewide system of support." California's county superintendents embrace their role of building this capacity across the state for students with disabilities. We recommend building that capacity within every county office of education.

Currently, each county office is responsible for working with their local school districts and charter schools through Differentiated Assistance, LCAP development, and general support. Instead of requiring COEs to compete for these resources, we recommend all county offices could instead each receive an allocation to build additional capacity in their county, particularly related to serving students with disabilities. The state could still cultivate specialty county offices to curate the research and evidence base through building partnership consortia with institutions of higher education in areas such as IEP best practices, transition, etc., so each county office would not need to create/cultivate the multiple complex evidence and research base related to serving students with disabilities.

To support students attending small and rural LEAs, we urge a more robust and streamlined extraordinary cost pool.

Students with a low-incidence disability who attend smaller LEAs face disadvantages to accessing services. This is due to both geography, for rural LEAs, and the costs associated with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) relative to available resources. CCSESA believes students should have access to high-quality educational services and accommodations no matter where in California they call home. One way to level the playing field for these students is to increase funding for and streamline the state's extraordinary cost pools.

Relatedly, we look forward to discussions on the trailer bill language to consolidate the existing cost pools.

6. Further investments are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of Universal Prekindergarten.

CCSESA is appreciative of the Administration's demonstrated commitment to early learning programs. County offices of education are dedicated to the successful implementation of Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) in order to best serve the needs of their communities, families, and youngest learners. To better serve the needs of these students, CCSESA recommends that the State:

Provide fiscal sustainability and relief from enrollment declines within the California State Preschool Program.

Parental choice in early learning is a crucial component of the UPK framework. As the State moves toward full implementation of Transitional Kindergarten, there will be a natural shift in the California State Preschool Program enrollment. Furthermore, enrollment in the program has continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in light of the recent surge in cases throughout the fall and winter. In order for providers to remain open and available to serve these students, another year of hold harmless is needed.

Invest in ongoing support for UPK implementation.

County offices of education have continually demonstrated their dedication to early learning. While the existing implementation grants have been incredibly beneficial in supporting the augmented workload associated with transitional kindergarten, the need for funding is ongoing. As districts prepare to serve younger children, they will need further support and technical assistance from county offices of education. Ongoing funding is necessary for county offices of education to grow their capacity to provide this support to districts.

Augment the investment in the TK facilities program.

One potential barrier to the implementation of TK is the lack of available facilities. The specific needs of a TK classroom differ significantly from the majority of K-12 classrooms. In order to provide appropriate facilities and therefore offer enrollment in the program, additional

7. CCSESA makes several recommendations on the following proposals and requests.

We support the proposed statutory change to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program.

CCSESA appreciates the Administration's laudable goals of the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program to provide enrichment and wrap around care opportunities for California's low-income students. We support the trailer bill language which amends the audit penalties to be proportional, rather than comprehensive. Further, we appreciate the flexibility of allowing for one additional year for implementation before the penalties go into effect.

We support efforts to strengthen the implementation of the California Community Schools Partnership Program.

CCSESA recognizes the important role that county offices of education must play to ensure the local success of the California Community Schools Partnership Program. We support the \$60 million investment for qualifying county offices of education for coordination activities and to support implementation of the qualifying community schools within their respective counties.

We support the Administration's allocation proposal for the remaining Proposition 51 bond funds.

CCSESA supports the governor's proposal to allocate the remaining Proposition 51 bond funds and dedicate additional non-Proposition 98 funding for school facilities. County office-run programs qualify for financial hardship assistance, making county offices reliant on the availability of state-level resources for equitable school facilities.

We recommend additional funding for the state's Home-to-School Transportation program.

To maximize the equity intent of the LCFF, we support addressing the costs of transportation services that hundreds of LEAs operate and thousands of students rely upon. On average, the state reimburses districts for less than one-quarter of their total costs, leading to LEA contributions that undermine other key educational programs and services.

We recommend permanent and ongoing investments to support behavioral health.

CCSESA is dedicated to supporting policies that serve the whole child and promote mental health. The Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) provides funds to COEs to expand mental health services. CCSESA recommends making this investment ongoing, so that all 58 COEs would be able to ensure that their current collaborations with county mental health providers will continue to grow, rather than expire at the end of the program. This is a critical need of our students and will further benefit their families and communities.

We oppose the \$1.5 billion Proposition 98 General Fund grant for electric school buses.

As was previously stated, there is a significant need for increased funding for core and existing programs. The allocation of Proposition 98 General Fund for a new program, which does not address existing transportation costs, takes away from this need. Therefore, CCSESA recommends removing the \$1.5 billion one-time Proposition 98 General Fund and repurposing the funds towards core services.