



California County Superintendents Educational Services Association

1121 L Street, Suite 510, Sacramento, CA 95814 ■ P 916.446.3095 ■ F 916.448.7801 ■ www.ccsesa.org

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February 11, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
1021 O St., Ste. 8630
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O St., Ste. 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Dear Senator Skinner and Assembly Member Ting,

On behalf of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), representing the 58 county superintendents of schools, we applaud the governor's effort to invest in policies that promote student wellness and student academic success.

We remain focused on accelerating learning and supporting students' social-emotional needs. Currently, however, schools are facing strained capacity due to staffing shortages, attendance disruptions, and the need to develop and implement new programs. We therefore commend the governor for prioritizing consistency and continued investment in existing programs. Below, we express our positions on critical education issues that will come before the legislative budget committees.

1. Now is the time to build capacity to nurture the social emotional well-being and academic success of California's diverse learners.

We urge the lawmakers to significantly increase Differentiated Assistance base grants for county offices of education and to apply an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities within our educational system, especially for students who are low-income, foster youth, experiencing homelessness, English learners, and students with disabilities. The 2021 California School Dashboard data affirms the challenges created by the pandemic through higher chronic absenteeism rates, lower graduation rates, and assessment scores that illustrate a widening of achievement gaps between student groups. Now is the time to invest in supports and interventions to help school districts and charter schools meet the equity needs of their students.

California's System of Support helps local educational agencies (LEAs) 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 over time. When implemented well, the system is not simply a reactive intervention out of differentiated assistance but an ongoing network of support.

County offices of education (COEs) are charged with being hubs of support to LEAs. COEs provide multiple levels of support to their LEAs based on their individual needs and identified performance issues. Over time, COEs have learned that the staff time and effort required to facilitate meaningful Differentiated Assistance to identified LEAs far exceeds the fiscal resources and capacity that the current funding formula affords. The base grants for differentiated assistance (DA) are unchanged since inception and have never been adjusted for COLA. To better support student performance and narrow disparities among student groups, we must make ongoing investments in the DA base.

Increasing the DA base grants for COEs and applying an ongoing COLA is urgent for the following reasons:

- The 2021 California School Dashboard suggests a significant increase in the number of school districts and charter schools eligible for differentiated assistance in 2022.
- County offices must provide technical assistance to charter schools beginning July 1, 2022, based on State Dashboard results (AB 1505, Ch. 486, Stats. 2019), but without additional funding.
- County offices are experiencing the same rising operational costs and staffing pressures as school districts but lack an average daily attendance (ADA) soft-landing to manage the major attendance fluctuations at juvenile court and community schools. (See section (2), below.)
- The pandemic has required county offices to play a major interstitial role between school districts, local public health agencies, and the state (a condition recognized in the Budget Act of 2021–22).

This budget offers a unique opportunity to invest in the supports and interventions needed to help school districts and charter schools meet the equity needs of their students.

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

We support the governor's proposal to stabilize the LCFF average daily attendance (ADA) calculation and urge policymakers to also include the at-promise students served by COEs. County offices directly serve California's at-promise 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 for these important student groups.

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

We recommend increasing investments in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Between a COLA and ADA changes, less than one-third of the \$16.1 billion in new Proposition 98 revenue is proposed for the LCFF, the state's equity-driven funding formula for core educational services. Inflationary cost pressures and rising fixed costs (including scheduled pension rate increases) dramatically undercut the impact of the proposed COLA. The cornerstone of this year's budget should be a historic investment in the LCFF far exceeding COLA.

We recommend paying down LEA pension liabilities to free local resources. Using state General Fund to pay down long-term unfunded actuarial liabilities at the California State Teachers' Retirement System and California Public Employees' Retirement System on behalf of school employers will strengthen educators' retirement security and build LEA budget resiliency to focus on core educational services.

4. We commend the Governor's commitment to students with disabilities and recommend additional actions to improve access, inclusion, and outcomes.

We support the following proposals:

- \$500 million (ongoing) Proposition 98 general fund to special education.
- 5.33 percent COLA to AB 602 funding formula.
- Calculating base funding amounts at the LEA level to heighten transparency and funding stability.
- Including county offices as resource leads.
- 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 recommend including students with disabilities directly in the LCAP. The LCAP is a critical strategic planning process for LEAs, their communities, and the students they serve. LEAs should develop their LCAP in a single process that gives life to the state's "one system" approach to supporting students with disabilities, as opposed to the otherization of an addendum.

We urge the state to support inclusion within California's System of Support. Consistent with Issue (1) (above), we recommend building capacity through the DA base grant to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. County offices would apply the best evidence-based research and create partnership consortia with institutions of higher education in areas such as IEP best practices, transition, and others.

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 due to both geography and the costs relative to LEA size. CCSESA believes students should have access to high-quality educational services and accommodations, in the most inclusive setting possible, 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.

5. Investments in the educator workforce remain critical.

CCSESA appreciates the administration's dedication to supporting California's educator workforce, as the demand for credentialed and classified staff remains urgent. To further address this need, 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 recommend programs to recruit and provide professional development to local members of the community who have shown an interest in entering 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 statewide educator workforce guide to demonstrate a more coherent process for candidates. A number of LEAs and LEA consortia have created robust teacher and administrator preparation programs, which meet immediate needs in the communities they serve. Given the number and complexity of pathways, grant opportunities, exams, and other steps to enter the teaching profession, CCSESA recommends an educator workforce guide. This guide would show applicants on-ramps into the system and help them locate financial and other resources to navigate that process. Locally, county offices and school districts could modify the statewide template to integrate opportunities provided by local institutions of higher education, workforce development boards, and LEAs. By helping potential applicants navigate the system and locate disparate resources, we hope to reduce barriers to the profession.

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

CCSESA is appreciative of the administration's commitment to early learning programs. County offices of education are dedicated to the successful implementation of Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) to best serve the needs of their communities, families, and youngest learners.

We recommend providing fiscal sustainability and relief from enrollment declines within the California State Preschool Program (CSPP). Parental choice in early learning is a crucial component of the UPK framework. As the state moves toward full implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK), there will be a natural shift in the CSPP 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. For providers to remain open and available to serve these students, another year of hold harmless is needed.

We recommend establishing 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 TK, the need for funding is ongoing. As districts prepare to serve younger children, they will need further support and technical assistance from COEs. Ongoing funding is necessary for COEs to expand their capacity to provide this support to districts.

We recommend augmenting investments in the TK facilities program. One 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 investments into the TK facilities program are needed.

7. Additional recommendations and positions.

We support the proposed changes to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P).

CCSESA commends the goals of the ELO-P 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 an additional year for implementation before the penalties go into effect.

We recommend additional funding for Home-to-School Transportation.

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, driving up LEA contributions and undermining other key educational services.

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

CCSESA recognizes the important role that county offices of education must play to ensure the local success of the CCSPP. We commend the \$60 million investment for qualifying county offices of education for coordination activities and to support implementation.

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 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 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 stated above, 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.

We thank you for your consideration of our views. To contact CCSESA regarding this letter, please feel free to contact Derick Lennox (dlennox@ccsesa.org).

Sincerely,



Derick Lennox
Senior Director, Governmental Relations and Legal Affairs
California County Superintendents Educational Services Association

cc: Honorable Anthony Rendon, Assembly Speaker
Honorable Toni G. Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore
Members, Assembly Budget Committee
Members, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review
Assembly and Senate Republican Offices of Policy
Ben Chida, Chief Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Nichole Munoz-Murillo, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Brooks Allen, Executive Director, California State Board of Education
Chris Ferguson, Program Budget Manager, California Department of Finance