



## ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2021-2022

### INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Association of California School Administrators calls on the organization to be a driving force for an equitable, world-class education system, and work towards the development and support of inspired educational leaders who meet the diverse needs of all California pre-kindergarten to adult students. The latest three-year strategic plan, adopted by the board of directors in February 2021 directs ACSA to shape policy by aligning the collective influence at the local, state, and federal levels and also calls on the organization to be a recognized expert, authoritative voice, and a partner in addressing the diverse needs of students and the issues that impact learning. The organization's Legislative Platform plays a significant role in guiding the ACSA Governmental Relations staff in steering the course for improvements and progress in public education and school administration.

ACSA's Legislative Platform, adopted every two years, establishes the advocacy priorities for the organization with the underlying premise of supporting what is best for students. The Platform, developed by the Legislative Policy Committee, is ratified by the Leadership Assembly and adopted by the ACSA Board of Directors. By establishing advocacy priorities, the Platform guides the advocacy work of the association and is used to inform lawmakers of the organization's highest education priorities. While the ACSA Legislative Platform is intended to identify major advocacy priorities, the absence of any particular policy issue does not preclude the Governmental Relations staff from representing the membership in policy areas that may arise over the course of the legislative sessions.

The development of the Legislative Platform is heavily underscored by the current efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic which has fundamentally impacted the nature of public education in California. As such, there is no greater immediate focus than supporting schools as they are challenged to serve student needs by providing distance learning and moving forward with the school reopening process. The mission remains by ensuring students have equitable access to in-person education when their respective communities' health situation stabilizes is a paramount objective for the current legislative session.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**STUDENT SUCCESS AND ACCESS:** ACSA will advocate for the necessary support and resources to ensure students have equitable educational access and opportunities — from early childhood, to college and/or workforce.

**EQUITY:** ACSA will take legislative and statutory actions that break down systemic barriers that limit the success of historically underserved students and advocate for policies and practices that result in equitable educational outcomes.

**LOCAL CONTROL:** ACSA supports policies and funding that empowers local educational leaders best positioned to make decisions for our students, staff, and communities. ACSA supports policies and funding structures that empower local education leaders best-positioned to make decisions, with robust alignment from state agencies and community stakeholders, to purposefully facilitate exemplary education.

## **PRIORITY AREAS**

### **PRIORITIZING THE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS**

ACSA's top priority is the expeditious, safe reopening of schools, as we know students are best served with in-person settings. Pandemic-induced shifts to distance learning have exacerbated achievement gaps, as students of color and students from low-income households, and students with exceptional needs have been most affected over this past school year. These student groups have not only fallen further behind academically but they have disproportionately dealt with social-emotional effects of isolation, abuse, and inability to have basic needs met. To reopen safely, LEAs need proper funding, science-informed safety requirements, and robust access to vaccines.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Prioritizing school personnel and student COVID-19 testing, as well as vaccine access
- b) Access to or funding for personal protective equipment for staff and students
- c) Clear, science-driven state and county health guidelines regarding reopening

### **EQUITY AND UNBIASED EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

ACSA's commitment to supporting legislation regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion is foundational to ensure all students are afforded the opportunity to a well-rounded education. ACSA pledges to apply an equity-focused lens on policies to further the ability of student achievement. We continue to advocate for equity-focused policies and practices that engage all student groups to fulfill their highest potential, empower underserved and underrepresented groups with additional resources, and ensure substantive requirements are met by our site leaders that show evidence of a progressive school environment.

Policy Recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Enact policies targeted to serve underserved populations and address factors that limit their success
- b) Prioritize legislation that promotes racial diversity in the educator workforce and enact recommendations from ACSA's Equity Services
- c) Promote policies that support the protection of LGBTQ+ individuals and enact legislation comprehensive prohibition of discrimination in public schools

### **WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH**

Student mental health needs are prevalent statewide issues that requires legislative awareness and attention. COVID-19 has only compounded these needs for students. ACSA members report that rates of anxiety, depression, trauma, and suicide are at all-time highs, including amongst alternative and adult education students. Alleviating these issues requires broad, coordinated efforts of which schools only play one part. ACSA continues to support policies and cross-sector solutions that are based in prevention, equity, and scientific rigor to address student mental health.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Increase coordination amongst schools and community providers
- b) Direct non-Proposition 98 funding to school districts to support local needs, including expanding student access to mental health services. Funding sources may include federal Medicaid/Medi-Cal, as well as revenues from both the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63) and marijuana taxes (Proposition 64)
- c) Support policies that allow LEA recommendation/referrals for behavioral support services that are not educationally related

## **ACCOUNTABILITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

ACSA supports the current pause to our state's accountability system which has allowed LEAs to instead focus on meeting the varied needs of their students, families, and staff to get through the pandemic together. ACSA supports the temporary requirements that have been enacted to hold LEAs accountable for the resources that have been provided and to demonstrate how they have served their communities during this time. ACSA is committed to continuing and accelerating the learning that students have achieved amid innovative teaching as LEAs have had to reimagine the delivery of instruction to protect the health and safety of students and staff. ACSA supports continued flexibilities that may be needed as the pandemic continues to ensure that assessments of student achievement are locally tailored to consider diverse and unique circumstances that exist for families and are intended to identify student progress and needs.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Pursue a waiver of federal assessment and accountability requirements in 2020-21
- b) Allow LEAs to rely on local assessments solely as a formative tool to gauge student learning
- c) Consider an extension of the temporary pause to the state's accountability system to ensure that expectations and requirements are aligned with flexibilities and waivers granted to LEAs as distance learning continues

## **EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT**

The COVID-19 crisis has placed a spotlight on student's need for the highest quality educator in every classroom. COVID-19 has exacerbated California's teacher and administrator shortage. COVID-19 guidelines along with policy changes to restore bilingual education and increased leave benefits will challenge districts to find and retain qualified employees in order to provide a superior education for all students. Investing in professional learning for teachers and administrators further aids in their preparation and retention.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Embed mental health and trauma-informed training into teacher and administrator credentialing programs;
- b) Protect the CalSTRS and CalPERS defined benefit, and repeal the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision, recognizing the importance in recruiting and retaining the highest quality educators;
- c) Support programs that help recruit and retain teachers, especially in critical shortage areas;
- d) Enhance teacher and administrator recruitment and retention by eliminating barriers within the teacher and administrator preparation programs and ease out-of-state reciprocity obstacles; and,
- e) Secure resources to support LEAs in providing robust professional development to teachers and administrators, including in the area of distance and hybrid learning

## **SCHOOL FUNDING**

ACSA calls on the state and federal governments to provide the resources necessary to safely reopen schools, address learning loss, and equip LEAs with the funding needed to offer innovative, excellent in-person and hybrid public education opportunities. ACSA urges the state legislature and governor to provide immediate one-time funding to LEAs to address urgent COVID-19 related items, while working to achieve a long-term funding solution to bring California into the top-ten rankings in per-pupil funding, as called for in the State Constitution.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Allocating state and federal one-time funding to address learning loss and safely reopen schools

- b) Support increased education funding, including the development of a long-term plan to raise revenues for California schools
- c) Mitigate the impact of increased employer retirement contributions while preserving the solvency of the public retirement systems
- d) Establish new funding targets for the Local Control Funding Formula and pursue improvements as needed
- e) Authorize LEAs access to Medi-Cal EPSDT funds to support the mental health needs of students and staff

### **SCHOOL FACILITIES AND SAFETY**

Students and employees deserve high-quality and equitable learning environments. The defeat of Proposition 13, the school facility bond, has placed additional strain to support our schools. While many districts are not heavily using their school sites due to COVID-19, the need to maintain our schools has never been greater. An investment in new HVAC systems, filters, air purifiers, and other healthy air products is required to help stop the spread of the disease. ACSA supports the comprehensive approaches to providing a healthy and safe educational environment that is conducive to student learning and protecting the safety of our students and employees.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Support efforts to place a school facilities bond on the next statewide ballot
- b) Protect access to local facilities funding sources, including developer fees
- c) Support funding for early childhood education facilities
- d) Support funding outside of Proposition 98 to pay for emergency repairs due to COVID-19 and natural disasters
- e) Support efforts around cybersecurity, student data protection, and privacy

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Special education serves the needs of students with disabilities to help them achieve their educational goals and succeed in school. While special education services are state and federally mandated, state and federal funding have not kept pace with rising costs. ACSA supports special education reform that recognizes the growing number and increased severity of students identified with special needs, provides appropriate funding for special education services, and increases support for districts identified for targeted assistance under the state accountability system. ACSA believes it is time for the state to address the glaring inequities in the current special education funding.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Continue to increase resources for special education, including fully funding state special education mandates and supporting efforts to increase inclusive practices
- b) Support the establishment of an ongoing funding allowance within the AB 602 formula for infants, preschoolers, and students with severe disabilities
- c) Engaging in the reauthorization and funding of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- d) Increase funding for Family Empowerment Centers and for alternate dispute resolution to reduce the cost of litigation