



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

### INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) is 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 California's 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. This plan 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 pivotal role in guiding the ACSA Governmental Relations team on advocacy to improve public education and school administration.

ACSA's Legislative Platform establishes the advocacy priorities for the organization, guided by the primary purpose to serve students. The Legislative Platform, developed by the Legislative Policy Committee, is ratified by the Leadership Assembly and adopted by the ACSA Board of Directors every two years. 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 arise over the course of the legislative session.

The development of the current Legislative Platform is heavily underscored by the continued 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 strive to meet the diverse needs of students. The overarching purpose of the organization continues to be that we ensure students have equitable access to a quality education with emphasis on in-person education

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**STUDENT SUCCESS** ACSA will advocate for the necessary support and resources to ensure students have equitable educational access and opportunities — from early childhood to college and into the 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.

**EMPOWER AND SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL LEADERS:** ACSA will elevate the voices of educational leaders in the policymaking process, promote collaboration amongst its members, and support professional development, including the well-being and success of our members.

**LOCAL CONTROL:** ACSA supports policies and robust, ongoing funding for public schools that empower and entrust local educational leaders to serve our students, staff and communities. ACSA supports policies and funding structures that enable local education leaders the ability to make decisions in the best interest of their community, with clear alignment from state agencies and our educational partners, to purposefully facilitate exemplary education.

## **PRIORITY AREAS**

### **KEEPING SCHOOLS SAFELY OPEN**

ACSA's top priority is keeping schools safely open for in-person instruction, as students are best served when they are in school and supported by dedicated educators. The pandemic-induced shift to distance learning exacerbated achievement gaps, and students of color, students from low-income households, and students with exceptional needs have been most negatively impacted during the previous 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 the inability to have their basic needs met. To keep schools open safely, LEAs need proper funding, science-informed safety requirements, and support in implementing all of the public health guidance schools must now follow.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Clear, science-driven state and county health guidelines
- b) Additional staff to support the implementation of public health requirements
- c) Access to personal protective equipment and accessible COVID-19 testing
- d) The ability to offer virtual education options to families who choose not to return to in-person instruction, whatever the reason may be, and the flexibility to determine whether independent study or other programs are the best modality to do so.

### **EQUITY-CENTERED EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

ACSA is committed to supporting legislation focused on equity, diversity and inclusion. These tenets are foundational to ensure all students are afforded the opportunity to a well-rounded education. ACSA stands with our educational leaders who celebrate California's diverse student populations through instructional practices that support the teachings of cultural and historical realities and anti-racist pedagogy. ACSA pledges to apply an equity-focused lens holistically on policies, ranging from curriculum and lack of broadband access to student achievement and discipline. 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 at school and at home, 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 aid underserved populations and address factors that limit their success, such as the closing the Digital Divide
- b) Prioritize legislation that promotes racial diversity in the educator workforce and enact recommendations from ACSA's Equity Committee
- c) Promote policies that support the protection of students of color, LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalized groups, including supporting legislation that provides comprehensive protection against discrimination in public schools

## **WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH**

Student mental health is a prevalent, statewide issue that requires legislative awareness and attention. COVID-19 has only compounded this need for students. ACSA members report that rates of student anxiety, depression, trauma and suicide are at all-time highs, including for 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 among schools and community providers, with a focus on providing school based services
- b) Direct non-Proposition 98 funding to school districts to support mental health, including expanding student access to mental health services. Funding sources may include federal Medicaid/Medi-Cal funds, as well as revenues from both the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63) and marijuana taxes (Proposition 64)
- c) Support policies that allow LEA referrals for behavioral support services that are not educationally related

**EDUCATOR STAFFING CRISIS** Students need highly trained and experienced educators to reach their full potential. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing teacher, staff, and administrator shortage. Districts are struggling to manage the ever-changing public health guidelines, new requirements on independent study, contact tracing, testing and vaccine mandates, all of which have significantly increased staffing needs. LEAs are also seeing a significant exodus of educators due to early retirements and those choosing to leave the profession because of the stressors created by the pandemic.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Establish financial incentives and reduce barriers for recruiting and retaining quality educators
- b) Support affordable and expedited credentialing programs and pursue opportunities that embed teacher credentialing programs within four-year bachelor's degrees
- c) Remove eligibility obstacles that hinder out-of-state reciprocity to grow California's pool of educators
- d) Protect the CalSTRS and CalPERS defined benefit, repealing the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision, and modifying earning limitations for retirees

## **SCHOOL FUNDING**

ACSA calls on the state and federal governments to provide the robust and stable funding needed for LEAs to offer an innovative and high-quality education to all students. ACSA urges the Legislature and Governor to bring California into the top 10 rankings among states for per-pupil funding, as called for in the State Constitution. ACSA supports raising the LCFF base grant funding, using one-time funds judiciously, and limiting the creation of new programs, as LEAs are currently implementing a swath of significant new programs that were created in last year's budget.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Increase the investment in the Local Control Funding Formula and pursue improvements to the formula as needed
- b) Mitigate the fiscal impact of declining enrollment and volatile ADA due to COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring LEAs are fiscally stable as they work to provide students with the supplemental support needed to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.
- c) Support increased education funding, including the development of a long-term plan to raise revenues for California schools
- d) Mitigate the impact of increased employer retirement contributions while preserving the solvency of the public retirement systems

## **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 on our schools. ACSA supports comprehensive approaches that promote a healthy and safe educational environment that is conducive to student learning and protects our students and employees.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Utilize the state's surplus revenues to invest in school facilities, including, but not limited to, the retrofitting and building of classrooms that are needed to implement transitional kindergarten.
- b) Secure funding outside of Proposition 98 to pay for emergency repairs due to natural disasters and power shutoff
- c) Support student data protection, information privacy and other cybersecurity efforts

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Special education serves the needs of students with disabilities to support them in achieving their educational goals and succeeding in school. While special education services are state and federally mandated, funding has never been adequate, nor has it grown commensurate with the rising costs of services. ACSA supports special education reforms that recognize the diversity of our state and that a single approach will not work for all districts. Policies must acknowledge the growing number of students with special needs and the increasing number of students who have severe needs by providing appropriate funding for special education services, including increasing support to 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 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 ongoing funding within the AB 602 formula for preschoolers and students with severe disabilities
- c) Promote the reauthorization and funding of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## **UNIVERSAL TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION**

ACSA supports the educational needs and enrichment of our youngest learners. To ensure these students are provided with high quality universal transitional kindergarten (UTK) programs, LEAs must be provided with adequate funding and flexibility. LEAs have been impacted by the labor shortage and do not have the enough credentialed or classified staff members to meet the statutory ratios that would allow for the necessary care of these students. In conjunction, many school sites are ill-prepared to house additional 4-year-olds because their classrooms necessitate special amenities, which will require time and funding to build or retrofit existing infrastructure. Investing in preparation will enable successful programming where all 4-year-olds in the state will have the ability to enroll in a high-quality TK program.

Policy recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- a) As UTK is implemented, provide LEAs with flexibility to ramp up programs
- b) Enable LEAs to better integrate their State Preschool Programs with UTK
- c) Enact robust state programs that will finance and assist new teachers instructing UTK
- d) Provide additional funds for prekindergarten facilities