



February 22, 2021

Senator John Laird, Chair  
Senate Budget Subcommittee on Education  
State Capitol, Room 5019  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2021-22 Budget Request

Dear Chairman Laird:

As classroom teachers and Teach Plus Policy Fellows, we are writing to share our insights about opportunities we see in this year's budget to address the current crisis, while also laying the groundwork for transformational shifts in our schools. As you are aware, the pandemic has exposed deep inequities in our society, and the most severe impacts of COVID-19 have been borne by those who traditionally have been the most under-resourced and who already were experiencing the highest education and social-emotional needs. As teachers, we have witnessed our students experience intense stress, social isolation, and serious mental health issues.

We are pleased that Governor Newsom's proposed budget prioritizes our students' social and emotional well-being and invests in building a diverse, well-supported teaching force. We believe that there are ways to refine those proposals so that we can maintain that focus while realizing our collective vision for equity and providing clear oversight of how schools and districts are supporting our most vulnerable students.

We recommend the following:

- **Prioritize student well-being** beyond this fiscal year by directly investing in infrastructure like establishing a baseline school climate survey for all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to conduct.
- **Focus investments on [Transformative SEL](#)**, a means to articulate the potential of social-emotional learning to mitigate the educational, social, and economic inequities that derive from the interrelated legacies of racialized cultural oppression in the United States and globally.
- **Ensure that programs addressing the teacher pipeline have the greatest impact** on the communities and students where they are most needed by focusing on communities with the greatest shortages, prioritizing teacher diversity and supporting retention as well as recruitment.
- **Make sure investments in professional learning are most responsive to teachers' and students' needs** by requiring a needs assessments, plan, and a clear set of deliverables for how flexible professional development funds are spent.
- **Fulfill the promise of the Local Control Funding Formula** and ensure LEAs to spend their full allocation of supplemental and concentration funds on targeted students.

### **Prioritizing Positive School Climate, Student Mental Health and Well-Being**

As teachers, we are encouraged by the attention paid to student mental health and well-being in the governor's budget proposal. With \$100 million for California Community Schools, \$50 million for professional development on social emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices, and \$25 million for mental health partnerships with counties, Governor Newsom has put forward a multifaceted

approach to well-being, which is comprehensive and directly responds to one of the most significant needs of today.

While these would be important steps, they feel like disconnected one-time investments. In addition to creating new models like community schools, and building partnerships with outside experts, the state must also create the infrastructure for existing schools to foster climates that prioritize student-well being. Legislators should build school district capacity and set clear expectations to prioritize student well-being beyond this fiscal year. To that end, we appreciate the governor’s recognition of the role of school climate surveys. In order to identify schools and LEAs who are struggling to create a climate that is supportive, affirming, and safe for all students, we need to collect consistent data statewide. We recommend that the Legislature direct a portion of the school climate survey funding toward establishing and conducting a consistent statewide baseline survey. This would allow the state to support improvement in schools to meet the needs of all students, particularly our most marginalized, based on data that is consistent across all LEAs.

Legislators should also make sure that the investments in professional development for social emotional learning meet the most pressing needs of our students. California educators cannot limit our understanding of what social-emotional learning is. [Transformative SEL](#) is a means to articulate the potential of social-emotional learning to mitigate the educational, social, and economic inequities that derive from the interrelated legacies of racialized cultural oppression in the United States and globally. The SEL professional development grant program should prioritize transformative SEL.

### **Investing in Educators and Equity**

We appreciate Governor Newsom’s recognition that a well-prepared, well-supported teacher workforce is one of the most significant factors in improving student achievement and addressing educational equity. We believe we must explore a range of recruitment, development, and retention strategies to expand and diversify the teacher workforce to meet the changing educational needs in the state. The COVID-19 crisis may exacerbate shortages California is already facing. Governor Newsom has sent a powerful signal that to improve outcomes for our students, we must invest significantly in developing our teaching force with nearly \$600 million in program investments. We support these important strategies and see opportunities to refine the proposals.

We support continuing to invest in the previously funded programs to address teacher shortages, particularly the Teacher Residency Grant Program, the Classified School Employees Teacher Credentialing Program, and the Golden State Teacher Grant program, but also hope we can adapt based on some of the lessons that have already been learned. These programs are intended to remove barriers into the profession to address shortages in particular disciplines. We believe that they should also be targeted to address communities with the largest shortages and the biggest gaps between the demographic makeup of their teachers and students. In particular, with regard to the Classified program, we recommend that the program prioritize those communities with the most significant teacher shortages.

As cited in our policy memo, [Making Teacher Diversity a Priority](#), a growing body of research consistently shows that teachers of color increase success for all students. Many of the strategies reflected in the programs proposed to address teacher shortages have also been cited as promising practices for bringing more teachers of color into the workforce.<sup>1</sup> We recommend that future investments should make

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<sup>1</sup> Carver-Thomas, D. (2018, April 19). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifyingteaching-profession-report>

increasing the number of teachers of color an explicit goal or a measure of success of the program. If state leaders are serious about creating a more representative teaching force, it should be a goal of these programs and an element in the assessment of their impact. They should also prioritize programs that build the capacity of teachers to foster culturally affirming and responsive school climates, which will further support teacher retention. Especially after such a challenging academic year, LEAs need guidance and resources to ensure that the teacher shortage doesn't worsen in the coming years.

We are also encouraged with the Governor's focus on ongoing professional development and training for our educators. The targeted programs, namely Ethnic Studies and Social Emotional Learning, focus on issues where we see significant gaps in our colleagues' training. With regard to the Educator Effectiveness Block Grant, we appreciate the need for local flexibility to help address the most pressing challenges our teachers face. We have seen far too many instances of wasted professional development time. Our experience in this year of crisis has not only highlighted the need for training and skill development but also the need to think differently about teachers' time and roles. We urge the Legislature to provide clear expectations for LEAs to conduct needs assessments with their educators before developing their plan for how they will expend these flexible PD funds, where teachers can opt in and training that will be necessary for all educators. And for all the professional development programs, the Legislature should establish a clear set of deliverables and expectations for each proposal that is approved to ensure funds are spent as intended and achieve the desired outcomes. We recommend that this includes both short and long term accountability structures.

### **Fiscal Transparency & Accountability**

As sponsors of previous legislation to ensure appropriate use of funding designated to support our most vulnerable students, we are pleased that Governor Newsom continues to make a commitment to fiscal accountability. When the governor vetoed AB 1835, he did so based on concerns that it would not be "smooth or timely" enough. We believe that the Governor's proposal takes us part of the way to meet the promise we have made to our students with the greatest need when we passed the Local Control Funding Formula. The proposal closes the critical loophole that has allowed LEAs to redirect supplemental and concentration (S&C) funds that have gone unspent in the budget year. But it does not address all the needs. Moreover, we are concerned that the proposed solution would create a more cumbersome process and would not be implemented until the 2022-23 school year at the earliest. That feels neither more timely or smooth than the AB 1835 proposal.

The Governor's proposal would close the carryover loophole by requiring districts to identify when planned spending did not happen. But it would still allow for "qualitative improvements" to substitute for actually spending the S&C grant funds to benefit the targeted students. Instead of eliminating qualitative improvements as required by AB 1835, the Trailer Bill language (TBL) would require that districts identify the qualitative improvements that the district plans to make, and somehow identify the fiscal equivalence of the qualitative improvement.

We question whether districts can determine a fiscal equivalence to a qualitative improvement. An example the administration has used of a qualitative improvement is for schools to change to a block schedule. The TBL would thus require the district to determine whether a change to a block schedule is equivalent to a \$1 million improvement, a \$10 million improvement or a \$100 million improvement while spending no money on the reform. It is unclear how the district would make that determination in a justifiable way, how stakeholders would provide collaborative feedback on it, and how a county office of education would review it for plan approval.

We continue to believe that all supplemental and concentration grant funds should be used to benefit the targeted students. We think that qualitative improvements that do not require spending any money are a great thing for schools and that district should do them, but then still spend the S&C grant funds on other actions to benefit the targeted students. Until academic and other achievement gaps are closed, all S&C grant funds should be used to benefit targeted students.

If the Legislature does decide to move forward with the qualitative approach, the Legislature should require districts to identify specific outcome goals that will result from the proposed actions with a limit on the timing of impact of up to three years. Because the action needs to result in a higher level of service for the targeted students above and beyond what other students receive, the goals for the targeted student groups need to exceed goals for other students in the district.

We do appreciate that the governor has recognized the need for clearer oversight of LEAs by county offices on how they utilize supplemental and concentration grants to increase or improve services for our most marginalized students. The budget can go further to outline clearer and stronger oversight and accountability from the county offices of education. We hope to work with the Budget Committee to identify the best ways to prioritize education funding for our most vulnerable students as the 21-22 budget items are finalized.

We appreciate Governor Newsom proposing to invest more in our students and schools than ever before in his 2021-22 state budget, and focusing on prioritizing our students' social and emotional well-being and investing in building a diverse, well-supported teaching force. We urge you to incorporate these recommendations into the state's 2021-22 budget to lay the foundation for the transformation that our students need. If you have any questions about our recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our names and email addresses are below.

Sincerely,



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