

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Room 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2020-21 California State Budget

Dear Governor Newsom:

The California Federation of Teachers (CFT) represents over 120,000 certificated and classified employees from early childhood educational settings, TK-12 schools, and California community colleges and universities. Our members provide critical services for students of all ages. The CFT is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers and is a member of the AFL-CIO.

In a March 24 letter, we provided our support and commentary for the Governor's January budget proposal for 2020-2021. The itemized list in the previous document still outlines our long-term priorities; however, in the current reality we understand the need to shift our focus toward the health, safety, and economic recovery of our students, communities, and workers. This letter serves to update our position on the state budget in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, just as your budget priorities are undoubtedly being updated as well.

We would first like to thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate your tireless efforts addressing the crisis, marshalling the resources and talents of the state, and working to ensure the health and safety of every California resident. Your commitment to fully funding our schools through this school year, including funds to provide personal protective equipment, and to ensuring the continuation of pay and benefits for educators and school workers, has been essential in ensuring the sanctity of our public education system and helping it transform during the crisis to distance education and disinfection. We also want to applaud the tremendous effort of partnering with non-profit entities to help undocumented workers obtain financial relief through cash grants to individuals and families in need.

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While this letter focuses on our education system, the CFT is also concerned about the broad issues that many of our students, parents, and workers face; specifically housing costs, homelessness, living wages, health care for all, racial equity, and other social justice issues. Without a doubt, increasing the investment in California's public education system, from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade and higher education, is a matter of equity for our most vulnerable students. The physical closure of our TK-12 schools disproportionately impacts students who live in low-income or immigrant households, and especially students who depend on the range of critical special education services provided by dedicated school professionals. Next fall it will be essential to have schools reopened, in one form or another, and fully staffed in order to provide the education that they deserve. Any cuts will only further disadvantage these students.

California's K-14 system will not only serve a critical role in recovering from COVID-19, but also in preventing any future outbreaks. Schools will need to be fully resourced and staffed to ensure that students and employees are able to be screened for infection, stay home if they show symptoms, maintain social distancing efforts, and support ongoing disinfection procedures. California's schools, including the Adult Education and Community Colleges, will play an essential role in supporting the families of unemployed and under-employed workers.

Therefore, we support the following policies in the revisited California Budget:

Utilization of rainy day funds for 2019-20 and 2020-21. Publicly funded state, county, city, and education agencies are playing a crucial role in California's success in flattening the curve of infections and deaths of this disease. This is an opportunity to strategically allocate the state's rainy day fund to maximize its impact, ensure critical operations and programs keep running, at minimum, at the current levels, and maintain employment of public workers. This will keep workers insured and enable a smooth transition back to normal operations as soon as the pandemic permits.

Protecting all public education funding. The statewide closure of our public school system has exposed a stressful world without the services they provide. Communities rely on local schools for not just education, but also food security and childcare in the best of times. As Californians look to schools for relief once again in the fall, the state must maximize stability during the COVID-19 crisis and hold our public education system harmless. CFT requests consideration on the following points:

- Districts must receive, at minimum, their base funding from 2019-20 plus the cost-of-living adjustment. This gives districts both certainty and the ability to allocate resources within a known funding level. If the COLA formula is under 2%, the option for August layoffs for educational staff should be suspended.
- Considering the likelihood of additional school closures and lower attendance in the coming school year, funding for local education agencies (LEAs) during the 2020-21 school year should be based on enrollment and not average daily attendance. Steps to mitigate a second wave of the

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pandemic will require more students to stay home at the first sign of illness. Without a move to enrollment-based funding, we are likely to financially cripple LEAs.

- Similar consideration must be made In the community college funding system, where we are seeing similar issues resulting in reduced attendance. This pandemic has also created anxiety and fear, and we will lose enrollment in both our K-12 schools and community colleges. However, we will need to continue funding so that we maintain programs for when those fears abate and students return.
- Extend the hold harmless provision in the Student Centered Funding Formula through at least the 2021-2022 school year. Implementing the full funding formula in 2020-2021 could financially cripple many community colleges across the state of California, at precisely the moment they will be essential in the economic recovery in the state.
- Continue the funding level for the CSU and UC systems. The universities are an infrastructural investment and a pathway to rebalance inequality. They produce medical and sociological research that address the pandemic. At the same time, they preserve and build on a priceless cultural heritage that makes California the most desirable place to live.

Funding early childhood education. In many parts of the state, daycare and early education centers have been forced to close to assist with the COVID-19 effort. This has negatively impacted a great number of parents, including many who are public education employees who depend on childcare. In this time of crisis, supporting our essential workers by caring for and educating their young children will be an invaluable investment by the state. Therefore, it is extremely important to increase funding for early childhood education and allow more first responders to meet the challenges of this crisis and to keep it at bay in the foreseeable future.

Additional support for disinfection and distance learning. The initial funding that the legislature allocated for school employee PPE for 2019-2020 was critical funding to keep school employees safe and protected during the initial onset of the virus. The 2020-21 budget should include additional funds to continue to provide PPE for all essential school, early child education, and community college personnel in order to be prepared for resurgences of COVID-19. Each site should have caches of PPE and disinfectant equipment to mitigate any resurgence of the virus. Investments that have already been made for distance learning options should be supplemented with additional funding for equipment maintenance, digital connectivity, training, and other resources so that faculty, staff, and students are able to stay home and continue the education while practicing social distancing.

Supporting classified school employees through summer months. Classified school employees have been engaging in the dangerous and critical work to disinfect our school sites. Most of these employees are not paid during the summer months, relying on a “reasonable assurance” of continued employment in the subsequent academic year--a condition that prevents these essential workers to access unemployment insurance benefits. While current law allows employees to save part of their salary to be

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matched by state dollars to make ends meet over the summer, many workers have not been able, either by the district's unwillingness or individual financial security, to participate in the classified school employee summer assistance program. This program is crucial to workers who are providing the essential services to mitigate infections and should be funded on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, as no worker can possibly have reasonable assurance of employment in this crisis, classified school employees should be recognized for their essential contribution to the COVID-19 effort and have access to full unemployment insurance benefits during the summer.

Proliferating the Community School model. The wrap around services offered by community schools are essential to preventing a second outbreak and mass school closure in the future. This includes school nurses, medical testing equipment, mental health counselors, and other professionals and resources needed for the health and safety of the students and the community. Having on-site nurses that are able to catch fevers or other signs of illness early on is critical to stopping a resurgence of COVID-19. The community school model has long been supported by CFT, since it has proven to provide students with wrap around services, including health care. It is more important than ever before to continue the support and to fully fund both the mental and physical health services on every campus.

Increased funding for impoverished students. This pandemic has shown the glaring inequity in resources available to our most vulnerable students, especially those living in poverty. It is critical that all students are able to continue their education during a stay-at-home order, regardless of their family's economic status. All students must be able to access the internet and be provided with electronic devices to complete their school work in order to ensure educational equity. The state should even look at the possibility of regulating the internet as a utility as opposed to a commodity.

Increased funding for alternative tools and resources for students with Individual Education Plans. As K-12 schools have been forced to quickly transition to distance learning, providing appropriate services and support to students with IEPs has been a major challenge. With little or no support from the federal government, California has an obligation to increase funding for alternative tools and resources to support these students. In the likely event that regional school closures will happen in the coming school year, additional funding will be critical to ensure our students with IEPs continue to receive the education they deserve.

Funding for CalBright should be reallocated to support existing online local programs. The pandemic demonstrates the importance of online education programs that supplement our education system. The CFT has confirmed the ability of our community colleges to provide education through online and other virtual modes of instruction. Unexpended initial and ongoing funding for CalBright should be reallocated to support local community colleges, which are better positioned to offer the highly specialized and limited classes that CalBright is attempting to offer. CalBright students and course offerings could be seamlessly integrated into the local community college system's online programs.

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Protecting Adult Education in this economy. The California Adult Education Program (CAEP) will be essential for many adults who have lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic and may need additional skills to transition to a new job. Many CAEP consortia have been carrying over funds from one budget year to the next with little explanation or oversight. The CFT recommends establishing policies that ensure transparency and accountability for adult schools and community colleges who carry over CAEP funding, including public plans for expenditures within the local consortia planning process.

Funding to ensure access to extended paid leave. The pandemic is rapidly exhausting employees' accrued paid sick leave, especially for new, temporary, and part-time employees with little to no sick leave banked. The state of California must ensure funding to support additional paid sick or other paid leave options to cover COVID-19-related absences. This will help California flatten the curve, keep these employees and their communities healthier, and allow them to return to their essential duties when able.

Federal funding should not supplant state funding. The CARES Act has provided substantial financial support for our public education system to address the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and we thank you for advocating to congress for additional funds in a potential fourth federal stimulus bill. The state budget should ensure that federal dollars will not supplant or reduce any baseline, ongoing state funding. Doing so would only result in continued chronic underfunding of our public education system. Our state should continue advocating for additional congressional relief packages, including flexible funding for the Education Stabilization Fund.

The California Federation of Teachers would once again like to thank Governor Newsom for his tremendous leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for his continued support for public education. We look forward to continuing to work with him and the Legislature in crafting budget solutions that keep our students, educators, and school employees safe and healthy. California must have a budget that recognizes that our public schools are a critical engine to ensure the health and economic recovery of our state.

Sincerely,



Jeffery M Freitas, President
California Federation of Teachers

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cc: Keely Martin Bosler, Director, Department of Finance
Senator Toni Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore
Assemblymember Anthony Rendon, Assembly Speaker
Senator Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Senator Richard Roth, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 1
Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, Assembly Education Committee
Senator Connie Leyva, Senate Education Committee