

**Marin County School Districts  
Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC)  
Annual Priorities 2023**

**Marin County**

Marin County serves over 33,000 PreK-14 public school students in small to mid-size, rural, and suburban districts. Like schools throughout California, Marin schools serve a diverse population of students and families, including immigrants and English Learners.

**Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC)**

JLAC is a countywide committee of superintendents and elected school board members advocating on behalf of public school children in Marin County. Recognizing the challenges and limited resources of our state education system, JLAC is committed to focusing on top actionable priorities that will enable Marin's students to be provided with the best possible education programs.

**ACTIONABLE AND IMMEDIATE CONCERNS**

**SCHOOL FUNDING AND PENSION FINANCE**

It is important for the state government to provide the funding needed to offer innovative, excellent in-person public education opportunities and to achieve a long-term funding solution to bring and keep California into the top-ten rankings in per-pupil funding, as called for in the State Constitution. JLAC recognizes the increase made to the LCFF base grant funding in 2022-23 and the proposed cost of living adjustment in the 2023-24 budget as positive steps. State legislation which required increased contributions from CalSTRS members and school districts has had a significant impact on our systems. JLAC urges the Legislature to address pension liabilities as a statewide issue. The state-required employer and employee contributions to CalSTRS and CalPERS have grown dramatically over the years without a similar increase in state funding to offset these increases. As a result, school districts are required to spend more of their funding to cover pension liabilities, directly impacting their ability to provide the highest quality education and provide their educators and staff with the pay raises they deserve. In addition to pension costs, school districts have faced a host of additional budget pressures, including rising costs for services, such as special education and transportation, utility and operating costs and lower reimbursement rates from the state and federal government.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Support increased education funding, including the development of a long-term plan to raise revenues for California schools;
- b) Increase the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Base Grant;
- c) Mitigate the impact of increased employer retirement contributions while preserving the solvency of the public retirement systems;
- d) Authorize LEAs access to Medi-Cal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) funds to support the mental health needs of students and staff.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION**

While special education services are state and federally mandated, state and federal funding have not kept pace with rising costs. We support special education reform that recognizes the growing number and increased severity of students identified with special needs, and provides appropriate funding for special education services.

Special education is highly individualized, with some students requiring more intensive and more costly support. State funding is primarily distributed through a model developed under AB 602 which provides a base rate per unit of student Average Daily Attendance (ADA) with no differentiation for serving students with more intensive (and expensive) supports. Overall student attendance is in decline across the state, meaning state funding is also in decline. However, the incidence of students identified for special education services has been steadily increasing. The state's current funding model ignores the trends impacting special education and provides proportionately less funding each year. Local budgets are left to make up the difference. In addition, like school districts across the state, we are facing the impact of the pandemic. Student needs have become more prominent, specifically in mental health, and districts are faced with increasing challenges, including but not limited to disagreements related to services and parental placement in private schools and residential settings. As one can imagine, this can lead to a significant strain on time and resources, leading to an even greater strain on the system.

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) Support the reauthorization and full funding of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- d) Increase funding for alternate dispute resolution activities to restore relationships and reduce stress on the system.

## **EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT & TEACHER/STAFF SHORTAGES**

Teacher, substitute, and administrator shortages continue to be a major challenge for our schools. This challenge, which has existed for years, has been exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic. We are challenged to find and retain qualified employees, and this affects our capacity to provide the best possible education for all students. Cost of living in Marin makes this challenge significant to our districts. National research shows student enrollment in credentialing programs is declining. If prospective teachers cannot or will not get their credentials, that is likely to increase the teacher shortage. This shortage is most acute in critical subjects like science, math, bilingual education, and special education. In addition, as demographics change throughout our state, it will be more important and more challenging to find bilingual and bicultural school staff that are representative of the students and families we serve.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Explore ways to protect the CalSTRS and CalPERS defined benefit, while minimizing the impact to district contributions;
- b) Support programs that help recruit and retain teachers, especially in critical subject area shortages, and create incentives for students entering education by expanding programs like student loan forgiveness.
- c) Expand access for classified employees to degree and credential programs;
- d) Expand state funding and development incentive for school staff housing programs;
- e) Support efforts to improve teacher education programs which generate high-quality educators;
- f) Temporarily waive the requirement of Bachelor's degrees for substitute teachers to broaden the pool.