

Marin County School Districts | Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC) Annual Priorities 2024

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

It is important for the state government to provide the funding needed to offer excellent, innovative and effective public education opportunities and to achieve stable long-term funding solutions for our schools. JLAC recognizes past efforts including the increase made to the LCFF base grant funding in 2022-23 and advocates to protect educational funding and for additional increases to the base grant funding which provides support and flexibility to all schools. JLAC recognizes that there are questions related to the 2024-25 budget and that the Governor has proposed solutions that will largely keep school funding intact. If, however, tax revenues do not reach anticipated projections and lower the enacted budget it will be important for potential budget cuts be kept as far from classrooms as possible as our schools continue to establish programs and services addressing challenges resulting from the COVID era. For example, sweeping funds or withholding resources from funded grants in areas such as Community Schools, Career Technical Education and Mental Health and Wellness will hinder the significant progress made on these and other important initiatives. School districts face a host of additional budget pressures, including pension liabilities, rising costs for services, such as special education and transportation, utility and operating costs, and lower reimbursement rates from the state and federal government. For many school districts these challenges will be exacerbated by the very low COLA projected for 2024-25

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Protect education funding and support increased education funding by increasing the LCFF base grant, including the development of a long-term plan to raise revenues for California schools;
- b) Mitigate the impact of increased employer retirement contributions while preserving the solvency of the public retirement systems;
- c) Address requirements and mandates in areas such as the Universal Lunch program that have resulted in unintended challenges for school districts.
- d) Expand commercial insurance company participation in the new Multi-Payer Fee Schedule to include all commercial companies.
- e) 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. As an example, the number of students eligible for special education grew by 6.3% between 2021 to 2023. 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 continue to face the impact of the pandemic both programmatically and fiscally. 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) Continue funding for alternate dispute resolution activities to restore relationships and reduce stress on the system.

EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT & TEACHER/STAFF SHORTAGES

The state's response to the education workforce shortage has provided some significant steps forward in recent years. Strategies to meet near and long-term priorities, these investments have created new pathways into the field for aspiring educators that are more accessible, result in significantly higher quality educators, and will reduce attrition. However, these programs and infrastructure investments are still in development and the investment in these programs needs to be protected. Continuation of funding is essential for these investments to deliver on their promise to reshape our education system in service. Examples include the Teacher Residency Grant, Classified Employee Credentialing Grant and the Golden State Teacher Grant.

School districts in Marin and throughout the state recognize the importance of developing workforce housing for the education sector. Yet, developing surplus parcels remains a major challenge. Housing development is a significant departure from the expertise of Districts and their boards. Projects can take several years to move to completion, requiring prioritization across multiple generations of district and board leadership. Financing for workforce housing is extremely limited.

Policy recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Expand the support available to LEAs from HCD to move projects through the development process;
- b) Re-allocate a portion of low-income housing financing for workforce housing to ensure the development of housing for moderately low-income educators;
- c) Offer incentives for those living in workforce housing to save for home ownership.