Marin County
Marin County serves over 35,000 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

1. Pension Liabilities
JLAC continues to urge the legislature to address pension liabilities as a statewide issue as school districts have had to use their restoration funding, base, or their supplemental Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) funds to pay for increasing pension obligations. We were supportive of the supplemental contribution toward CalSTRS long-term liabilities in the 2019 state budget. We support additional contributions in the state budget as school districts struggle to cover past, current, and future STRS and PERS rate increases.

Increased costs continue to have an inverse impact on the restoration of pre-recession funding levels and on a district’s ability to adequately implement their educational priorities. These increases, over which school boards have no control, were not negotiated, nor contemplated at the local level, have effectively absorbed all of the restoration or gap closure increased funding, including the proposed COLA adjustments to school funding by the state.

JLAC strongly advocates for an increase in school funding that would put our school funding on par with other states. While California is the fifth-largest economy in the world, its per-pupil spending on public education is one of the lowest in the United States. Even with the completion of Restoration Funding in 2018, plus added COLA’s, California remains toward the bottom in state comparisons.

Though local districts do not have control over public pensions, we will work in conjunction with the state to do our part. There are actions we have taken to maintain excellence in our schools. We operate districts with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, keeping staffing levels, which affect pension costs, at the most cost-effective levels as possible, while still maintaining high quality programs. However, fair and full funding for schools will be necessary to provide baseline education such as the full implementation of common core and next-generation science standards and to address growing needs such as student mental health, school site safety, and special education.
2. Special Education Must Be “Fully Funded”.
With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, federal law established a maximum grant amount for each state equal to 40% of the national average per-student educational spending amount (including special education expenditures) times the state’s population of students with disabilities. This is commonly referred to as “full funding” for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), legislation that reauthorized Public Law 94-142. Actual federal funding has fallen short of this target. In 2018-19, federal funds provided for less than 8% of special education expenditures statewide, which is $3.2 billion below the target.

The shortfall in funding is growing even faster because special education per-student expenditures are rising faster than available funding. The Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) report on special education funding in 2018 determined that inflation adjusted, per-student special education expenditures increased 12% between 2005-06 and 2015-16. Over this same period of time, inflation adjusted, per-student Proposition 98 funding increased only 2%. Local school districts must use local unrestricted dollars not originally intended for special education to cover the resulting shortfall.

Programming costs related to the increase of students with severe disabilities must be recognized.
The prevalence of students with relatively severe disabilities has almost doubled since 2000-01. This increase is due largely to a notable rise in autism, which affected about 1 in 600 students in 1997-98 compared to about 1 in 50 students in 2017-18.

Between 2007-08 and 2017-18, inflation-adjusted special education expenditures increased from $10.8 billion to $13 billion (28%). Both state and federal funding decreased in inflation-adjusted terms over this period, primarily as a result of declining overall student attendance. Consequently, local unrestricted funding has been covering an increasing share of special education expenditures (49% in 2007-08 compared to 61% in 2017-18). In a recent report, the LAO estimated that about one-third of recent increases in special education expenditures are due to general increases in staff salaries and pension costs affecting most school districts. The remaining two-thirds were due to a rise in the number of students with relatively severe disabilities, which require more intensive and expensive supports.

Funding models need to be changed to be responsive to the need.
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 AB602 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. 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. JLAC supports the consideration of a funding model that is driven by special education enrollment and learning profiles and not by ADA. The state’s funding model ignores the trends impacting special education and provides proportionately less funding each year. Local budgets are left to make up the difference.

JLAC also supports the reduction of Unwarranted Claims and unilateral placements. In order to help districts manage excessive special education costs often associated with private school placement, reasonable restrictions should be placed into statute that require districts and parents to create and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEP) providing an opportunity to deliver Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students, before families can unilaterally place their children in a private school environment and request reimbursement.
California Special Education Funding for Extra Costs
Percentage of Total Contribution by Funding Source
Federal, State, and Local General Purpose

Data Source: Maintenance of effort test required by IDEA, Coalition for Adequate Funding for Special Education and California School Funding Coalition. Contact Nancy LaGesse (916) 444-7117, Steve Vail (916) 647-2552, 35711T