

# Marin County School Districts Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC) Annual Priorities 2015

## **Marin County**

Marin County serves over 36,000 K-14 public school students in small to mid-size, rural and suburban districts. Like schools throughout California, Marin schools serve an increasingly diverse population of students and families with a growing student population of English Language 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. We meet monthly to discuss common educational issues and challenges, review legislative activity that affects education, and receive updates and reports from our legislators.

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## **OUR PRIORITIES THAT REQUIRE LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT**

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### **FLEXIBILITY AND LOCAL CONTROL**

*Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) must be individualized to meet the needs of the community and must be flexible enough to provide targeted resources that ensure that ALL students get the services they need to be successful. JLAC priorities are based on the foundation that local control and flexibility are imperative to meeting a district's needs and successfully educating students.*

#### **1. Parcel Tax Passage and Clarification**

Parcel taxes are a critical local source of increased funding for school districts. JLAC advocates for the reduction of the 2/3 super-majority threshold for school district parcel taxes, statewide. Alternatively, enable counties or special districts to determine the threshold for parcel tax approval at the ballot. In addition, support legislation that clarifies the definition of uniformity in Government Code section 50079 in respect to the application of voter approved parcel taxes. Specifically, clarify that uniformity does not require districts to apply one flat rate to all parcels, but that tiered rate structures are permissible if rates are applied uniformly to all like parcels.

#### **2. Teacher Performance**

JLAC supports the court's decision in Vergara v. California to enable districts to evaluate teacher performance more effectively prior to granting permanent status. For example, providing a minimum three (3) year "At Will" probationary period for teachers allows for sufficient assessment and a more efficient hiring process.

#### **3. Facilities**

In order to provide an appropriate learning environment for our students, facilities must be adequately maintained and equipped. The Governor has expressed a desire to change the state-local partnership currently used to finance public schools and to reduce or eliminate the use of state bonds to finance schools. The role of the state would be based on existing state budget resources. JLAC supports continuing the current structure of school construction financing, but if any reform of the state school building program is made, the school districts of Marin support: 1) maximum flexibility to reduce both the costs of school construction and the administrative approval process; 2) lowering the voter threshold for local bonds to 50%; 3) an increase in the percentage of assessed valuation that can be used for district debt; 4) a reasonable transition period that would ensure that local debt obligations established under the prior program rules would be met; and 5) assurance that no Proposition 98 funding be used as part of a new school construction program.

## ADEQUATE AND RELIABLE SCHOOL FUNDING

*Adequate, reliable, and non-categorical state funding is essential to the planning and implementation of local district priorities. School districts have the best knowledge of their students and community and, with parents and other local stakeholders, are prepared to establish budgets, financial priorities, and programs that best meet student needs.*

### **1. Repeal SB 858 - District Reserve Funding Restrictions**

With the passage of Proposition 2, it is expected that there will be some reduction in the volatility in state provided funds. However, this reduction does not in any way reduce the overall volatility that districts face in ensuring that adequate resources are available to run their districts—a determination that varies from district to district. Current law requires school districts to maintain a "minimum" of 3% to 5% in reserves for economic uncertainties. "Minimum" does not mean "adequate." JLAC supports legislation that enables districts to establish their own adequate reserve levels in order to ensure fiscal solvency.

### **2. Common Core Funding**

In order for districts to successfully implement Common Core standards, additional funding and time will be required. One-time money is not enough to effectively implement a curriculum change of this magnitude. The State needs to make a commitment to support these new standards by budgeting additional funding for every district over the next five years in order for districts to support professional development, acquire new instructional materials, and obtain the technology needed to implement the standards and assessments.

### **3. Special Education**

Mandated special education programs consume an increasingly larger portion of local education resources.

- **Fully Fund Special Education** – In order for districts to effectively deliver a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with special needs, additional funding should be allocated to cover the costs.
- **Reduce Unwarranted Claims With IEP Mandate** – In order to help districts manage excessive special education costs (which are often associated with private school placement), reasonable restrictions should be placed into statute that requires districts and parents to create and implement IEPs and that gives districts a reasonable opportunity to deliver FAPE for these students before families can unilaterally place their children in a private school environment and request reimbursement.

### **4. Pension Liabilities and School Funding**

Recent STRS and PERS assessments have had an adverse impact on the restoration of pre-recession funding levels, "Gap Funding", and on a district's ability to fully implement LCAP priorities. JLAC urges the legislature to address pension liabilities separately and not require districts to use restoration, base or supplemental grant funds to pay these new pension obligations.

## IN CLOSING

The public school children of California depend on their elected leaders to provide the necessary infrastructure for the educational preparation that will enable them to compete in an expanding and dynamic global environment. Students will become the entrepreneurs who will drive our economy, the thinkers who will rearrange our universe, and the explorers who will blaze new trails. We must meet our responsibility to these students and all future generations of students and make full funding for education, local control, and flexibility for districts our top priorities. Thank you for your commitment to our children!