

# Discussing COVID-19 with your local legislators

MAY 2020



As we grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, CSBA encourages school district and county office of education board members to continue engaging with your Senators, Assemblymembers and Congressional representatives and their district staff in a manner **that safely supports physical distancing** (i.e. webinar, email, letter or phone). It is critical for state and federal leaders to hear from locally elected school district and county board members about how your schools are being affected by COVID-19 — especially as the 2020–21 state budget takes shape and additional federal responses are being developed — and what you are doing to serve your students, families and employees now, over the summer and into the fall. It is important to emphasize the point that **reopening schools will be key to reopening the economy**.

Whenever possible, it is helpful to set **regular or recurring meetings** with your state and federal representatives and their staff. CSBA members can establish themselves as community leaders on the COVID-19 response and as a trusted resource by providing regular updates.

## Key points to discuss

**Campuses may be closed, but school is not out!** Schools remain an essential service as we fight COVID-19 — make sure your representatives know what you are doing to provide distance learning, meals and other services. Tell them that all existing resources remain devoted to serving all students. It is important to also talk about what plans are being made for summer programs and fall reopening.

**School funding must be a priority** going forward. At a minimum, state funding must be maintained at the January budget level: full 2.29% COLA and \$1.5 billion in one-time revenues distributed to LEAs on a per-ADA basis to be used to safely reopen schools. Additionally, a second federal investment in education is needed immediately to assist schools now and through the coming months. Reopening schools with physical distancing requires additional funding to ensure the safety of all students, staff and their families.

**Public education in California remains underfunded.** Schools were facing severe funding challenges and struggling to balance budgets prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Those same funding challenges remain, and they are becoming more severe, not less. Recognizing that there will be budget pressures from the economic fallout of COVID-19, it is imperative that funding, including emergency appropriations in the current year from the state or federal government, and those appropriated in 2020–21 must be **as unrestricted and as flexible as possible**.

### UPDATES AND RESOURCES ON COVID-19:

**CSBA:** [www.csba.org/coronavirus](http://www.csba.org/coronavirus) | **State:** [www.cde.ca.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cde.ca.gov/coronavirus) | **Federal:** [www.ed.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ed.gov/coronavirus)

### DISTRICT OFFICE ADDRESSES AND CONTACT INFO:

[www.senate.ca.gov/senators](http://www.senate.ca.gov/senators) | [www.assembly.ca.gov/assemblymembers](http://www.assembly.ca.gov/assemblymembers) | [www.house.gov/representatives#state-california](http://www.house.gov/representatives#state-california)

**FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVES:** [www.csba.org/legislativeadvocacy](http://www.csba.org/legislativeadvocacy)

Please do not hesitate to reach out to CSBA Governmental Relations staff if you need additional resources to engage with your representatives and their staffs at [govrel@csba.org](mailto:govrel@csba.org)



## Talking points for CSBA members:

**COVID-19:** Thank your representatives for their actions in addressing the pandemic, including the Legislature’s swift action in March (before recessing) to pass \$100 million in funding for schools (about \$17.27 per ADA) and protections against lost funding from school closures, as well as Congress’ action on the CARES Act, which includes about \$2 billion for California K-12 schools.

- » **Tell your story! Emphasize that schools remain an essential service.** In some communities, there may be perceptions from a small minority that schools are not doing enough to serve students during this crisis. Any such perceptions can be countered by offering specifics and sharing best practices about how your schools are responding and what you are doing to provide essential services as your campuses are closed, such as:
  - › **Distance learning:** How are your schools approaching it? What has worked well? What have been the most significant barriers to success? How can the Legislature/Congress help? Focus on what services you are providing that go above and beyond.
  - › **Meal service:** How many meals are you serving per day? Which school staff members and how many staff have been serving meals?
  - › **Special education:** How are you adjusting to meet the needs of students requiring special education and working to ensure that as many IEP requirements as possible are met?
  - › **Child care:** Have you been able to offer child care to families in need during the outbreak?

**State budget proposal:** While recognizing that the budget and the Proposition 98 guarantee stand to take a significant hit from COVID-19, urge legislators to fund schools based on need; preserving full statutory COLA and to allocate one-time funds on a per-ADA basis to be used for discretionary purposes. Expect pushback from legislators; they will cite falling state revenues and thus a falling Proposition 98 guarantee. The guarantee must be exceeded (a valid use of state reserves) to ensure that school programs in a COVID-19 world continue and that schools can begin reopening. Costs will increase as issues like intensive and frequent cleaning, physical distancing, and child supervision are addressed.

- » **COLA:** Urge legislators to prioritize funding COLA, especially in base programs of the Local Control Funding Formula and special education.
  - › **Know your number.** Wherever possible, cite the percentage by which you estimate your per-student costs increased in the current year and will rise in 2020–21 (especially if that percentage is greater than the current 2.29 percent proposed COLA). Provide local examples of why protecting base funding is critical, especially in the era of COVID-19.

### EXAMPLES:

- › Programs you have cut or are considering cutting, either before the outbreak or as a result of it.
- › Layoffs of certificated staff made on or before March 15 and/or layoffs of classified staff; provide specific examples of which positions are affected, if applicable.
- › Remind legislators and staff that your LEA may be forced into laying off the same staff members who have been directly serving students during the COVID-19 crisis.



- » **Discretionary funding:** One-time funding in 2020–21 should be allocated on a **per-ADA basis**, to allow LEAs to target funds to local priority areas such as providing summer programs, reopening schools in the fall, and avoiding further cuts and layoffs.
- » **State reserves:** It is for times such as these that the state’s reserves are needed; to backfill LEA funding because of the inadequacy of Proposition 98. LEA costs are going to continue to increase as schools revamp summer programs and look to reopen for the upcoming 2020–21 school year in a COVID-19 environment.
- » **Need for a state bond:** CSBA is urging the Governor to call for a \$2 billion bond for the November 2020 ballot to fund local broadband access statewide, particularly in rural areas; to purchase hardware; and to support health and safety needs relating to COVID-19.
- » **Hold harmless:** Remind legislators that education funding must be “held harmless” going forward as schools continue providing services, such as expanded distance learning for all students, expanded meal provisions and other associated costs.
- » **Increasing costs:** Cite impacts on your current and future budgets from increasing employers pension costs, higher healthcare costs, increasing mandated costs, and additional costs associated with COVID-19 such as distance learning, personal protective equipment, and additional sanitation supplies. Note that the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, 14 state mandates in 2019 that will cost schools as much as \$1 billion annually in new costs.

**Federal proposal:** Congress approved the CARES Act in March and it is expected to provide \$2 billion in funds to California schools (\$13.5 billion was provided nationally). But those funds will likely be depleted just with the costs to LEAs in retooling education programs for distance learning, providing nutrition services and child care. An additional investment is needed from the federal government of at least \$175 billion to help cover costs to schools between now and the reopening of schools in the fall.

- » **CARES Act II:** Congress must approve a second stimulus bill to provide funds for schools that are needed immediately and to allow for safe reopening of classroom-based programs.
  - › **Know your number.** Similar to conversations with state legislators, know what increasing costs your district/county programs have already incurred and what costs lie ahead as you plan for summer programs to address learning loss and as you look to the fall to reopen schools.

#### EXAMPLES:

- › Programs: what additional/extraordinary costs have you incurred to date and what costs do you foresee as you looking into the summer and fall months? Professional development? Ongoing daily deep cleaning? Technology? Implementation and supervision of physical distancing?
- › Layoffs: Remind representatives your LEA may be forced into laying off the same staff members who have been directly serving students during the COVID-19 crisis.

- › **Federal special education.** In addition to funding issues, there is a need for Congress to waive certain requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to allow services to be offered in a way that complies with physical distancing and distance learning. Specifically, allowing for LEAs to meet Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) standards using a “good faith” standard for services provided during this time.



## Tips for a successful meeting (physical-distancing edition)

- » **Know the platform:** If using Zoom, GoToMeeting or a similar webinar platform, make sure all meeting attendees are familiar with the platform and have the log-in information.
- » **Prepare local information:** Bring info relevant to the agenda to distribute via email or screenshare during the meeting, if your platform allows.
- » **Game plan:** Establishing what each attendee will discuss is helpful to avoid attendees talking at the same time — a common issue in web-based meetings or conference calls.
- » **Ask how much time you have and honor that time.**
- » **Do not dominate the meeting:** Make your point and allow others to participate.
- » **Cover the topics succinctly:** Allow time for your representative/staff to ask questions.
- » **Don't be afraid of what you don't know:** If you do not know the answer to a question, it is much better to say, "I don't know the answer" than to provide information that may be wrong. Also, be sure to tell your legislator you will follow up with them and their staff once you get the answer.
- » **Follow up:** Honor any commitments made during the meeting, such as providing more information.
- » **Plan your next meeting:** Whenever possible, arrange recurring meetings to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 and your local response on an ongoing basis.
- » **Keep CSBA informed:** Please email Governmental Relations ([govrel@csba.org](mailto:govrel@csba.org)) if follow up is needed.

