

# The Uncertain Road Ahead



Reopening schools in the time of COVID-19



June 9, 2020

Dear California Education Leaders:



It is probably fair to state that the 2019–20 school year will go down in history (some might say infamy) as the most uncommon year in the long history of California public schools. The COVID-19 pandemic turned our schools — and the world — upside down and required a resiliency that words cannot appropriately describe. And to our dismay, it appears that this uncommon season will continue into the 2020–21 school year.

When classes resume later this year, COVID-19 will still be here, and Californians will continue to rely on their local schools for safety and support, with the expectation of a high-quality education for every student. Meeting those expectations is a daunting prospect for which no roadmap exists. In recognition of the uncertainties facing education leaders, we have titled this report, *The Uncertain Road Ahead: Reopening Schools in the Time of COVID-19*.

In *The Uncertain Road Ahead*, we answer some important questions about reopening schools. Where there are no clear solutions, we present options for governing board members to consider on behalf of students, staff, families and their communities. Inside you will find a robust examination of what it will take to reopen our schools safely and effectively, with in-depth resources focused on the areas of Health and Safety, High-Quality Teaching and Learning, Equity, Funding and Flexibility. You will also find an overview of CSBA's efforts to advocate for the resources, guidance, funding and support schools need to navigate this crisis.

The typically demanding process of preparing for the start of school carries even greater urgency this summer. As board members, you face the challenge of making decisions while battling several invisible adversaries: a virus we don't fully understand, guidance that is typically insufficient and occasionally nonexistent, and funding that is inadequate to cope with the added expense and logistical challenges of responding to COVID-19.

Our hope is that this report makes this arduous task a bit easier and provides knowledge and inspiration as you move through the planning process. I have been amazed by the ingenuity governance teams have displayed in responding to COVID-19. I have no doubt that your resourcefulness will continue as you serve California's students and, amidst great challenges, prepare them for success in college, career and civic life.

This pandemic continues to evolve and change the way we live, and each day it becomes even clearer that our schools are the centers of our communities and beacons of hope for so many students and families. Our campuses may have been closed, but school was never out. I salute the educators who have worked tirelessly to make distance learning a new reality; the classified staff and volunteers who have distributed countless meals and cleared innumerable logistical hurdles; the administrators and governing boards who rapidly adopted, adapted and implemented policies to serve students in an unprecedented time; the parents and guardians who demonstrated patience despite disruption; and the students who persevered through this bewildering period in world history.

We have all exhibited great resilience, but the fight is not over. As we approach the new school year, we must continue to remain nimble in our response, and we must place the health and safety of our students first. As you endeavor to meet this standard, CSBA will be right beside you, championing public schools and the board members and superintendents that lead our 6.1 million students.

Sincerely,

**Vernon M. Billy**

CEO & Executive Director

California School Boards Association



## Background



### Context

**Campus closures during the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted every aspect of education and social life, presenting the most daunting challenge schools have ever faced.**

Board members, administrators, certificated and classified employees have worked tirelessly to find creative and resourceful ways to safely educate and support the state's 6.1 million students for the remainder of the 2019–20 academic year and the years to come.

While the Governor's Office, California Department of Education, State Board of Education and public health agencies will determine much of the specific guidance, funding, legislation and regulations, CSBA continues to advocate that these organizations and leaders provide clear, consistent and aligned guidance to school boards, county offices of education and superintendents. The ability of local educational agencies to plan for the coming year hinges upon these elements.

Look for this symbol  throughout this report to see spotlight areas for which CSBA is advocating.

### Purpose of this document

California's school districts and county offices of education are considering options to safely and effectively provide instruction for the 2020–21 school year. Families, students and staff are seeking clarity after months of uncertainty and constantly shifting conditions. CSBA is working arduously to support LEAs in these efforts as they plan for the coming year.

In recognition of the obstacles facing its members, CSBA convened an internal staff work group to respond to member needs and ensure the association's advocacy efforts and resources address members' needs and concerns. As part of this work, CSBA conducted a series of virtual listening sessions (see Appendix A) and surveyed Delegates and board presidents about distance learning issues, along with concerns and needs related to reopening schools. To obtain additional budgetary, administrative and logistical data, CSBA also surveyed superintendents of member LEAs.

Each day seems to bring new guidance and (sometimes conflicting) information, but one thing remains constant — resuming in-person instruction in a way that both serves and protects students, staff and community will require a historic level of support and coordination at a local, county and statewide level. As those entrusted with the health and safety of California's students, education leaders must

consider whether schools can reopen campuses safely in the midst of a global pandemic and a budget crisis potentially worse than the austere conditions seen during the Great Recession. And if it is not safe for students and staff to be on campus, how will schools ensure students have access to a high-quality education and support services?

This document presents the principles that CSBA believes to be essential in any plan for resuming instruction for the 2020–21 academic year. Unlike many reopening frameworks or guidance, this document is not intended to provide specific health and safety guidelines, instructional recommendations

or budget advice. Instead, CSBA hopes the principles and content within provide a framework for the many decisions and considerations that board members will need to address in the months ahead.

It also includes important examples of questions for board members to consider as they plan. The framework complements the suite of COVID-19-related materials that CSBA has developed, from a comprehensive pandemic sample policy for reopening schools to a funding advocacy toolkit and COVID-19 webinar series. Many of these resources are available on our dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#).

## CSBA’s Core Principles for Resuming Instruction

CSBA believes resuming instruction must be based on five core principles. These principles apply to decisions about how and when to reopen campuses, as well as to the types of instructional approaches a school district or county office of education may provide.

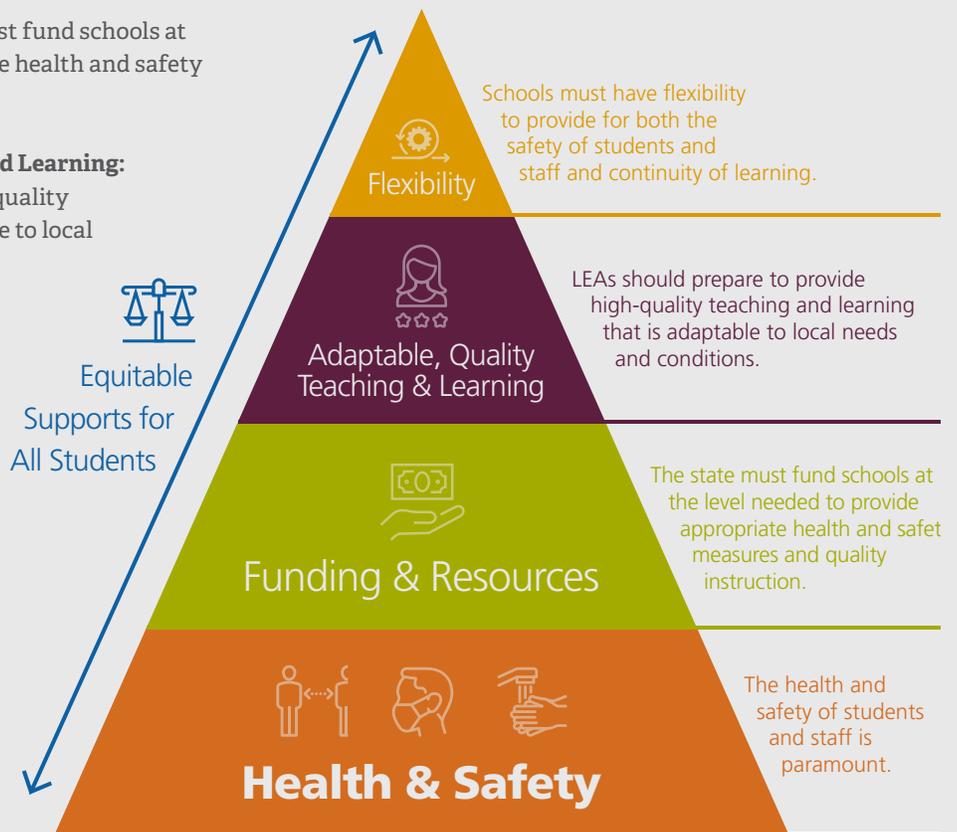
**Health and Safety:** The health and safety of students and staff is paramount

**Funding and Resources:** The state must fund schools at the level needed to provide appropriate health and safety measures and quality instruction

**Adaptable, High-Quality Teaching and Learning:** LEAs should prepare to provide high-quality teaching and learning that is adaptable to local needs and conditions

**Equitable Supports for All Students:** Plans for the new school year should ensure that all students have access to the supports they need

**Flexibility:** Schools must have flexibility to provide for both the safety of students and staff and continuity of learning





## Principle 1: Health and Safety

*The health and safety of students and staff is paramount*



**Health and safety is an essential consideration for any plan to reopen for California's schools.** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Gavin Newsom and SPI Thurmond have repeatedly emphasized the important role of local educational leaders in determining when to close schools and when to bring students back to campuses.

If health considerations are paramount, then campuses should open only when schools have the necessary resources and procedures in place to offer a safe environment for students and staff. A vaccine will not be available before the start of the 2020–21 academic year. Therefore, students, families, educators and community members are relying on the state and federal governments to establish readily accessible testing, a robust system of contact tracing, and the consistent use of self-isolation practices for those with confirmed cases of COVID-19 or recent exposure to those infected by the virus.

### Conditions for reopening

The decision to reopen is a local one and should be based on available local data and scientific understanding of the novel coronavirus. According to recent guidance offered by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [California Department of Public Health](#), certain conditions should be met prior to reopening.

CSBA recommends the following conditions, at a minimum, should be in place and communicated to your school community prior to reopening campuses for in-person instruction:

- ▶ The community has met all six safety indicators outlined by Governor Newsom
- ▶ Schools have the resources to implement the state's COVID-19 guidance, including funding, adequate staffing and supplies, without diverting resources away from instruction
- ▶ Health and safety guidance should be realistic and able to be implemented consistently
- ▶ The LEA and local public health officials are coordinating on guidance about procedures, monitoring local cases and other public health issues
- ▶ Protocols have been developed to determine when and if to close schools if local conditions worsen
- ▶ Plans for a rapid transition to distance learning have been developed in case classroom, school or LEA closures are warranted

Schools remain an essential service, and CSBA recognizes that returning to campus is a critical aspect of reopening the California economy. With the Governor's May Revision budget proposal, however, schools simply will not be able to afford to implement the recommended public health guidance at the start of the 2020–21 academic year. The Legislative agreement reached on June 3 provides room for more optimism, but its heavy reliance on deferrals is still troubling for districts facing an array of added expenses. From social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE), to transportation and cleaning and disinfecting routines, every health and safety practice creates an additional cost in a system that is already grossly underfunded.

## Health and safety considerations for reopening

### Facilities and Operations

- ▶ Consult with local public health officials about implementing guidance from the California Department of Public Health and CDC in the local context.
- ▶ Work with staff to analyze current resources and identify additional needs, including staffing, facilities, cleaning and disinfecting supplies and PPE, to implement the guidelines.
- ▶ Identify supply pipelines for equipment and materials in high demand, perhaps in coordination with the county office of education, other local LEAs or the county emergency services office.

### Transportation

- ▶ If an LEA provides transportation, ensure conversations about scheduling options address considerations for reducing risk while transporting students, including social distancing. Consider implications for additional staffing and routes, including cost and time.

### Accommodations

For [higher-risk staff](#) and students or those who will not send their children to campuses due to safety concerns:

- ▶ Every LEA should consider an independent study or distance learning option for students who are at higher risk for infection or have members of their household who are at higher risk. Additionally, some parents have indicated they are unwilling to send their children back to campus prior to the development of a vaccine. CSBA recommends that districts survey families about their intent to return and interest in alternatives to classroom-based instruction.



### CSBA ADVOCACY

**Clear guidance:** Guidance on reopening from various agencies at the state level — and ultimately at the local level — must be clear, realistic and not contradictory.

**Access to state, regional, and local services:** The state should provide schools with access to as many state, regional and county-level services as possible to relieve local funding pressures. This would include coordinating purchasing and distribution of PPE, providing access to mental health services for students, staff, and families, and ensuring access to COVID-19 testing and related services including contact tracing and screening.

- ▶ If not already done, LEAs should immediately survey staff and/or collaborate with bargaining units to gather information about staff members' intent to return in the 2020–21 academic year. This should include those staff members willing to identify themselves as being at higher risk for infection or having a household member who is at higher risk. Information about whether those staff would like to be considered for alternative assignments or would refuse to re-enter a classroom environment if a vaccine is unavailable will allow LEAs to begin organizing their placements for the 2020–21 academic year.

## Physical distancing: Developing schedules to support health and safety

Until a vaccine is widely available or containment strategies have been effectively implemented, the CDC and CDPH advise that physical distancing is the primary way to reduce transmission of the coronavirus. Schools, however, are not designed for the degree of physical distancing recommended by public health officials. One approach many LEAs are considering to facilitate physical distancing is to develop scheduling alternatives that limit the number of students and staff on campus at any given time.

Each LEA will have unique conditions, needs and preferences that influence the scheduling options they select. Additionally, several organizations, associations and LEAs have developed overviews of the various options and the considerations associated with each. CSBA does not recommend a particular scheduling structure, however, we suggest LEAs consider the following factors in reviewing their options:

- ▶ Impact on health and safety risks
- ▶ Cost, including staffing needs
- ▶ Implications for child care for families and employees
- ▶ Feasibility of implementation
- ▶ Stakeholder input, particularly from employees and families
- ▶ Impact on instructional quality

At the time our framework was developed, most LEAs were in the early stages of selecting their scheduling options. A survey of CSBA Delegates and board presidents indicates that 77 percent of LEAs are engaged in a work group to plan for their reopening strategy in the 2020–21 academic year.

Furthermore, CSBA Delegates and LEA superintendents indicate that the most popular option is currently a hybrid (also known as blended) learning model. More than 78 percent of reporting LEAs were considering some form of hybrid approach, though their preferences for a particular model (if they have one) vary. Additionally, when asked whether any possible schedule would be unacceptable, the responses from many of our members indicated that either end of the spectrum would be untenable — a continuation of full-time distance learning or reopening campuses full time for “business as usual.”

**More** than 78 percent of reporting LEAs were considering some form of hybrid approach, though their preferences for a particular model vary.

Regardless of the way instruction resumes this 2020–21 academic year, CSBA and its members remain committed to the health and safety of California’s 6.1 million students, their families and the employees who work with them.

### Questions and considerations for board members:

- ▶ Now that the CDPH, CDE and CDC have released guidance, are we working with our local public health officials and county office of education to develop protocols for deciding when it is safe to reopen campuses, as well as when future classroom, school site or LEA closures are warranted?
- ▶ Are we working on addressing supply chain issues for equipment and materials to ensure we can implement health and safety measures when in-person instruction resumes?
- ▶ Have we engaged with families and staff to identify those who will need accommodations when in-person instruction resumes?
- ▶ Has our administration evaluated potential liability issues, including insurance costs, associated with reopening campuses?
- ▶ What health and safety measures are collective bargaining units advocating for as part of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for returning to campuses?
- ▶ How will we educate classified and certificated staff about implementing the necessary health and safety measures?
- ▶ How do we communicate with our families about the health and safety measures we will be adopting to reopen campuses?



## Principle 2: Funding and Resources

*The state must fund schools at the level needed to provide appropriate health and safety measures and quality instruction*



### Schools need more funding to reopen

For schools to reopen their campuses, they must have the funding and resources needed to implement the measures described within this framework: health and safety precautions (including physical distancing), academic and mental health support, and equitable opportunities. Given the additional expenses incurred by campus closures this March, our chronically underfunded schools will be under additional strain.

It is unrealistic for campuses to reopen without a significant additional investment in our schools. Yet the Governor's recent revised budget proposes unacceptable cuts for California's PK-12 system. According to a recent letter from the Education Coalition, of which CSBA is a member, the Governor's proposed 10-percent cut to LCFF would translate to:

- ▶ Equivalent cut per student: \$1,230
- ▶ Equivalent cut per classroom: \$21,667
- ▶ Equivalent teacher layoffs (salary and benefits): \$57,638
- ▶ Equivalent classified employee layoffs: \$125,000
- ▶ Percentage increase in class size: 19.1 percent

Given the necessary health and safety measures for reopening, these cuts would preclude schools from being able to welcome students and staff back to campus. Schools have always been innovative about making the most of limited resources, but this is beyond what is possible for even the most creative school business officials, and the stakes are too high for half-measures.

### CSBA ADVOCACY

**Members whose LEAs** are not basic aid and who do not receive concentration funding are worried relief will not reach them. CSBA is advocating for full funding of the LCFF at the January budget level, including COLA, which is the level contained in the Legislature's proposed response to the May Revision.

LEAs should also be prepared to manage their cash flow, as state-level deferrals are planned for the 2020–21 fiscal year. As proposed in the May Revision, \$100 million will be available in May and \$100 million in June for districts that would experience financial hardship due to the deferrals. In order for a school district to receive a payment, the county superintendent of schools shall certify to the SPI and to the Director of Finance on or before January 5, 2021, for May and by April 1 for June that the deferral will result in the school district being unable to meet its financial obligations for May or June, and shall provide an estimate of the amount of additional funds necessary for the school district to meet its financial obligations for the month of May or June.

It is likely that deferrals will require some level of borrowing by LEAs that do not have sufficient reserves to cover the entire amounts being deferred. Consider CSBA's [California School Cash Reserve Program](#) for the best terms.

CSBA is engaged in advocacy on behalf of our members and their LEAs. Board members can play an important role in communicating the potential impact to the Governor’s Office and the Legislature. To help, CSBA has developed an [Advocacy Toolkit](#), which includes talking points, sample letters and call scripts, recommendations for social media posts, and sample resolutions for both state and federal funding.

**CSBA ADVOCACY**

**Health and safety funding:** State and federal funding must be able to cover the totality of the health and safety concerns to address the needs of students, employees and their families.

**Technology funding:** Funding at the state and federal levels should provide broadband access to all communities to accommodate appropriate distance learning opportunities for all students, as well as expansion of E-Rate and providing funds for devices and maintenance services. CSBA is advocating for a tech bond to include funds to provide access to broadband services and for purchasing and replacing devices and hotspots.

**Special education funding:** LEAs need increased state and federal funding, along with regulatory flexibility, to appropriately address the needs of special education students including additional funding for high-cost, low-incidence services, flexibility in timelines for reviewing and implementing changes in IEPs and ensuring access to individualized services.

**Funding to support student groups:** Connect funding needs to issues and considerations of the various LCFF student groups, including access to services and programs necessary to close achievement gaps.

**“The May Revision budget proposal will prevent many schools from opening safely as expenses for COVID-19 response have exacerbated the already precarious financial situation of public schools. In February — before the pandemic — we conducted a survey of school districts’ financial conditions which found that 77 percent of school districts were deficit spending and more than a third were contemplating layoffs. Today, schools are planning for physical distancing on campus and school buses, assessing the expense and availability of personal protective equipment, buying technology to expand their capacity for distance learning, calculating high food and meal distribution costs and preparing for the additional cleaning and sanitizing needed to keep, students, staff and families safe. Against this backdrop, the current budget would exacerbate inequity and damage a generation of public-school students. California can and must do better.”**

*—Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez, CSBA President, Trustee  
Azusa Unified School District*

**Additional resources**

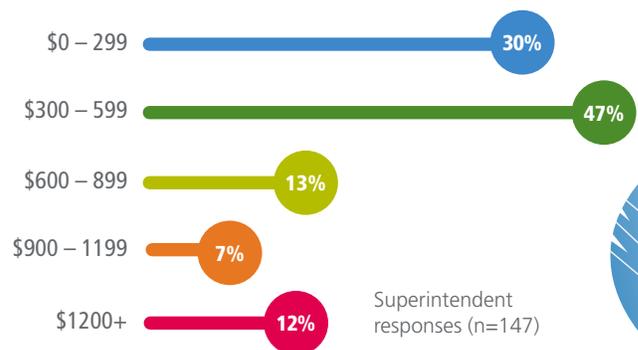
**Personal protective equipment and essential protective gear**

Responding to calls from CSBA, the Education Coalition and others for the state to use its purchasing power — rather than relying on LEAs to purchase equipment — [the state announced](#) that it has procured the following supplies to distribute to schools and child care centers:

- ▶ More than 47,000 no-touch thermometers for every school and child care facility
- ▶ Face shields for every teacher and child care provider (approximately 2.4 million)
- ▶ Over 14 million cloth face coverings for staff and students



**Estimated additional per-ADA costs during distance learning from March through end of school year**



- ▶ Over 16 million disposable masks
- ▶ 123,000 N95 masks for school-based health professionals, including those interacting with symptomatic students
- ▶ 143,000 gallons of hand sanitizer

The distribution of these supplies will be through the California Department of General Services and the Office of Emergency Services, with the DGS also creating a procurement process for schools and child care centers to access on an ongoing basis.

This development is important for LEAs, which should not have to compete against one another for the supplies they need to open campuses safely. Given ongoing shortages, competition could lead to some schools being unable to reopen primarily because they did not have the resources to do so safely.

**Questions and considerations for board members:**

- ▶ What do we need to budget for to support distance learning (short- or long-term, depending on public health guidance)?
- ▶ What needs to be included in our budget to prepare for reopening campuses once it becomes safer to do so?
- ▶ How are we working as a governance team to advocate for the school funding needed to reopen schools? (Please see [CSBA's Advocacy Toolkit](#) for resources.)
- ▶ How are we communicating to stakeholders about the financial implications of our COVID-19 response? Are there ways we can support their advocacy as community members?
- ▶ Are we prepared to manage cash flow issues created by deferred payments from the state?

**A joint analysis** by the Association of School Business Officials International and the School Superintendents Association estimates that the expenses associated with following the CDC health and safety guidance for schools would require an additional \$490 per student. While only one estimate, it highlights the urgency for additional state and federal funding needed if students and staff are to return to campus before an effective vaccine becomes available or community spread is contained.



**LCAP AND LCFF FOR 2020–21**

The Governor's [executive order](#), issued on April 23, extended the deadline for the 2020–21 Local Control and Accountability Plan to Dec. 15, 2020, to provide LEAs more time to address pressing COVID-19 needs. On July 1, 2020, LEAs will submit an update of COVID-19 related impacts on students and plans to address those impacts instead of submitting a three-year LCAP. This will be followed by an abbreviated annual 2020–21 planning document in December. The report must include a description of how the LEA is meeting the needs of English learners, foster youth and low-income youth during school closures. The California Department of Education issued a [template](#) for LEAs to use for their written report, which must be adopted by governing boards at the same time as their 2020–21 budgets.

To help guide LEA officials through this new timeline and format, the CDE has posted [frequently asked questions and answers](#).

Members have asked if there will be any flexibility in the use of LCFF funds. The guidelines regarding supplemental and concentration grant funds remain unchanged.



## Principle 3: Adaptable, High-Quality Teaching and Learning

LEAs should prepare to provide high-quality teaching and learning that is adaptable to local needs and conditions



### The importance of educational quality

As noted in CSBA's Policy Pillars, "School boards and districts must provide all students high-quality teaching." Yet, the instruction students received this spring was not representative of what distance learning could be under normal conditions. It was distance learning *during a global pandemic and economic crisis*, designed and implemented with little time to prepare staff, students and their families.

This summer, however, LEAs have time to draw on the many resources available to them as they plan for a multitude of scenarios. The expectations our students and their families will have for the 2020–21 school year will be significantly higher than they were in the spring.

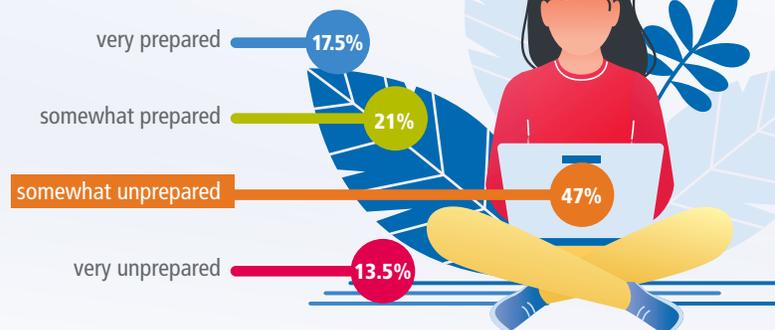
### Professional development

Professional development will be critical in planning for the 2020–21 academic year, as most teachers received limited, if any, education on how to provide distance or blended learning during this last school year or during their initial credential preparation programs.

Even LEAs with high hopes for reopening campuses with in-person instruction at the start of the school year should



Overall, how prepared was your LEA for the transition to distance learning?"



Board member responses (n=152)

consider investing in professional learning opportunities to deepen staff understanding of blended learning and distance learning. These could be related to best practices associated with LEA-approved digital platforms and licenses, though many educators could also benefit from professional development that supports effective digital pedagogy. Teaching through a blended model, using both online and in-person instruction, is a well-developed area of

educational technology, but California's schools have never had to implement it at scale.

In a recent CSBA survey of superintendents, about half of responding LEAs are planning summer professional development in online or blended learning, and another third are considering it.

### Students, families and staff seek clarity

Part of the instructional planning process must include stakeholder engagement. Many LEAs have already surveyed families about their distance learning needs and experiences, as well as the conditions under which they would feel comfortable sending their children back to in-person instruction. Recent surveys indicate that many families will need options for distance learning, either due to pre-existing health conditions or to concerns about the risk of infection prior to the release of a vaccine. Other parents and families eagerly anticipate a return to campus as soon as possible. To prepare for these varying needs, CSBA recommends that LEAs work with families to identify their preferences.

**“95 percent of LEAs have surveyed or will soon survey their families about their preferences for how their children’s schools will resume instruction.”**

Timing these decisions will prove challenging, as CDC and state health and safety guidance were only recently released, and the state budget has not been finalized as of this framework's development. Yet LEAs need to begin planning for the upcoming school year, and families and staff are asking for clarity so that they can plan as well. Extensive delays may lead to families looking for answers in other places, including virtual charter schools or homeschooling, and unclear expectations could factor into staff attrition.

Additionally, LEAs should develop a communication plan that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of students, parents or guardians, and staff in instructional activities. News reports and polls indicate that many parents felt as if they were responsible for instruction during the emergency distance learning model, which created additional stress during an already challenging period.

### Addressing uneven educational quality due to COVID-related disruptions

When the 2020–21 academic year begins, students will have had varying levels of engagement with distance learning, disparities in the resources available to them, and perhaps lost instructional time due to the transition period many schools experienced at the outset of campus closures. A recent survey of our Delegates and board presidents indicates that approximately six in 10 LEAs are considering summer learning options to address potential learning loss, though budget concerns might limit the number of spaces offered.

Schools should have a plan to identify potential gaps in content knowledge so educators can provide the instruction needed. One option is the use of diagnostic assessments, which are designed to assess student understanding of standards-based content so that educators can pinpoint strategies to the needs of their students. This will be especially important in subject areas that build upon prior content mastery (e.g., early-grade reading, courses with prerequisites). LEAs should also prepare to assess English language development and, for students with disabilities, progress toward their Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs).

Additional considerations will, to a large degree, depend on state and local public health recommendations and requirements, many of which might evolve as conditions within California and its communities change. For governance teams, there are many issues worth exploring as guidance is released. Among them are instruction for lab-based courses, career and technical education, project-based learning, music, athletics and physical education. Some of the guidance listed within Appendix B discusses these issues in greater depth, and CSBA is continuing to advocate for public health guidance to be as clear as possible.

When considering uneven academic development due to the disruptions earlier this year, board members and educators should approach the work with an asset-based perspective. Students, despite our best efforts, lost educational opportunities this spring. When they return to school, our role as educators is to meet them where they are, providing the instructional supports that will help them thrive academically.

In addition to diagnostic assessments, LEAs should develop options for student assessment if schools need to operate using a full-time distance learning or a blended approach. Among other considerations, educators should examine how conditions in the home, including students' access to resources such as digital devices and Wi-Fi, may impact engagement and performance. This also includes developing student grading policies. Students, families and educators will likely expect different policies than ones adopted by LEAs in the spring.

## Planning for rapid transitions

The rapid switch to distance learning this spring demonstrated the need for districts and COEs to be flexible and responsive to local conditions. Each LEA will decide how and when it will reopen campuses for students and staff, as well as its start date for instruction.

If a campus reopens, the LEA needs a plan for shifting rapidly into distance learning if local public health conditions result in the need to close for either short or extended periods, at the classroom, school or LEA level.

### *Questions and considerations for board members:*

- ▶ How is our LEA engaging with staff, students and families about expectations and preferences for resuming instruction in the 2020–21 academic year?
- ▶ What feedback have we received about our LEA's ability to provide meaningful, high-quality instruction in a distance learning model? How can we apply those lessons to planning for the 2020–21 academic year?
- ▶ What have our educators shared about the supports they need to feel effective while teaching in an online or blended learning model?
- ▶ What did we learn from the unexpected transition to distance learning this spring? Once we reopen campuses in some capacity, does our plan for rapidly transitioning back to distance learning apply these lessons?
- ▶ Should we consider identifying core standards to prioritize if our educational programs are disrupted again?
- ▶ If our LEA is considering using educators at a higher risk for severe infection to conduct distance learning, what supports will we provide them to facilitate their instructional effectiveness?
- ▶ What new resources for instruction are offered through our county office of education?





## Principle 4: Equitable Supports for All Students

*Plans for the new school year should ensure that all students have access to the supports they need*



### Integrate equity throughout plans

Recent campus closures highlighted how integral schools are in supporting the health, learning and well-being of California's students. The education community responded to the unprecedented challenges of this crisis by organizing resources and adjusting to distance learning with dedication and creativity, but educators and policymakers have also noted that the pandemic exacerbated long-standing health, economic and educational disparities. LEAs must plan to ensure all students have access to the supports they need, whether schools continue full-time distance learning, operate a blended learning approach, or bring all students and teachers back to campus five days a week.

Central to this principle is the understanding that “equity” and “equality” are not the same thing. Some students require additional supports to be able to access educational opportunities. In California, some of the students identified as needing extra support are low-income students, students with disabilities, homeless students, English learners and foster children and youth. Additionally, race and ethnicity are linked to historical structures that impact gaps in educational opportunities issues to this day, and many districts are working to address these inequities in their schools.

When planning for the 2020–21 academic year, the board member role includes using an equity lens in decision-making. Sometimes this may prove challenging politically. If true

equity requires providing additional resources to specific student groups, other stakeholders might perceive the decision as unfair. Your communication strategies, therefore, should include clear, data-informed explanations of how these decisions are equitable.

### CSBA EQUITY STATEMENT

CSBA recognizes that educational excellence requires a commitment to equity. California students bring a wide range of assets, abilities, backgrounds and needs to their educational experience. Schools have an obligation to provide all students with the access and opportunities necessary for college, career and life success. This requires school leaders to address practices, policies and barriers that perpetuate inequities which lead to opportunity and achievement gaps. Effective school boards are equity-driven, making intentional governance decisions that combat institutional discrimination and bias (both explicit and implicit) and eliminate disparities in educational outcomes based on socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or family background.

*Adopted September 2019*

## Digital divide

For many of California's districts, the digital divide has been the greatest barrier to ensuring all students have access to instruction during distance learning. The stark statistics represent a massive lift for our schools, and to meet it, many LEAs have invested heavily in supporting students by providing devices, mobile hotspots and Wi-Fi access. Yet more work is needed, particularly if we are to be prepared for episodes of short- or long-term distance learning in the coming year. In addition to devices, students and families with previously limited technological access or experience may need further support (in some cases, in conjunction with translation services).

## Student groups with additional support needs

*Resuming instruction will require careful planning to ensure LEAs provide full access to the curriculum for all students. Among those considerations are:*

- ▶ Students with disabilities, including those with IEPs and 504 plans
- ▶ Students in low-income households
- ▶ English learners
- ▶ Homeless children and youth
- ▶ Foster children and youth

A wide range of resources have been created since school closures began, and more will continue to be developed in the months ahead. Several of these can be found in Appendix B. As a board member, consideration must be given to ensuring that the needs of vulnerable students are included in all reopening plans, while also looking at the unintended consequences of new policies and procedures.

## Food services

Due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and mitigation efforts such as shelter-in-place, many families may need to rely on the free- or reduced-price meals for the first time. Additionally, LEAs will need to consider options for meal distribution, consistent with state and federal regulations, based on proposed scheduling and infection prevention protocols. Appendix B includes several health and safety guidance documents that outline considerations for meal distribution, including interim guidance from the CDC, guidance from the CDPH and the CDE. Specific recommendations may also be found in reopening documents issued by county offices of education.

## Additional health and safety considerations

In addition to the risk of infection, the novel coronavirus has contributed to conditions that can negatively impact the mental health of students and staff alike. In a recent [letter](#) to the Governor, the California Association of School Counselors reported the urgent need for additional mental health supports. In a survey of 650 youth, 22 percent reported that they were receiving mental health services prior to the pandemic. An additional 32 percent, who had not previously been receiving mental health services, indicated they believe they now require help for their mental health.

Given the impact students' mental health can have on their ability to learn, LEAs should consider how to address the increased need for supports and services, across a variety of delivery models. Additionally, LEAs might consider what supports are available to employees, as certificated and classified staff are also likely to be impacted by the stressors related to the pandemic and campus closures.

### *Questions and considerations for board members:*

- ▶ Are we allowing returning students to continue using LEA-owned devices through the summer? Can we continue to support students' internet access in any capacity?
- ▶ What additional technology needs (e.g., devices, tech support, internet access, hotspots) are needed to ensure all students have access to high-quality distance learning?
- ▶ Are we providing summer learning opportunities for our students to reduce the risk of learning loss? Have we discussed partnerships with external groups and agencies that can provide continued support to students?
- ▶ How are special education teachers and administrators planning to provide services in the 2020–21 academic year if distance or blended learning is necessary? How are we planning to address remediation and/or compensatory education services as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?
- ▶ What options are available for extended learning time in the 2020–21 academic year?
- ▶ Are there groups of students whose educational needs might require more in-person instruction (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners)? Would we be able to create a schedule that brings those students on campus more often as part of a staggered schedule?
- ▶ Are we developing a plan for addressing the mental health challenges associated with anxiety about the pandemic, extended social isolation, and other stressors students and staff might be experiencing during school closures? What resources are available to help support them, and which service delivery platforms should we have in place?



## Principle 5: Flexibility

*Schools must have flexibility to provide for both the safety of students and staff and continuity of learning*



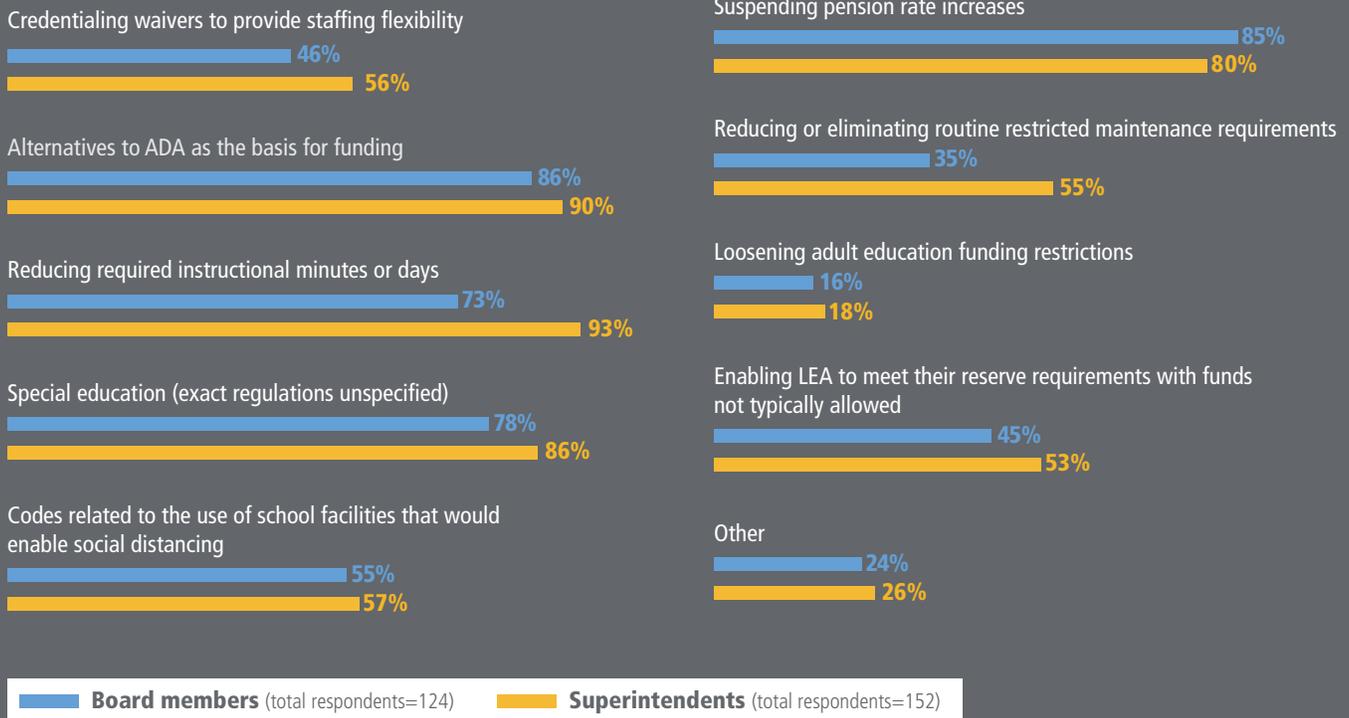
### Changing circumstances, changing needs

Unprecedented times require innovative responses. When schools suddenly closed this March, the state and federal government provided flexibility in many areas through executive orders, waivers and other measures. However, many of these measures are scheduled to expire on July 1, 2020. Because many of the actions taken by the state to assist with school closures were advisory, many of the terms in existing collective bargaining agreements, such as employee leaves, differential/hazard pay, work hours and the instructional day, were renegotiated with local labor associations. It is anticipated that in response to upcoming guidance released by the state about the reopening of schools, conditions of employment such as class sizes, sanitization measures, PPE and employee evaluations will be addressed in the next round of negotiations.

*Members have asked* whether the August layoff window will be available in 2020. Currently there are no bills addressing the August layoff window in the Legislature, but there is likely to be a push by labor organizations to nullify this section for the coming fiscal year.

The proposed scenarios for resuming school will require regulatory relief. CSBA surveyed Delegates, board presidents and superintendents to identify areas in which flexibility is needed.

### Percent of Board Members and Superintendents Who Recommend Flexibility in Federal Law or Regulations (n=276)



For board members and superintendents that replied “other,” their recommendations included items such as:

- ▶ Granting traditional public schools the same flexibility that is offered to online charters
- ▶ Suspending testing and instructional minutes requirements for physical education
- ▶ Lifting the requirement to show three years of positive budgets

#### Questions and considerations for board members:

- ▶ How are staff tracking the laws, regulations and executive orders that might affect the feasibility of plans to resume instruction?
- ▶ What are those flexibilities and are they state, federal or locally authorized?
- ▶ How can our governing board advocate for the flexibility we need to reopen schools?

**Many districts** have relied on federal waivers to provide nutrition services to families during spring school closures. Economic conditions currently suggest families will continue to need free- or reduced-price meals during the pandemic, particularly given current unemployment figures.

# Appendix A:

## Reopening work group:

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEYS

Because CSBA recognizes that our members and their LEAs require support as they consider resuming schools in the 2020–21 academic year, including reopening campuses, an internal work group was convened. The group, composed of staff from across the association, was created to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response to our members' needs.

As part of CSBA's member engagement, staff in the internal working group organized a series of conversations about members' experiences with distance learning during campus closures and their needs and concerns about resuming instruction in the 2020–21 academic year. CSBA engagement is ongoing, but the following represents the conversations held in April and May 2020:

- ▶ Twenty-nine meetings with Delegates, as well as state legislators, organized by CSBA's Public Affairs and Community Engagement Representatives (PACERS)
- ▶ Reconvening of the former Professional Learning Networks for Small Districts and for Medium/Large Districts
- ▶ Reconvening of CSBA's Equity Network cohorts I and II
- ▶ Special meeting of CSBA's Legislative Committee
- ▶ Optional virtual breakout discussions for Delegates
- ▶ Special meeting of CSBA's Superintendents Advisory Council

The internal working group also held listening sessions with external labor and parent groups, including the California Teachers Association, the California Federation of Teachers and the California PTA. The information from these discussions, combined with survey data, is being used to inform CSBA advocacy, resources, and member supports.

Information from these listening sessions and surveys is being used in a variety of ways, particularly in advocacy on behalf of our members, which you have seen throughout the report.

**Policy Services:** In addition to a sample [Resolution on Grading During Emergency School Closures](#) and sample policies on [Distance Learning](#) and [Working Remotely](#) made available to all members, CSBA has developed a comprehensive COVID-19 sample reopening schools policy (June 2020) for subscribers to CSBA GAMUT Policy. Content includes sample policies on attendance, sanitized facilities, campus practices to reduce infection risks, teaching and learning issues, special education and other equity issues. Additional guidance will be forthcoming and will address the needs identified by our members.

**Legal:** Discussions with partner organizations and responses from CSBA's members have provided CSBA with a better understanding of the specific needs of our members related to legal guidance, model board policies, and laws and regulations from which member LEAs may need waivers or other flexibilities. These conversations also highlighted existing concerns about potential liability and litigation while educating students during the pandemic, both in person and through distance learning. In addition, discussions have been helpful in illustrating for CSBA leaders the complexities of engaging in collective bargaining during COVID-19 closures.

**Policy and Programs:** Stakeholder conversations provided extensive insights into the types of support needed to inform decisions about resuming instruction in the 2020–21 academic year, including examples of best practices. The Policy and Programs department is compiling information based on member feedback for distribution this summer and fall.

**Association Education:** CSBA will offer sessions related to LEAs' COVID-19 response at our Annual Education Conference, including best practices for supporting students and educators during the pandemic.

# Appendix B:

## Resources

CSBA has developed an extensive, curated collection of resources for our members, available on our dedicated COVID-19 page ([www.csba.org/coronavirus](http://www.csba.org/coronavirus)). For your convenience, we have selected just a few of the resources that governance teams might find relevant as this year comes to a close and you look toward resuming school in the 2020–21 academic year.

### GOVERNANCE:

From the CSBA Blog: [Brown Act waivers during COVID-19](#)

CSBA Webinar: Governance and Guidance in the Age of COVID-19

[Watch the recording](#) | [View the slides](#)

CSBA Webinar: Open Board Meetings in a World of School Closures

[Watch the recording](#) | [View the slides](#)

CSBA sample policy on reopening schools (available to [GAMUT Policy](#) subscribers)

### PRINCIPLE 1: HEALTH AND SAFETY

[Interim Guidance for Resuming School and Day Camps](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Schools Reopening Decision Tool](#) from the CDC

[CDPH Guidance for Schools](#)

[Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools](#) by the California Department of Education

### PRINCIPLE 2: FUNDING AND RESOURCES

[CSBA funding advocacy toolkit](#) — Schools need more funding to reopen safely! Toolkit includes sample letters, call scripts, social media posts, resolutions and a one-click link to email your representatives.

### PRINCIPLE 3: ADAPTABLE, HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

[COVID-19 Technical Assistance Distance Learning Resources](#), developed by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence

[School Reopening Group: Final Report](#), a planning document prepared by the Association of California School Administrators

[Distance Learning Instructional Resources by Content Area](#), developed by the San Diego County Office of Education

[Resources for Online Learning During School Closures](#), from NEA Today (a publication of the National Education Association)

[Remote Learning with Khan Academy During School Closures](#)

[Providing Services to English Learners During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#), a fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Education (published May 20, 2020)

[Continuity of Learning Playbooks](#), a resource for distance and hybrid learning models developed by the CCEE

### PRINCIPLE 4: EQUITABLE SUPPORTS FOR ALL STUDENTS

CSBA Webinar: Supporting Student Well-Being from Afar  
[Watch the recording](#) | [View the slides](#)

CSBA Webinar: Going the Distance to Bridge the Digital Divide

[Watch the recording](#) | [View the slides](#)

CSBA Webinar: Special Education in Extraordinary Times  
[Watch the recording](#) | [View the slides](#)

[Supporting student mental health during COVID-19 campus closures](#): Sample questions for board members from CSBA

[Equity and Continuity of Learning: Guidance and Tools for Unprecedented Times](#), published by the CCEE

[Help for Students in Crisis](#), a resource from the CDE

From the CSBA Blog: [COVID-19 webinar explores legal, policy and instructional aspects of special education](#)

[Connected Nation: Resources and Solutions to Providing Connectivity](#)

[Special education guidance](#) from the CDE

[Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities](#)



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