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CSBA emphasis on broadband access begins to bear fruit

On Dec. 7, 2020, the California Legislature inaugurated its new session and announced several priorities, including housing, policing reform and broadband access. We are encouraged that the Legislature is making broadband access a priority. CSBA's consistent advocacy for universal broadband since the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic helped elevate this issue and put it front and center before the Legislature. It also reflects our ongoing commitment to close the digital divide.

Whether in discussions with legislators, meetings with cable and telecommunications companies, or scores of media appearances calling for immediate action from both the private and public sector, CSBA has carried the banner for universal broadband. As CEO & Executive Director Vernon M. Billy said in an [April budget letter to Gov. Newsom](#), and again in an [op-ed for CalMatters](#), "The financial interests of telecoms and cable companies should not be able to hold the education of students hostage or force governing boards to 'MacGyver' internet access for their students. California has a moral, legal and economic interest in ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education. The lack of broadband access undermines the state's ability to achieve this goal and threatens its civic well-being and economic prosperity."

That conviction drove CSBA's efforts to get a broadband bond on the 2020 ballot, an initiative we are revisiting this year along with several other options for expanding access. In Gov. Newsom's 2021 budget, he should set aside enough money from general fund revenues to buy internet access in bulk — at a steep volume discount offered by the internet service providers — for every low-income household for a period of two years. This will provide temporary relief for the one in five California students without access to the internet, students who are effectively being denied access to an education. At the same time, the Governor should announce a plan to build out California's broadband network statewide by 2026, both by upgrading outdated networks in underserved communities and by extending the network to unserved areas in rural and remote parts of the state.

Politico reported that, in his address to members, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-

Lakewood), stressed the urgency of expanding broadband access as a means of supporting students and facilitating remote work. We share this urgency and believe broadband access is critical for public education, for the labor market and for access to telehealth, online banking, and public services that improve quality of life and benefit all Californians. We will continue to hold our leaders' feet to the fire so students across California have access to the tools needed for a high-quality education and to prepare them for success in college, career and civic life.



California School Boards Association | 3251 Beacon Blvd., West Sacramento, CA 95691

Phone: (800) 266-3382 | Fax: (916) 371-3407

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