

Making Good on California's *Promise* to Our Students

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY IN THE 2020 BUDGET



Our community is showing up. We are in this *together*.



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// COVID RAPID RESPONSE
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Advancement Project California

COVID-19 Rapid Response



The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the nature of our everyday lives in unprecedented ways. In California, the pandemic is impacting student success, community representation, and the health of many. Advancement Project California, in partnership with leaders advancing equity, is releasing policy briefs, research, and letters to bring awareness to the racial inequities unearthed by this pandemic and offers concrete recommendations to the officials that represent Californians. California will overcome this crisis by ensuring education policy, budgeting, and democracy issues are informed by those impacted most by COVID-19 - low-income communities of color.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS POLICY BRIEF IS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT WITH:

A Black Education Network
ACLU of California
Advancement Project California
California Child Care Resource and Referral Network
California Partnership for the Future of Learning
CDTech
Children's Defense Fund- California
Community Coalition
District Innovation and Leadership Initiative for Early Education, Californians
Dedicated to Education Foundation
InnerCity Struggle
Partnership for Los Angeles Schools
The Education Trust—West
The Children's Partnership
Vickie Kropenske
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A California Budget that Reflects Our Values



In the past weeks, we have seen the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impact communities of color. In addition, we have witnessed nation-wide protests in reaction to police and vigilante killings shedding light on the double pandemic facing our Black brothers and sisters. The partners that worked on this policy brief are dedicated to advancing the civil rights movement and stand in solidarity under the rallying cry of Black Lives Matter.

California has the opportunity to innovate, learn from these difficult times, and direct a powerful response that recognizes how the pandemic and structural racism disproportionately impact the educational, economic, and health outcomes of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color. As we rebuild and create stronger, more resilient communities, our state leaders must embrace racial equity and ensure systemic infrastructure investments in our K-12 public education and early care and education (ECE) systems.

On May 14, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom released California's May Revision Budget Proposal to the Legislature. In his overview, Governor Newsom shared: "Numbers change but our values don't have to." Newsom highlighted, "There is a human being behind

every single number. A dream that is deferred in some way is denied."¹

In agreement and support of Governor Newsom, we stand ready to do all that is required to ensure that we uphold our values to ensure California does not just survive this moment but thrives. One key way will be to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all young learners and students. As we envision a better future for all Californians, we must reimagine how we fund our public education system and how these systems serve our children and families. To do this, our state budget must put equity at the center.

Governor Newsom and the Legislature have a critical role to play in ensuring that wise investments in K-12 education and ECE today will lead to a brighter future for all Californians tomorrow. To meet this moment, we urge the administration and the legislature to adopt the following recommendations in the State's 2020-21 final budget. We include highlights of practices that can serve as bright spots and offer concrete examples of how the recommendations may be implemented to ensure that California students, regardless of race, will have opportunities to thrive during these unprecedented times.

¹ KQED, "What Lawmakers Learned From the Last Budget Crisis," (May 19, 2020), <https://www.kqed.org/news/11819069/what-lawmakers-learned-from-the-last-budget-crisis>.



Recommendations

Budget Recommendation 1: Support and Endorse California Schools and Communities First Initiative to Mitigate Education Budget Cuts

With an estimated \$54 billion budget deficit, which will lead to deep cuts to our state’s K-12 education system, now more than ever the legislature needs to support a state-based solution instead of solely relying on the federal government. Schools and Communities First, which is a measure that recently qualified to be on the November 2020 ballot, will reclaim around \$4 billion annually for our schools, as well as \$8 billion for critical local services and higher education. These additional revenues are desperately needed to overcome the \$19 billion of projected cuts due to the impact of the COVID-19 induced recession.



Budget Recommendation 2: Hold Local Control Funding Formula Supplemental and Concentration Funds Constant for Students Most Impacted by the Pandemic

School closures have forced school leaders, students, and families to adapt to a new learning environment. School districts have introduced the concept of “distance learning” to facilitate students’ continued engagement during this global health crisis. The purpose of distance learning is to maximize a student’s well-being while minimizing disruption to their education.

Yet, it has exacerbated existing educational inequities that have long disadvantaged low-income families and families of color. Structural inequities such as income inequality and residential segregation have left many low-income families and students of color without the tools and resources necessary to successfully participate in distance learning.

The May Revision budget proposal of a 10% cut to Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funds will compound the inequities of distance learning. If adopted, this cut will have a devastating impact for many years – especially to our highest-need students. We must protect LCFF funds. Most critical during this pandemic, we must be vigilant about protecting funding that has been allocated to address the needs of our most underserved students.

Under LCFF, local education agencies receive three types of funding: (1) base funding, for services that support all students; (2) supplemental funding, for services directed towards unduplicated students; and (3) concentration funding, for districts that enroll more than 55% unduplicated students to use for services that support those student groups. We stand in solidarity with our LCFF Equity Coalition and recommend that we hold LCFF supplemental and concentration funds constant.

Bright Spot: Office of Equity

The San Bernardino Unified School District (SBUSD) has established an Office of Equity and Targeted Supports. This Office invests in Opportunity Gap specialists who work with educators at the beginning of the school year to build a positive relationship with students, connect with parents, and utilize ongoing data to support students and address needs as they come up. Additionally, the Office of Targeted Supports in SBUSD provides wrap-around supports through connections with local community-based organizations.



Budget Recommendation 3: Create an Office of Equity within the California Department of Education to Address the Needs of Students Hardest Hit by the Pandemic

The emergency shutdown of schools and immediate shift to distance learning have resulted in high-need students disappearing even further into the margins. The time is now to ensure the systemic supports to address the needs of historically disadvantaged students.

The California Department of Education (CDE) has demonstrated tremendous leadership in looking at data around the equity need of students. We recommend continued support for increased capacity to address equity needs by creating the Office of Equity within the CDE and allocating funding for the Office to partner with districts that are able to establish their own local “office of equity.” Through this governance structure, the CDE can establish clear guidelines for accountability and transparency to ensure equity. This should prioritize and ensure systemic supports for low-income students of color, including Black students, Indigenous students, English learners, and dual language learners, alongside youth in the foster care system and students with disabilities. We recommend the following governance structure:

- track and analyze student academic outcomes by incorporating a comprehensive data system to provide early academic intervention;
- provide guidance on curriculum, through standards that supplement those of the State Board of Education and emphasize the importance of race, culture, and language as essential elements to quality education; and
- ensure accountability by establishing a learning collaborative that supports districts and local education agencies in developing partnerships with local community-based organizations that have the trust, connection, and history of engaging with students and families of color.



Bright Spot: Equity Need Index to Guide Investments to High and Highest Need Schools

After the passage of the LCFF, the Equity Alliance for LA's Kids was established by the Community Coalition, InnerCity Struggle, and Advancement Project California to ensure these new dollars reached high- and highest-need schools to improve student academic outcomes. The Equity Alliance for LA's Kids worked with school and district leaders, families, and students to pass the "Equity is Justice" resolution, introduced by then-board President Monica Garcia. The resolution passed unanimously and the Board adopted the Student Equity Need Index (SENI) to allocate over \$290 million to high and highest-need schools in Los Angeles Unified School District.

SENI is an equity-based formula that is a research-based ranking of schools. SENI determines how to distribute additional funding to schools, based on target student populations specifically highlighted in the LCFF—foster youth, English Language Learners, and low-income students—and takes into account neighborhood conditions and school climate that negatively impact a student's academic success. The SENI include indicators like asthma rates and injuries from gun violence in neighborhoods near its campuses, and incoming student-level data and test scores to decide which district schools are most in need of extra funding. The SENI allocates approximately \$260 million every year for the high- and highest-need schools in LAUSD.

Budget Recommendation 4: Utilize an Equity-Based Formula to Allocate Funds to Early Learners and K-12 Students Most Impacted by the Pandemic

Historic under-investment and the inequitable distribution of resources have created gaps in access to quality early learning and K-12 education opportunities. To address the needs of early learners and K-12 students, and to ensure that this pandemic does not further exacerbate inequities, we recommend creating and adopting an equity-based funding mechanism that directs additional dollars to highest-need communities. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has adopted the Student Equity Need Index, a funding mechanism that allocates additional dollars to high- and highest-need schools.

An equity need index offers a funding distribution mechanism to allocate dollars more equitably and effectively. The state may adopt an index similar to the Student Equity Need Index in Los Angeles Unified to ensure additional funding is reaching highest-need schools. This index is a research-based ranking of communities facing the greatest challenges and offers a solution to repair historic under-investments.

We recommend using an equity need index to allocate additional resources for a variety of evidence-based approaches. There are endless possibilities and innovative ways to apply a statewide equity index. Possibilities include:

- investing in the community school model;
- providing mental health, trauma-informed, culturally-based healing, and relationship-centered services and practices by investing in counselors and holistic wellness centers;
- offering students and parents remote access (on-line or by phone) to school nurses, social workers, and school psychologists;
- data-informed collaboratives of educators to ensure academic rigor for students; and
- investments in early care and education programs that are responsive to the linguistic and cultural assets in communities (e.g. dual language programs).

Budget Recommendation 5: Engage Parents and Students in Distance Learning Best Practices

Community engagement is key to ensuring that distance learning happens in the most culturally responsive and effective way. California’s budget should include funding for districts to examine the effectiveness of distance learning. To implement this, districts may create committees that center the voices of parents from communities most impacted by the pandemic. These committees can, in turn, play an essential role in ensuring that schools are reconnecting with disengaged students and may offer local community solutions for thresholds for engagement and learning for all students – especially in higher need communities.

Budget Recommendation 6: Create Whole Family Wellness Hubs to Provide Children and Families a Holistic Approach to Education, Health, and Wellness in Areas of Highest Need

The pandemic has applied considerable pressure to California’s health and wellness systems, with systems scrambling to serve COVID-19 affected patients and expand access to testing. Further, the pandemic has delayed indefinitely preventative and maintenance health and wellness. During a child’s earliest years, early intervention and regular health and dental wellness checks are foundational to long-term healthy well-being and intertwined with educational success. Before COVID-19, California’s youngest Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children and their families disproportionately carried the burden of the inequities of California’s health care system. Latinx children born outside of the US are five times more likely to lack health coverage than their US-born Latinx peers; Indigenous children are nearly four times more likely to lack health coverage than white children. Inequities in the health care system also affect children even before they are born. Black children are nearly twice as likely to be born underweight as white children. As California’s leaders create a budget that repairs the harm of COVID-19 and pre-existing disparities, we recommend taking a holistic wellness approach centered on equity. We recommend creating

Bright Spot: Whole Family Wellness Hubs

Hope Street Margolis Family Center is a nationally recognized model of providing integrated healthcare within the community. Since 1992, Hope Street has provided Los Angeles families access to early education, family literacy services, and family support services including home visiting. Along with ECE programs, Hope Street provides families with access to youth programs that offer educational support, academic enrichment, recreational opportunities, family literacy programming, school readiness programming, a continuation school, and family strengthening and preservation services. Hope Street also provides community wellness services including recreation and fitness, free health screenings, health workshops, and welcome baby home visitation services. Through a partnership with the County Department of Mental Health, Hope Street offers families access to therapy, child psychiatric evaluation, and psychological assessments. Hope Street has demonstrated an impact in supporting cognitive development for early learners, building pathways to employment for families, and supporting the health and wellness of children. Hope Street preschoolers’ oral language post-test gains tripled the federal expectation. 86% of families showed greater skills in supporting their child’s learning and interactive literacy activities. 100% of children under the age of five received their comprehensive wellness exam.

Whole Family Wellness Hubs in areas of highest need, as identified by an equity-based funding mechanism.

Whole Family Wellness Hubs are place-based community-driven centers that provide integrated and coordinated services across health, mental health, youth services, child welfare, ECE including dual language programs, home visiting, and education for both children and families. Whole Family Wellness Hubs focus on the identification of upstream factors and social determinants of health to ensure the health and wellness

of all. Whole Family Wellness Hubs are evidence-based models of success using a two-generation approach that acknowledges that supporting the healthy development of young children also requires supporting their caregiver’s ability to provide adequate care. Whole Family Wellness Hubs provide wrap-around services to children and families through structured partnerships between community entities and service providers that are tailored to the unique contours of each community, as determined by a community assessment. It is critical to develop a support infrastructure where families can easily access a suite of high-quality holistic services that meets the needs of their family.

Budget Recommendation 7: Increase Access to WiFi and Technology for Low-Income Communities and Communities of Color to Address the Digital Divide Revealed by the Pandemic

During the past months as school districts and organizations have moved quickly to support students and families in the wake of COVID-19, many technology and internet companies scrambled to offer “free” internet and Wi-Fi services for students and families in low-income communities. We applaud these efforts.

At the same time, we need to grow and monitor these efforts to ensure they meet the needs of students and families who face the greatest and most urgent barriers to technology access and distance learning. We urge the state to address the digital divide by:

- holding technology companies accountable for ensuring that public relations announcements match up with actual services;
- prioritizing access for the communities with the greatest unmet need first;
- supporting schools’ technology and safety needs;
- simplifying processes for families to access internet offers; and
- making federal funds available for equipping students with home internet access.

Budget Recommendation 8: Professional Development to Redress Historic Inequities and Address Learning Loss Due to the Pandemic

To ensure equity during distance learning and as schools re-open, educators need professional development and peer-to-peer learning to better support students. The COVID-19 pandemic compounds usual summer learning loss that leads to disparate levels of readiness for students from low-income communities of color after they graduate. Strong teacher-student relationships will be even more critical for students to catch up, and educators will need to be prepared to provide targeted supports to historically underserved populations to minimize learning loss.

To address the needs of all students, especially those who have had significant challenges during distance learning, we recommend a targeted fund for educators to receive professional development opportunities that include racial empathy and cultural competency, socio-emotional learning, student engagement, academic curriculum and rigor for all students, and supports specific to dual-language programs.



Conclusion



This policy brief presents a few strategic interventions in the State budget that we believe will help to center equity in our K-12 and ECE systems. Understanding this is a difficult budget year, the investments we propose do not add up to a lot of money, but will have a tremendous impact.

Right now, we are confronting many challenges and we must, of course, address and respond to those challenges. The wisest course of action is to also think

strategically about how our actions today will reverberate into the future. The strategic investments we propose will build a foundation for healthy, sustainable, and successful educational outcomes for all our students, but especially for our most vulnerable.

To discuss this paper, its recommendations, or to get full references, please contact us at education@advanceproj.org.



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Advancement Project California is a multi-racial, multi-generational racial justice organization with expertise in research, advocacy, and policy. We work with partners and communities to expand educational opportunities for California's children; create healthy and safe neighborhoods; ensure communities of color have a voice in our democracy; strengthen movement-building; and shift public investments toward programs that benefit all Californians—not just the privileged few.



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