

CSBA Counties Conference

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

details subject to change

Friday, Sept. 25 | Conference Program

12:30–4:30 p.m.	Registration *California Ballroom doors open at 1 p.m.	Outer Foyer, Lobby Level
1:30–1:45 p.m.	Opening Remarks <i>Speakers: Dr. Debra Schade, President, CSBA; Vernon M. Billy, CEO and Executive Director, CSBA; and Mike Walsh, Director, County Board Member Services, CSBA</i>	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
1:45–2:45 p.m.	Trends, Challenges, and Innovative Practices in Special Education Special education continues to evolve as county offices navigate changing legislation, legal requirements, fiscal realities, and increasing student needs. Join a panel featuring experts in legislative policy, legal guidance, and county office practitioners with deep experience in SELPA leadership and differentiated assistance as they explore current trends, emerging challenges, and promising practices from across California. Participants will gain practical insights, a broader understanding of the statewide landscape, and ideas they can bring back to support governance, oversight, and student success. <i>Speakers: Marissa Vismara, Legislative Advocate, Governmental Relations, CSBA; Matthew Juhl-Darlington, Attorney at Law, Dannis Woliver Kelley; Damali Thomas, Executive SELPA Director, Los Angeles COE; and Jovan Jacobs, Director III, Division of Special Education, Los Angeles COE</i>	
2:45–3 p.m.	Break	
3–3:30 p.m.	Micro-training: CSBA Policy Toolkit Strong governance begins with strong policy. This interactive micro-training will introduce the CSBA Policy Toolkit and demonstrate how trustees can use its resources to strengthen policy literacy, engage community stakeholders, and develop effective, equitable policies that support student success. Participants will leave with practical strategies for making policy development a more informed and impactful part of board governance. <i>Speakers: Mary Briggs, Senior Director, Research and Education Policy Development, CSBA; and Tezeta Stewart, Senior Director, Policy and Governance Technology Services, CSBA</i>	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
3:30–3:45 p.m.	Micro-training: Legislative Committee Spotlight: Representing County Voices The CSBA Legislative Committee plays a critical role in shaping the Association's advocacy priorities and ensuring county perspectives are represented in the legislative process. Whether you have considered serving on the committee or simply want to better understand its work, this session will provide an inside look at how the committee operates, why county representation matters, and how trustees can become more engaged in advancing policies that support students and county offices of education. <i>Speaker: Annette Lewis, Region 14 Director, Contra Costa COE</i>	



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3:45–5 p.m.	Pure Politics Panel Attendees will explore how politics, funding, and leadership shifts are shaping California's K–12 education landscape, with presenters examining the key political, economic, and legislative forces influencing education policy and governance in the year ahead. <i>Speakers: Patrick O'Donnell, Chief Government Relations, CSBA; Kevin Gordon, President and Partner, Capitol Advisors Group; Jack O'Connell, Partner, Capitol Advisors Group; Lee Angela Reid, Partner, Capitol Advisors Group; and Barrett Snider, Partner, Capitol Advisors Group</i>	
5–6 p.m.	Mix, Mingle & Win! Welcome Reception Attend for a chance to win a county basket!	<i>Sinder Patio, Lobby Level</i>
6–7:30 p.m.	No Scheduled Program Time to enjoy a local restaurant for dinner, network, or take in the sights of Marina del Rey!	
7:30–9 p.m.	Movie Night Featuring <i>Possible Selves</i> Join us for a screening of Possible Selves, an award-winning feature-length documentary by filmmaker Shaun Kadlec. The film follows two foster youth, Alex and Mia, as they navigate high school and pursue higher education in partnership with First Star, a nonprofit supporting foster youth on the path to college. <i>Hosted by: Amy Christianson, Chief, Member Services, CSBA; and Mike Walsh, Director, County Board Member Services, CSBA</i>	<i>California Ballroom, Lobby Level</i>

Saturday, Sept. 26 | Conference Program

7:45 a.m.–4:30 p.m.	Registration *California Ballroom doors open at 7:45 a.m.	Outer Foyer, Lobby Level
7:45–8:45 a.m.	Networking Breakfast Enjoy the breakfast buffet open to all registered conference attendees.	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
8:45–9:15 a.m.	Micro-training: Science of Reading Get up to date on key terms, recent legislation, and the literacy landscape in California. Session attendees will learn about policy and governance recommendations for improving literacy and have access to new resources to support their governance responsibilities. <i>Speakers: Angela Asch, Principal Research Manager, Research and Education Policy Development, CSBA; and George Ellis, Director of the California Reading & Literature Project, UC Berkeley</i>	
9:15–9:25 a.m.	Break	
Breakout Sessions (Choose one) 9:25–10:30 a.m.	AI Can Answer: But Who Is Listening? <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> Chatbots are changing how students seek support but at what cost? Hear from experts in counseling and education on why human interaction remains essential and how schools can develop policies to protect students. New California Youth and Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) funding also makes expanding mental health staffing more attainable. This timely panel brings together experts in psychotherapy, school counseling and educational leadership to explore the real implications of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven student engagement.	Promenade, Lobby Level



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	<i>Presenters: Lee Angela Reid, Partner, Capitol Advisors Group; Loretta Whitson, Executive Director, California Association of School Counselors; Jeremiah Aja, Communications Director, Wellness Together; and Scott Kuykendahl, Superintendent, Stanislaus COE</i>	
	Competitive Edge: Transforming CTE with Pre-apprenticeship <i>Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access</i> Riverside COE's Competitive Edge initiative turns high school career technical education (CTE) pathways into paid, state-registered pre-apprenticeships, scaled across two counties through IEConnect, a collaboration between Riverside COE and the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. Many students—especially foster youth and other underserved groups—finish CTE but struggle to reach paid careers. Attendees will learn the governance, policy, funding and partnership strategies behind the initiative, review outcomes, and leave with a roadmap to replicate this debt-free pathway. <i>Presenters: Forest DeRenzo, Executive Director, Riverside COE; and Kermit Boyd, Teacher on Special Assignment, Riverside COE</i>	Palisades, Lower Level
	The Big Five: Trauma-Informed Safety Protocols for Schools <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> The Big Five is a countywide common-response protocol that uses shared language across schools to ensure clarity, coordination and an effective response from first responders. This multi-hazard framework includes standardized protocols, communication templates and practical tools for wildfire evacuation, student reunification, communication contingency planning and violent threat response. Grounded in a trauma-informed approach, The Big Five supports inclusive emergency planning and developmentally appropriate student preparedness. Participants will learn how districts and county offices can implement The Big Five to strengthen school safety and emergency readiness. <i>Presenter: Mason Henricks, Manager, School Safety and Risk Prevention, San Mateo COE</i>	Malibu/Santa Monica, Lower Level
10:30–10:45 a.m.	Break	
Breakout Sessions (Choose one) 10:45–11:50 a.m.	Workforce Housing as a Governance Strategy <i>Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access</i> California's education leaders face growing workforce shortages, housing affordability challenges, enrollment shifts and increasing pressure to maximize public resources. Workforce housing is emerging as a powerful strategy to recruit and retain employees, strengthen communities and support student success. This session explores how county boards and educational leaders can leverage educational assets, navigate legal and governance requirements, and structure partnerships that advance workforce housing goals. Drawing on California case studies and practitioner experience in real estate, public agency law and educational leadership, attendees will gain actionable strategies for transforming underutilized assets into long-term solutions. <i>Presenters: Al Grazioli, Vice President, Brailsford & Dunlavey; and Sarine Abrahamian, Managing Partner, Orbach Huff & Henderson LLP</i>	Promenade, Lobby Level
	Charter Authorizing: Balancing Board Discretion and Law <i>Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy</i> Charter school authorizing is often viewed as a statutory function, but effective decision-making requires boards to balance legal requirements, local history, community priorities and trustee judgment. This session highlights how the Alameda COE built board capacity through a charter authorizing study session that combined historical context, authorizing trends, legal analysis and practical decision-making tools. Presenters will share strategies, materials, lessons learned and implementation considerations. Participants will leave with actionable	Palisades, Lower Level

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	approaches to strengthen governance, improve transparency and support more informed authorizing decisions in their local contexts. <i>Presenters: Alysse Castro, Superintendent, Alameda COE; and Juwen Lam, Chief, Accountability Partnerships, Alameda COE</i>	
	Improving Graduation Rates of Foster Youth <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> Foster youth are one of the lowest performing student groups in the state of California. On average, a student in foster care will attend six different schools and research has shown they lose four to six months of learning with each school change. To help improve the outcomes of foster students, the Monterey COE Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) has implemented a robust case management program that provides support to students, schools and districts. Join this session to learn how the Monterey COE FYSCP's case management program resulted in a 96 percent high school graduation rate for foster students in the 2024–25 school year. <i>Presenter: Justin Parker, Program Coordinator, Monterey COE</i>	Malibu/Santa Monica, Lower Level
11:50 a.m.–12 p.m.	Break	
12–1:15 p.m.	Networking Lunch Enjoy the lunch buffet open to all registered conference attendees.	Sinder Patio, Lobby Level
1:15–1:45 p.m.	Micro-training: Supporting High-Quality Mathematics Instruction: The County Office's Role in Curriculum Adoption Adopting high-quality mathematics instructional materials is more than selecting a curriculum—it is a strategic process that supports student success for years to come. This session will explore the county board's role in adopting instructional materials for county-operated programs while highlighting how County Offices of Education support local educational agencies through the adoption process. <i>Speaker: Ellen Barger, Associate Superintendent, Santa Barbara COE</i>	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
1:45–3 p.m.	Resilience, Mentorship, and Deep Learning on the Path to Educational Success Alex Ballantyne and filmmaker Shaun Kadlec share the powerful story behind Emmy-winning documentary <i>Possible Selves</i>, offering a firsthand look at the resilience of foster youth and the life-changing impact of caring adults. Through personal storytelling and conversation, participants will consider how county boards and educational leaders can create conditions for every student to discover their potential and thrive. <i>Speakers: Alex Ballantyne, Foster Youth Advocate and Student, UC Santa Barbara; and Shaun Kadlec, Documentarian and Filmmaker</i>	
3–3:15 p.m.	Break	
Breakout Sessions (Choose one) 3:15–4:20 p.m.	New Charter School Accountability and Oversight Requirements <i>Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy</i> The 2026–27 budget trailer bill brings about many changes to charter school law, and especially to the role of the charter authorizer. Many of the provisions were implemented as soon as the budget deal was signed. County governance teams should be prepared for all the new components in a multitude of areas that will impact them, such as auditing, contracting and charter oversight. This session will lay out the new requirements and provide a timeline for county boards to hit the ground running.	Promenade, Lobby Level

Saturday, Sept. 26 Conference Program		
	<i>Presenters: John Yeh, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen, LLC; Kristin Armatis, Executive Director, Charter School Services, San Diego COE; and Stephanie Medrano Farland, Director, Education Policy, Capitol Advisors Group</i>	
	Small Investments, Big Impact: Scaling CalKIDS <i>Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access</i> COEs play a key role in advancing equity and improving student outcomes. This session highlights how county offices can leverage Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs), specifically California's CalKIDS program, to expand college readiness and reduce barriers to post-secondary access. Drawing on Riverside COE's experience and partnerships with ScholarShare and the California Student Aid Commission, participants will explore governance strategies and collaborations to scale impact across districts, especially for underserved students. Attendees will leave with practical tools and strategies to strengthen partnerships, align policy and expand college access. <i>Presenters: Ben Johnson II, Board President, Riverside COE; Catalina Cifuentes, Executive Director, College Career Readiness, Riverside COE; Jessica Moldoff Director, Education Policy, Capitol Advisors Group; and Noah Lightman, Assistant Deputy Director, Policy & Administration, ScholarShare Investment Board, State Treasurer's Office</i>	Palisades, Lower Level
	Placer County Reads: Empowering Literacy for All <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> Improving literacy outcomes for all students — especially English learners, students with disabilities and those experiencing poverty — requires aligned systems, strong partnerships and strategic investment. This session highlights Placer COE's Placer Reads initiative and the role of Board Literacy Ambassadors in advancing community engagement. The initiative focuses on providing targeted support and access to quality instruction, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to read and succeed. Presenters will share approaches to implementing high-quality supports and attendees will leave with actionable strategies, tools and partnership models to drive measurable gains. <i>Presenters: Gayle Garbolino-Mojica, Superintendent, Placer COE; and Jennifer Hicks, Associate Superintendent, Educational Services, Placer COE</i>	Malibu/Santa Monica, Lower Level

Sunday, Sept. 27 Conference Program		
7:45–11 a.m.	Registration *California Ballroom doors open at 7:45 a.m.	Outer Foyer, Lobby Level
7:45–8:45 a.m.	Networking Breakfast Enjoy the breakfast buffet open to all registered conference attendees.	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
Breakout Sessions (Choose one) 8:45–9:50 a.m.	Reimagining Schools Through Student Voice <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> Student presenters will lead an interactive exercise addressing the challenges of limited authentic student input in governance decisions and of translating student voice into actionable board priorities. Students will first demonstrate for participants a student-led facilitation model that can be used to engage broad student input, co-creating a vision of the ideal school and identifying priorities for board action. Next, students will lead a group discussion on barriers to student board member engagement and share feedback around what skills students need to learn to be effective board members.	Promenade, Lobby Level



	<i>Presenters: Ethan Duncan, Director, California Association of Student Councils (CASC) and High School Senior, Canyon High School; Euri Kim, State President, CASC and High School Senior, Arnold O. Beckman High School; Maggie Chou, CASC Region 9 President and Claremont High School Site Council Member; Patrick Cruz, CASC SABLE Director and Inglewood USD Student Board Member; and Kelly Wachowicz, Executive Director, CASC</i>	
	County Boards and New Changes to Charter School Oversight <i>Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy</i> Even before the latest charter school legislation, county boards had a critical role in charter school authorizing, as California is in its single biggest year ever for charter renewals — and potential appeals. The education budget trailer bill makes important changes to charter oversight that boards must understand for their ongoing oversight and high-stakes decisions they make at the board level — and to help ensure county office staff are prepared for their own multi-faceted role. This session will review the board's key responsibilities before the new law, explain what has changed and how it may impact boards, and equip boards to make sure they are ready for the oversight challenges, substantively and politically. <i>Presenters: Debi Deal, Senior Fiscal Consultant, California Charter Authorizing Professionals; Louise Johnson, Board Member, Nevada COE; Tom Hutton, Executive Director, California Charter Authorizing Professionals; and Yvonne Chan, Board Member, Los Angeles COE</i>	Palisades, Lower Level
	Supporting Every Student After <i>Mirabelli</i> and <i>Mahmoud</i> <i>Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success</i> As legal and policy debates surrounding parental rights, student privacy and student support services continue to evolve, county boards and educational leaders face increasing challenges in balancing legal compliance, student well-being and community expectations. This session will examine the practical implications of recent court decisions, including <i>Mirabelli v. Bonta</i> and <i>Mahmoud v. Taylor</i>, and their impact on policies, communication practices, and student support systems. Through real-world examples and lessons learned from local educational agencies, presenters will share governance considerations, policy insights and practical strategies for supporting students and families while navigating an evolving legal landscape. <i>Presenters: Christopher D. Keeler, Partner, F3 Law; and Greg Rolan, General Counsel, Orange COE</i>	Malibu/Santa Monica, Lower Level
9:50–10 a.m.	Break	
10–10:30 a.m.	Micro-training: Social Media Do's and Don'ts Social media offers board members valuable opportunities to inform, engage, and connect with their communities—but it also presents legal, ethical, and governance considerations. This fast-paced micro-training will cover practical do's and don'ts, common pitfalls to avoid, and best practices for using social media in a way that builds public trust while supporting your role as a board member. <i>Speakers: Alisha Kirby, Senior Writer, Communications, CSBA; and Heather Kemp, Senior Writer, Communications, CSBA</i>	California Ballroom, Lobby Level
10:30–11:15 a.m.	Be a Coffee Bean Life can be like a pot of boiling water. It can be harsh, stressful and difficult. You have three choices how to respond to your pot of boiling water. Be like a carrot that becomes soft, an egg that becomes hardened, or a coffee bean that changes the water to coffee. <i>Speaker: Damon West, Best-selling Author and Criminal Justice Advocate</i>	
11:15–11:30 a.m.	Call to Action and Adjourn <i>Speakers: Dr. Debra Schade, President, CSBA; and Mike Walsh, Director, County Board Member Services, CSBA</i>	