

# Delegate Assembly Report

*May 2021*



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## DELEGATE ASSEMBLY REPORT MAY 2021

CSBA's Delegate Assembly is a vital link in the association's governance structure. Delegates help ensure that the association reflects the interests of school districts and county offices of education throughout the state. Nearly 250 elected board members from CSBA's 21 geographic regions gathered virtually May 15–16 to learn more about the May Budget Revision, the latest research on student academic and social-emotional interventions, updates from CSBA's Climate Change Taskforce, the Education Legal Alliance and more. On the final day, Delegates separated into breakout groups to discuss the challenges of planning for summer school and the coming school year, areas to prioritize, what they learned from the prior year of distance learning, and how they plan to implement programs and services with the help of new state and federal funding.

Most Delegates expressed serious concern about the mental and social-emotional health of students and staff, specifically how they can best support children and their teachers in this area at a time of great need. Other frequently discussed challenges included the hiring of additional staff or reallocation of existing staff to reflect changing needs and priorities, professional development and training, strategic use of one-time funding, initiatives to accelerate learning recovery, and planning fall program delivery modes to account for uncertainty around health and safety protocols.

This report synthesizes the conversations held in May 16 breakout rooms into seven common topics that local educational agencies should consider as they continue planning for the start of the 2021–22 academic year. These subjects include:

- › Mental and social-emotional health of students and staff
- › Professional development and new hire training
- › Use of one-time funds
- › Learning recovery
- › Program delivery
- › Return to campus protocols on health and safety
- › Assorted challenges related to fall planning and implementation

TO FURTHER SUPPORT THE WORK OF OUR MEMBERS, CSBA'S RESEARCH AND EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT IS DEVELOPING A COMPANION PIECE OF BEST PRACTICES, SAMPLE POLICIES AND OTHER RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING THE ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT.



## TOPIC 1

# **MENTAL AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS AND STAFF**

Student experiences during the pandemic have varied greatly, but nearly all children have felt some degree of isolation and loneliness, while others have endured hardships at home such as COVID-related sickness or deaths of family members, parental unemployment or homelessness. Some students took on jobs to help support their families or cared for younger siblings and helped with their schooling.

A Gallup poll conducted in May of 2020 found that among parents of K-12 youth, 29 percent reported their child was “already experiencing harm” to their emotional or mental health because of physical distancing and pandemic-related closures of schools and businesses. Recent data show the issue has only since worsened, with more than half of students in California experiencing serious stress, anxiety or depression at least some time during the past year, and an increasing number said they had suicidal thoughts.

District and county office of education trustees see the struggles students have faced and expressed great concern as well as commitment to address the needs of students, families and staff alike.

LEAs are getting creative — one is working with Sports for Learning, which blends social-emotional learning and physical activities. Another LEA is in the process of building “two big mental health and wellness centers” that will be in operation by fall and is working with community groups to ensure the centers are open 24/7.

Working with nearby institutions of higher education and local community, nonprofit and faith-based groups was a strategy outlined by numerous Delegates as a way to quickly scale up the accessibility and breadth of services available to students, staff and families.

- › Several Delegates spoke about expanding social-emotional curriculum and, as a result, educator training. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support were identified as a “great help to make sure kids are all being served” by one Delegate — an opinion shared by numerous other Delegates. Others are relying on online options such as Care Solace to quickly connect students and families to mental health services.
- › Many LEAs are planning to increase mental health staffing in some capacity. Strategies often reflected the size and region where an LEA is located, with larger urban LEAs looking to hire additional staff, and smaller rural LEAs training current staff to identify and work with students who are struggling.
- › Hiring practices also differ from one LEA to the next. Many are hiring social workers, counselors, and counseling interns while others are relying on teachers on special assignment. LEAs are also keeping equity top of mind, seeking out bilingual therapists and liaisons specializing in working with Latino families, LGBTQ youth, Native American communities, foster and homeless youth, and other high-need student populations.
- › Surveys and assessments such as the California Healthy Kids Survey and social-emotional assessments will be used to determine overall student wellness, while Delegates reported that ongoing screenings will continue with the help of social workers and other support staff.
- › Home visits and family counseling are likely to become more frequent, as many LEAs seek to connect families and youth to both new services and underutilized existing ones.
- › Student board members have proven helpful in shaping mental health and social-emotional supports by sharing their perspectives, according to several Delegates. At least a handful of Delegates reported they would create “student forums” focused on mental health.
- › Some LEAs are also looking to provide support to staff, while others expressed a desire for guidance on how best to provide mental health resources for staff. One Delegate said cooking, health and wellness, yoga, stress relief and other programming would be offered to staff and administration. Staff wellness support will prove incredibly important, as many Delegates cited teacher burnout as a major concern.
- › Family resource centers that provide and connect families to community parenting courses, housing, nutrition, mental health and other services will be created or expanded in some LEAs. Some LEAs are more seriously looking at the components of community schools in order to better connect social-emotional learning, and physical and mental health services with families in need.



## TOPIC 2

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ NEW HIRE TRAINING**

Professional development for certificated and classified staff is critical to ensuring programming is understood and implemented appropriately. In addition to any new programs and policies, staff may need to be refreshed on existing ones. Many Delegates said that professional development in the upcoming year will be more comprehensive, with areas of focus largely dedicated to mental health, social-emotional or trauma-informed practices, the use of technology in the classroom and more.

- › The majority of Delegates said significant time and training for all staff would center around trauma-informed practices and mental health for both certificated and classified staff. Equity training will also be a regular fixture in LEAs throughout the state.
- › Some LEAs are also adding restorative justice, implicit bias and equity training in light of both the racial reckoning that has taken place nationwide in the last year and the likelihood that more children will return to the classroom with behavioral challenges. Dr. Tyrone Howard of UCLA and Nicole Anderson, founder and CEO of Nicole Anderson and Associates Consulting, LLC, were named by several Delegates as those who conduct trainings in these areas.
- › Professional development among classified staff will differ from one person's role to the next. Those who clean and sanitize classrooms, buses and other common spaces must be trained by maintenance and operations on what is expected; staff hired to aid special education students with significant

physical needs — such as those who rely on feeding tubes — will require specialized training; and those who administer medication to children each day must be trained to understand all protocol associated with doing so.

- › Many LEAs will need to train new staff, volunteers or interns to provide tutoring and other academic supports to students that aligns with district requirements. Current staff will also receive training in many LEAs to provide intensive, personalized academic assistance, conduct assessments and offer remediation.
- › For those LEAs starting new virtual academies, training will be conducted on how to start and present this mode of instruction.
- › Instructional coaches will conduct trainings in many cases, as will county offices of education staff and other teachers. In many LEAs, teacher mentorships will be a significant source of support.
- › Professional development will be more comprehensive than in years past, encompassing far more social-emotional and trauma-informed components, as well as technology use in the classroom. As a result, several Delegates said it will be an ongoing process. Many said about five days for professional development would be or already were built into the school calendar. Some split these days up while others held training over the course of a week.



### TOPIC 3 USE OF ONE-TIME FUNDS

Both California and federal leaders have provided — and continue to propose — significant one-time money for programs that address student need. One-time funding does little to address the long-term ability of schools to contend with ongoing financial pressures, however, and LEAs are rightfully wary of relying on such allocations to solve longstanding problems that require continued spending. Still, with staffing needs so deep, many Delegates discussed the likelihood of using at least some one-time funding for hiring or retaining both certificated and classified staff. Other common uses included training, stipends and facilities.

- › Training will be one of the most common uses of one-time funds, as outlined in the previous section.
- › Some Delegates said they would use at least some one-time funding to either retain educators or bring back some of those who had been laid off, which could help with the reduction of class sizes.
- › Pay increases were also cited by several Delegates as potential uses of one-time funds — be it for paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, assistant principals or other staff. Other Delegates said stipends would be offered to bilingual and biliterate educators, bus drivers and teachers who provide expanded learning before or after school.
- › LEAs also plan to use one-time funding to make long-needed facilities upgrades and replace or upgrade HVAC systems.

- › To address the many mental and social-emotional health needs of students, many LEAs are using one-time funds to bring in school counselors and psychologists for as long as they can afford to.
- › Several Delegates said one-time funding will be used to provide students with Chromebooks and hotspots. At least one LEA purchased cameras to track teacher movement in their classrooms to allow students at home better access, while another cited voice amplification technology in the classroom.
- › At least one LEA is using the funds to pay for a late bus that will allow children who ride the bus to stay on campus and receive expanded learning supports.
- › One Delegate emphasized the need to be “cautious and build capacity and know that [as] this money is coming in we need to plan accordingly so we do not find ourselves in four years trying to figure out what we will do for money,” and many agreed. One Delegate recommended staggering spending as best as possible, as students’ needs will continue to change over time.



## TOPIC 4 LEARNING RECOVERY

There is no shortage of research showing the urgent need to address the learning disruptions experienced by children since the start of the pandemic, which experts suggest has exacerbated pre-existing educational inequities throughout the country. Many studies have found that low-income and rural students were likely impacted by unreliable access to devices and/or broadband, making it difficult to access online instruction. Other children simply did not have a quiet place at home to learn, while others struggled with food or housing insecurity or with limited adult support. In addition, distance learning is simply more difficult to implement successfully for students with disabilities, English learners, homeless youth and children in the earlier grades.

LEAs will undoubtedly prioritize early assessment to determine where students need learning recovery interventions and tailor instruction and supports accordingly. Among the most common methods of supporting students mentioned by Delegates:

- › One-on-one and small group tutoring and mentoring will be a regular fixture in LEAs statewide, as nearly every breakout group reported some mention of these interventions. “This is an extraordinary chance to do things we’ve always wanted to do,” said one trustee, whose sentiment was shared by several others.
- › Those who will provide tutoring and other intensive academic supports across many LEAs largely include retired teachers, college students, those in educator credentialing programs and community organization staff.

- › Equity and the needs of English learners, students with disabilities and other youth most impacted by the extended lack of in-person learning is at the forefront of many LEAs' priorities. Curriculum and equity work is being accelerated in some LEAs to address learning recovery.
- › Several LEAs have adopted social-emotional curriculum to assist in addressing mental health needs.
- › LEAs are poised to use different assessments to identify where children are academically. STAR testing, Next Generation Math assessments, PSAT and NWEA scores, programs like i-Ready and IXL, growth models and textbook publishers' assessments were among those listed. Some will be piloting new assessment systems.
- › New science curriculum has been adopted in several LEAs, as well as social studies, ethnic studies, history, and mathematics.



## TOPIC 5 PROGRAM DELIVERY

Following weeks of uncertainty, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced during the May Budget Revision presentation that distance learning legislation would sunset on June 30, while allowing LEAs to provide students the option to learn at home through more traditional independent study programs. That flexibility will prove useful for LEAs — many of which are already considering beefing up virtual, independent study programs for those families not yet ready to return to in-person learning, as well as for those students who thrived in a distance learning environment. Where some LEAs differed was in their approach to allowing online learners to partake in extracurriculars in person.

- › Many LEAs will offer both full-time in-person instruction and independent study through either a traditional program or by online instruction through a virtual academy in the fall, while a significant portion of others will only offer full-time in-person instruction. Few Delegates reported plans to rely on a hybrid instruction model, though more expressed a desire to maintain that option as a backup should COVID cases experience a surge this winter.
- › Many Delegates expressed the need for flexibility at the local level to plan varied modes of delivery for instruction, especially regarding distance learning models that will become part of their independent study program. Some Delegates spoke of operating virtual instruction run out of a separate facility, through the county office of education, or with dedicated teachers.
- › Among those LEAs planning to offer independent study options, many are relying on programs that

were already in place prior to the pandemic. Many are also looking to expand these offerings or develop online options for the first time. Several Delegates said that so few families expressed interest in remaining in distance learning that it would not be financially viable to establish a virtual academy.

- › Even among those Delegates planning to offer only full-time in-person instruction in fall, many noted that technological gains made during distance learning will be incorporated in the classroom.
- › Some LEAs are expecting significant dips in student enrollment — in some cases as high as 20 percent, with one district reporting 25 percent of families opting to remain in online learning when school reopened. Outreach is being conducted in several regions to keep students in the LEAs. One Delegate reported they brought in experts to inform parents of the district’s safety plan and program to encourage families to return in the fall.
- › Several Delegates reported that children who enrolled in virtual academies would not be permitted to play a sport or participate in band or choir in person. Other districts said students could participate in extracurriculars at whichever campus would be considered their “home school.”
- › Though enrollment numbers are subject to change as fall approaches, a handful of Delegates expect up to 10 percent of their students to enroll in a virtual academy. At least a few Delegates expect fewer than 20 families to remain in an independent study distance learning option. Others report fewer than 3 percent of children are expected to remain in independent study, whether traditional or virtual learning. A few Delegates expressed serious concern regarding the high percentage of students who do not appear likely to return to their district.



## TOPIC 6

### **RETURN TO CAMPUS PROTOCOLS/ HEALTH AND SAFETY**

As of this writing, no additional guidance has been provided to California LEAs related to recent changes in masking requirements and return-to-campus protocols in fall will look similar to this spring, according to many Delegates. This time around, however, trustees have a better idea of what to expect. That could make some things go more smoothly, though Delegates mentioned that mitigation strategies on campus are expensive and ongoing. LEAs are addressing health and safety this fall in the following ways:

- › Replacing or upgrading campus HVAC systems was far and away one of the most common responses among Delegates.
- › Regular sanitizing of classrooms, buses, multi-purpose rooms and other places where students and staff meet will be ongoing, as will efforts to socially distance students in the classroom, during mealtimes and other instances where large groups gather. Extra staff will be hired in many LEAs to ensure regular disinfection occurs.
- › LEAs are working closely with county officials from local health departments and offices of education to establish guidelines and build infrastructure around personal protective equipment. At least one Delegate spoke of the need to hire staff to keep track of and distribute all the PPE stored in a district warehouse.

- › Masking policies for fall are still undecided, especially in light of recent state and federal health guidance, according to many Delegates. Most reported they would rely on guidance from state or county health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or another government agency.
- › Some LEAs are planning to or already have added an air purifier and/or filtration system to each classroom and bus.
- › A handful of LEAs are also moving away from the use of communal drinking fountains and are installing filling stations for water bottles, as well as touchless dispensers for handwashing, soap and paper towels.



## TOPIC 7

### OTHER CHALLENGES IN FALL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Some of the challenges and bright spots highlighted by Delegates revolved around more general topics as outlined below.

#### Communication/engagement

- › Many Delegates agreed that communication with stakeholders is at a much higher level than before the pandemic, and that is a silver lining that is likely to become the norm. Some Delegates reported the use of newsletters, social media, apps, email, robocalls, personal calls from the superintendent, and even “using a radio station to communicate to parents in Spanish and in English on two different channels.”
- › Largely through an increased use of technology by LEAs, families have received up-to-date information and weekly and monthly updates on topics including reopening strategies, community COVID-19 rates, meal distribution and the availability of other resources and supports.
- › While some reported the need to ramp up communication to re-engage families and discussed the prospect of more “townhall forums,” other Delegates pointed out the need to maintain a balance between communication and information overload, as well as the need to ensure a level of empathy in communications for communities hit hard by the pandemic.

## General uncertainty/need for clarity and guidance

- › The inability to plan ahead has been challenging for LEAs, with many reporting general uncertainty in part due to revolving — and in some instances opposing — guidance from local, state and federal leaders. This has proved a significant barrier to confidently communicating with stakeholders or reopening campuses.
- › Due to declining enrollment and a fluctuating number of families considering remaining in an online learning setting, some Delegates said determining the number of certificated staff they would need is a “guessing game.” As a result, Delegates cited the need for flexibility to handle changes as they arise.

## Vaccines

- › Though they are now widely available throughout California and some LEAs are even hosting vaccination centers, the COVID-19 vaccines are still creating challenges for many LEAs, and a significant portion are navigating difficult questions. Common questions that arose in breakout rooms included:
  - » While we do not have statutory authority to mandate vaccines, can we ask employees for proof of vaccination? What about students? This will be especially important once the masking mandate is lifted for vaccinated individuals in California.
  - » Once the vaccines are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, will they be required for staff and students? This could raise concerns in communities where there is significant hesitancy around vaccinations.
- › Several Delegates said there is a need for guidance and cooperation from local and state health officials to address these and other questions, and to help LEAs better and more accurately communicate with stakeholders.

## Working with unions

- › Many Delegates said one of their biggest challenges has been collaborating with their local teacher and labor unions. Negotiations over school reopenings have been fraught, and in some instances, board recall elections have been discussed.
- › Other Delegates have had the opposite experience, noting that their labor partners have been both cooperative and understanding of the difficult choices board members are being asked to make. One Delegate also noted that “with respect to negotiations, it is important to be broad in MOUs. Specific details can lock in and prevent future changes.”

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