

California School Boards Association

# Policy Platform

2025–27



# CSBA Vision, Mission and Equity Statement

## VISION

*The California School Boards Association is the essential voice for public education.* We inspire our members to be knowledgeable leaders, extraordinary governance practitioners and ardent advocates for all students.

## MISSION

*CSBA strengthens and promotes school board governance.* We define and drive the public education policy agenda through advocacy, training and member services. Strong local boards of education are essential to ensure a high-quality education for every student in every community.

## 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.

# Purpose of the Policy Platform

CSBA's Policy Platform provides a broad policy framework for implementing the association's mission to set the agenda for the PreK-Adult public schools and students of California. It guides the association in its policy and political leadership activities, as well as in its partnerships, research efforts and working with the media and the public.

CSBA provides policy and political leadership on critical issues through a variety of programs and special projects, including:

## POLICY

- ▶ Advancing key policy strategies.
- ▶ Policy analysis of local, state and national education issues.
- ▶ Advisories and publications on critical issues.
- ▶ Issue-oriented task forces and committees.

## PARTNERSHIPS, RESEARCH AND GRANT FUNDING

- ▶ Coalitions with other education, local government and children's organizations.
- ▶ Support for research on effective school governance.
- ▶ Alliances with philanthropic organizations to support CSBA's policy agenda.

## POLITICAL

- ▶ Governmental relations and legislative advocacy.
- ▶ Representation on state and national commissions and advisory committees.
- ▶ Legal analysis and representation.

## WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC

- ▶ Building awareness and support for PreK-Adult public education and local governance.
- ▶ Engaging the public in local governance issues.



All of these efforts are guided by the framework set forth in this platform. For example, it provides a basis for developing testimony to state and federal agencies on critical issues. When CSBA task forces are established to study specific issues and develop recommendations, they begin with the general policy framework for that issue, as established by the Delegate Assembly in the platform. Whenever CSBA's leadership and staff take action on behalf of the school and county boards in the state, the Policy Platform serves as the foundation for these efforts.

According to the CSBA Bylaws, the CSBA Policy Platform is reviewed and adopted every two years based on recommendations from the CSBA Policy Platform Committee. The CSBA Policy Platform Committee, appointed by the CSBA President, comprises members from both school districts and county offices of education. The Committee receives feedback from the Delegate Assembly on platform revisions and prepares recommendations based on that feedback. These recommendations are then submitted to the CSBA Delegate Assembly, which also includes representatives from school districts and county offices of education, for review and final approval.

# Core Beliefs

CSBA's policy positions are based on 10 core beliefs concerning children, schools, local governance and state and federal government.



## CHILDREN

- ▶ All children can learn and succeed when they have equitable access to a high-quality education program that challenges them to succeed.
- ▶ The needs of the whole child must be addressed.

## LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- ▶ County and local school boards must ensure accountability for both the effectiveness and fiscal solvency of their programs.
- ▶ County and local school boards must have maximum flexibility to govern their schools.
- ▶ Boards must be responsive to the needs, desires and concerns of local families and communities.
- ▶ Family and community engagement are necessary for student success.

## SCHOOLS

- ▶ Schools must effectively serve every child regardless of their individual differences.
- ▶ School staff must be adequately prepared, supported and held accountable.
- ▶ Schools must provide a safe, supportive and positive environment.

## STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- ▶ Schools must have adequate, predictable and equitable funding.

While addressing all of these critical issues, policy discussions about educational improvement must stay focused on meeting the needs of students. The ultimate goal must be to prepare all students to meet the challenges of the 21st century by addressing the changing needs of California's students.

# CSBA Policy Pillars

CSBA has identified four overarching policy pillars that we believe will lead to the outcome we all want for California's children: graduates prepared for post-high school success in college and the workforce with the skills to be lifelong learners and effective, contributing members of a global society.



## 01 *Strengthen* LOCAL GOVERNANCE

California schools are public institutions that belong to the communities they serve. Local boards must have authority and flexibility consistent with their responsibilities to ensure achievement for all students and the long-term fiscal stability of the schools.



## 02 *Secure* FAIR FUNDING

Public school funding in the state of California must be sufficient for high-quality teaching and learning for all students in every school. The funding of programs and facilities must be guaranteed, stable and equitable.



## 03 *Improve* CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN

Boards realize that student wellness, support for learning, safe school environments and access to community resources help students reach their maximum educational potential, and boards must establish policies and practices to overcome the barriers that students face.



## 04 *Ensure* ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL

School boards and districts must provide all students high-quality teaching and learning driven by curricula for post-high school success, research and evidence-based instruction, timely assessments that accurately measure student performance and strong professional teacher development.

## PLATFORM AT-A-GLANCE

Within the policy pillars, CSBA has identified specific levers — issues to which CSBA brings focus and pressure to leverage change that will improve public education.

### PILLARS ▼

### LEVERS ▼

<p><b>01</b> <i>Strengthen</i> <b>LOCAL GOVERNANCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Local authority &amp; flexibility</li><li>▶ One system of public schools</li><li>▶ Strong &amp; coherent local governance</li><li>▶ An engaged public</li></ul>
<p><b>02</b> <i>Secure</i> <b>FAIR FUNDING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Full and fair funding</li><li>▶ Stable funding</li><li>▶ Local flexibility</li></ul>
<p><b>03</b> <i>Improve</i> <b>CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Integrated student services</li><li>▶ Safe &amp; supportive school environments</li><li>▶ Family &amp; community role in improving conditions of children</li></ul>
<p><b>04</b> <i>Ensure</i> <b>ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ An aligned educational system</li><li>▶ Rich &amp; challenging local curricula</li><li>▶ Student-centered teaching &amp; learning</li><li>▶ Preparing effective teachers</li><li>▶ Family &amp; community role in promoting student achievement</li></ul>

School boards in California oversee a publicly funded system of schools that provide educational services primarily to students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, which often extend into early childhood education and services and adult education. Throughout this platform, the terms public school and PreK-Adult are used to refer to that system, which can include a full range of education services that are determined locally by districts and county offices of education.



# 01 Strengthen LOCAL GOVERNANCE

## PREAMBLE

The fundamental principle of our system of government is a democratic republic with representatives elected to govern on behalf of the communities that elect them. School boards are the simplest expression of this system at the local level. Boards provide citizen governance for one of our most valuable public institutions: California's public schools.

CSBA vigorously defends and values the contributions that school boards make to public education, and is committed to preserving and strengthening the authority of district and county boards of education.

*To strengthen local governance, CSBA will pursue four education policy levers:*

1. LOCAL AUTHORITY & FLEXIBILITY
2. ONE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS
3. STRONG & COHERENT LOCAL GOVERNANCE
4. AN ENGAGED PUBLIC

## 1.1 LOCAL AUTHORITY & FLEXIBILITY

Locally elected boards are accountable for ensuring that public education programs lead to achievement for all students and for the long-term financial health of local educational agencies (LEAs). Responsibility and authority go hand in hand, therefore boards must have the authority and flexibility over all aspects of the LEA for which they are held accountable. Local authority and flexibility must include:

**1.1.1 Student learning / achievement:** Boards must have final authority for all policy related to programs, curriculum, instruction, assessment, student placement, as well as class-size, instructional time and the school calendar.

**1.1.2 Student support programs:** Boards must have final authority for non-academic student services including safety, discipline, extracurricular programs and programs for mental, physical and social-emotional health.

**1.1.3 Human capital:** Boards must have final authority for the recruitment, selection, compensation, professional development, assignment, supervision, evaluation, promotion and termination of staff.

**1.1.4 Financial resources:** Boards must have final authority for the planning and use of all district assets and resources, and the authority to raise local revenue through bond measures, parcel taxes and other local revenues. Boards need timely reporting from independent and objective audits to determine the fiscal stability of school systems.

## 1.2 ONE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

California should have one coherent system of public schools that provides local autonomy and flexibility, encourages and rewards innovation that raises student achievement, and closes achievement gaps for all students. Charter schools can be dependent and independent, and all charters should be subject to the same standards and expectations as those that exist for local districts, county boards and county offices of education. A single, coherent system should ensure:

**1.2.1 Consistent standards of accountability:** All public schools in California should be expected to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps. All schools must demonstrate how programs meet the needs of all students and, in particular, the needs of underperforming students.

**1.2.2 Consistent support for innovation:** All public schools should have the same incentives and rewards for innovation and the same parameters for flexibility in district operations that lead to raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps.

**1.2.3 Consistent exercise of local control:** All public schools should be governed by district and county boards elected by their local communities, who have full authority over the development, review, approval, oversight and evaluation of all schools within their jurisdictional boundaries. Transparency and conflict-of-interest laws should be clear and consistent.

## 1.3 STRONG & COHERENT LOCAL GOVERNANCE

District and county boards of education are part of a system of local governance that includes city councils and county boards of supervisors. A coherent system of governance requires all local governing bodies, including school boards, to have the same degree of authority and flexibility, the same standards of accountability and equitable treatment under the law. Boards also need quality professional development that builds their ability to govern.

**1.3.1 Equitable standing with other governing agencies:** School boards will be treated equitably relative to other local governing agencies. They must have meaningful input and influence into local decisions that impact schools, especially in local planning issues. CSBA opposes the creation of new or expanded oversight responsibilities by federal, state, regional or local agencies.

**1.3.2 Professional development:** Board development should focus on improving the capacity of boards to exercise their governing responsibilities, be aligned with professional governance standards and be directed toward improving student outcomes.

## 1.4 AN ENGAGED PUBLIC

Public education reform will be strengthened by a more engaged public. Well-informed local residents can more meaningfully engage in and contribute to improving public education in three key areas.

**1.4.1 Local elections:** Local school board elections are an expression of American democracy at its most fundamental level. Local governing boards are stronger when the community they serve: 1) understands school governance and the beliefs, skills and knowledge that characterize effective board members; and 2) actively participates in selecting non-partisan school board members by exercising their constitutional right to vote. Local determination of district size, trustee areas / at-large elections, terms of service and local revenues strengthens local elections.

**1.4.2 Local engagement, advocacy and collaboration:** Boards must play a leadership role in the promotion and development of collaborative approaches among schools, cities, counties, other local government agencies, community-based organizations, local businesses and service organizations to meet the needs of students.

**1.4.3 Advocacy for and engagement in statewide issues:** Education reform can be accelerated by greater participation of school boards and the public in state and national policy issues that impact education, including supporting the position of an elected state superintendent of public instruction.



# 02

## Secure FAIR FUNDING

### PREAMBLE

Public education is a fundamental component of our American democracy and vital to the economic success of our nation. Our highest value and priority should be investing in the public education and training of the next generation. Federal, state and local government spending should reflect this critical investment.

*To secure fair funding, CSBA will pursue three education policy levers:*

1. FULL & FAIR FUNDING
2. STABLE FUNDING
3. LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

### 2.1 FULL & FAIR FUNDING

Funding should place California in the top tier of national per-pupil funding and fully cover the cost of preparing our students for college, career and civic life. The funding system should equitably distribute resources across LEAs to pay for the real costs of educating every California student. State and federal governments must fully fund each mandate, and impose as few mandates as possible. Three fundamental criteria for full and fair funding include:

**2.1.1 Full funding:** California must provide enough resources to support the actual cost of ensuring that all public school students and the LEAs who serve them perform at the highest possible levels. Performing at the highest level includes funding to promote mental, physical and social-emotional health. Funding for non-basic aid districts should be based on enrollment—the actual numbers of students served—and provide sufficient per-pupil resources to ensure the success of all California’s students.

**2.1.2 Equitable funding:** Funding must be allocated to account for the actual cost of meeting the differential needs of every student. This also requires the equitable distribution of funds among all LEAs, including county offices, school districts and charter schools. LEAs are responsible for the equitable distribution of resources to meet each student’s needs.

**2.1.3 Facilities funding:** California should provide LEAs the resources for non-instructional services and infrastructure including age-appropriate facilities necessary for effective school operations.

## 2.2 STABLE FUNDING

Funding should be predictable and not subject to dramatic fluctuations from year to year. It should empower LEAs to anticipate and respond to changes in a manner that mitigates the harm to student programs and maximizes LEA capacity to plan for proactive change. Stable funding must be consistent and guaranteed.

**2.2.1 Consistent:** Funding streams should be dependable and not subject to substantial shifts in funding levels from year to year.

**2.2.2 Guaranteed:** Funding streams should be protected from encroachment, deferrals, replacement or other political or legislative adjustments that reduce agreed-upon funding levels.

**2.2.3 Responsive funding:** Public education can be disrupted by emergent circumstances such as natural disasters. Supplementary funding should be provided in these instances to ensure stability and consistency.

## 2.3 LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

CSBA embraces the principle of subsidiarity — authority and control are best vested at the lowest level of organization, closest to those served by the organization. Education funding must allow for local autonomy appropriate for the level of accountability placed upon LEAs. Locally elected boards need authority and flexibility to generate local revenue, control the allocation of their resources and exercise greater autonomy for the development and use of facilities.

**2.3.1 Generate local revenue:** Local governing boards need authority and flexibility to generate additional revenue.

**2.3.2 Allocating resources:** Local governing boards need authority and flexibility to make decisions about how to best maximize and allocate resources. The state should impose as few categorical programs as possible to maximize the board's ability to align its resources with student achievement and organization goals.

**2.3.3 Control over development and use of facilities:** Governing boards must have final authority over the use of all LEA property. They also need flexibility to provide facilities that are safe and educationally appropriate. Greater flexibility is needed in regulations for construction, modernization and use of school facilities and local collaboration for infrastructure.



# 03

Improve  
CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN

## PREAMBLE

The primary responsibility of public schools is to educate students. The ability of children to attend school, to be engaged and learning in the classroom and to achieve academic success is significantly affected by conditions in their daily lives. The mental, physical and social-emotional health of each child, the social and economic obstacles they and their families may face, and the environments in which they live all impact a child's ability to learn. All children need access to appropriate support services.

Improving the outcomes for public education in California is a complex challenge. The research and documented success of the collective impact achieved by mobilizing multiple organizations to collaborate to find solutions for communities is compelling, and CSBA believes this must be a key strategy for meeting this challenge. No one agency can solve this problem alone, and CSBA is dedicated to convening the conversations and sustaining collaborations at every level that will bring our vision to fruition — children unbounded by circumstance.

*To improve the conditions of children, CSBA will pursue three education policy levers:*

1. INTEGRATED STUDENT SERVICES
2. SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS
3. FAMILY & COMMUNITY ROLE IN IMPROVING CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN

## 3.1 INTEGRATED STUDENT SERVICES

Addressing the conditions that impact students is not the sole responsibility of schools. The needs of all students must be identified and comprehensively addressed through the coordinated and collective efforts of schools and other agencies, institutions and organizations, each held to high standards of accountability, including protection of student privacy.

**3.1.1 Collaboration and accountability:** Partnerships and collaboration among all public and private agencies, businesses and community organizations should eliminate barriers to sharing appropriate data and increase flexibility in the coordination of funds to simplify access to education, health and support services for children. Responsibility for meeting the needs of every student should be shared across agencies, organizations, communities and schools. All entities providing integrated services to students should hold each other mutually accountable.

**3.1.2 Prevention, intervention and support for students:** Schools and communities should provide developmentally appropriate programs that lead to early success in school. Schools should identify student needs and provide services and supports that address the barriers students face to attending, engaging, learning and achieving in school. Appropriate and effective supports and resources should be developed for students whose needs cannot be met in regular education programs.

## 3.2 SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Effective teaching and learning occur when students and staff are healthy and feel safe, supported and connected.

**3.2.1 Safe schools:** A positive school environment identifies and reinforces nonviolent solutions to problems and respect for all students and staff. Schools must implement fair and effective practices for student discipline, safe use of appropriate technology and media resources, and appropriate emergency response and communication plans. Schools must protect confidential student information.

**3.2.2 Student health and well-being:** All students benefit from coordinated programs and supports that promote mental, physical and social-emotional health. When funding is allocated for health programs and services for children and youth, local government entities, community organizations and private businesses should collaborate with schools (as appropriate) to support the well-being of every student.

**3.2.3 Safe and appropriate facilities:** A supportive school environment includes safe facilities that protect the mental and physical health of students and staff and are educationally and age appropriate.

## 3.3 FAMILY & COMMUNITY ROLE IN IMPROVING CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN

The home and community environments in which children live influence their ability to learn and thrive. Community outreach, support and partnering with families are critical strategies for improving the conditions of children.

**3.3.1 Community outreach:** Schools should initiate outreach for community-based support to meet the mental, physical and social-emotional health needs of all children.

**3.3.2 Partnering with families:** Schools should promote the active involvement of families in supporting the mental, physical and social-emotional health of children as critical to fostering their success in school and life. These approaches should be culturally competent to maximize engagement.



# ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL

## PREAMBLE

California students need a well-aligned education system that prepares them for civic engagement, and college and career success. The state role should focus on standards, frameworks, accountability and data. State and federal governments must provide an effective, efficient and unbiased accountability system that uses multiple measures to determine school success, with balanced depth and scope of testing at each grade level to provide timely results and minimize the impact on instructional time. Local governing boards must have authority and flexibility to adopt local standards and curricula for their school communities that serve their local needs.

*To advance the achievement of all students, CSBA will pursue five education policy levers.*

1. An aligned education system
2. Rich & challenging local curricula
3. Student-centered teaching & learning
4. Preparing effective teachers & staff
5. Family & community role in promoting student achievement

## 4.1 AN ALIGNED EDUCATION SYSTEM

California students need a well-aligned education system that prepares them for college and career success. A well-aligned education system requires effective collaboration, coordination and articulation among school districts, county offices of education, the California Department of Education, California’s institutions of higher education and the state Legislature.

**4.1.1 Horizontal alignment:** A well-aligned education system requires consistent standards of accountability and performance among all schools that provide PreK-Adult or postsecondary education.

**4.1.2 Vertical alignment:** A well-aligned education system ensures that there are consistent standards for admission and matriculation between PreK, elementary, high school and postsecondary institutions.

## 4.2 RICH & CHALLENGING LOCAL CURRICULA

A high-quality and comprehensive instructional program offers a rich curriculum beyond what is tested on state assessments as the foundation for high expectations and achievement for every student.

**4.2.1 Comprehensive and competitive:** Educational programs should prepare all students for graduation and successful transition to employment or postsecondary education in the multicultural and global economy. These programs should also promote personal growth and support the development of their mental, physical and social-emotional health. College and career-ready students should also have opportunities to learn an additional language, utilize applied and experiential learning, and explore the principles of personal character, productive citizenship and co-curricular interests.

**4.2.2 Inclusivity:** Per CSBA's Equity Statement, schools should respect diversity among students and families. Learning environments should foster awareness, understanding and acceptance of cultures identities, and abilities through an inclusive and equity-driven curriculum.

**4.2.3 Locally driven:** Boards need local flexibility and freedom to adopt and approve curricula that provides students with a curriculum that meets local needs.

## 4.3 STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING & LEARNING

All children residing in California deserve high-quality educational services. Curriculum, instruction and assessment must be designed based on what students need to meet high expectations for performance.

**4.3.1 Effective instruction, assessment and interventions:** Instruction and assessment should be research and evidence based and address the learning needs of all students, and be adapted to meet the needs of English learners, students receiving special education services, historically underserved students and students with learning differences. Accountability for student achievement should be based on multiple measures over time, including standardized, performance-based assessments and growth based models. Assessment results should be included in the regular evaluation of program effectiveness in order to revise or terminate programs as needed.

**4.3.2 Equitable access to quality resources:** All students need equitable access to effective teaching and learning experiences and resources including instructional materials, technology and technological support, broadband access, media and other innovations appropriate and effective for learning.

**4.3.3 Data-driven:** Schools must use accurate data and reliable assessment results to regularly measure student progress. Assessment results effectively improve student performance when they support appropriate changes in curriculum and programs, instruction, assessment and intervention strategies. They are also a valuable tool in the creation of alternative instruction programs to meet student needs. The state must provide a data system that tracks students through graduation and connects to student support services and higher education.

## 4.4 PREPARING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS & STAFF

Students perform better when they are taught by highly qualified and highly effective teachers. California should provide a well-aligned and coherent system for public school teacher and administrator preparation including credentialing, recruitment, professional development and evaluation. All school employees contribute to student achievement, should reflect the diversity of the community, and should have appropriate training and support

**4.4.1 Credentialing:** California’s teacher preparation programs must be based on professional standards for teaching, and include a performance evaluation component prior to receiving a credential. The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) should offer additional pathways for those interested in entering the teaching profession and simplify the process for credentialing qualified teachers with out-of-state credentials and career-technical education (CTE) teacher candidates. Teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers for working with students with learning challenges, and actively encourage enrollment of teacher candidates from under-represented groups or with diverse backgrounds who can provide strong role models. The CTC should coordinate California’s teacher and administrator preparation efforts with institutions of higher education, county offices of education, school districts and professional associations to ensure alignment and coherence.

**4.4.2 Recruitment, placement and induction:** Local boards should have authority and flexibility to attract and retain highly qualified and effective staff and provide support and training for new teachers. Longer probationary periods should be established to provide sufficient opportunity for assessing teacher performance. Assignment and transfer of teachers should be based on student needs and teacher effectiveness and qualifications.

**4.4.3 Staff development:** Professional development must be ongoing, relevant and based on recognized standards for the professional development of educators. Professional development should address attitudes and perceptions of all staff about high expectations for — and the fair and equitable treatment of — every student. It must be focused on addressing the learning needs of students, including students with learning differences. Professional development activity can be enhanced by collaborative efforts among and between school districts, county offices of education and institutions of higher learning.

**4.4.4 Evaluation:** Evaluations for credentialed staff should be regular and ongoing, and must include assessment of subject-matter knowledge, instructional techniques and progress in student learning. The procedures for teacher placement, layoff decisions and the dismissal of staff whose performance is unsatisfactory should be streamlined, with maximum authority and flexibility for the local board.

**4.4.5 Employees:** All employees, credentialed and classified, play an important role in providing students with a safe and effective learning environment. Each employee in the system should have appropriate orientation, training, supervision, evaluation and support.

## 4.5 FAMILY & COMMUNITY ROLE IN PROMOTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Schools are public institutions that belong to the communities they serve, and they function better when the community is engaged. Family involvement and community partnerships are essential components of engagement and are important strategies for raising student achievement and improving schools.

**4.5.1 Family involvement:** All parents and guardians of all cultural backgrounds and native languages should have access to: 1) opportunities to participate in the school decisions that affect their children; 2) key information about classroom and school issues, programs, expectations and services; 3) flexibility to attend student-related meetings; and 4) opportunities to develop their own English language proficiency or academic/vocational skills.

**4.5.2 Community partnerships:** Collaboration and partnerships with businesses, local government agencies, institutions of higher education and other organizations can provide community service and service learning activities, raise public awareness of educational needs in the community and bring additional resources and programs to school sites.



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