

# California School Boards Association 2018 Candidate Questionnaire

## **Candidate Information**

**Candidate Name:** Tony Thurmond

**Office/District:** State Assembly, District 15

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**Candidate Occupation:** Assemblymember, District 15

**Employer:** CA State Assembly

**Proposed Ballot Designation:** educator/state legislator

**Elected offices currently/ previously held:** Richmond City Council (2005-2008), West Contra Costa USD Board (2008-2012), CA State Assembly (2014-present)

I chair the Assembly Select Committee on Science, Technology, Education, and Math Education Committee and a member of the Assembly Education Committee.

**Other campaigns for elected office:**

**Appointed offices currently/ previously held:**

**Organization(s) you belong to:**

**Experience / Relationships with schools:**

**On the following pages, CSBA has composed a list of ten (10) questions regarding K-12 public education in California. These questions are arranged based on CSBA's four (4) Policy Pillars. More information about each Policy Pillar and about CSBA are provided for your reference.**

Please attach your biography, a list of current endorsements and any campaign literature you have printed to date.  
Email completed forms to Dennis Meyers: [dmeyers@csba.org](mailto:dmeyers@csba.org)

*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.

1. 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 student achievement for all students and the long-term fiscal stability of the schools.
2. 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.
3. Improve conditions of children: Boards realize that proper nutrition, physical and mental health; 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.
4. 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-based instruction; timely assessments that accurately measure student performance and strong professional teacher development.

### **Policy Pillar 1: Strengthen Local Governance**

1a. 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.

### **Q1: What is your view on the role that locally elected school boards play in public education in California ?**

I want to start by inviting all school board members in California to join me for a tele-town hall on October 25 from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. Please email [townhall@tonythurmond.com](mailto:townhall@tonythurmond.com) to RSVP and to share with me directly your input on changes you would like to see at the California Department of Education, support needed from the SPI, and concerns and ideas you have about public education.

I care about engaging school board members in this discussion about improving public education, because I was elected to my local school board. The school board provides a vision for the district and supervises the superintendent in carrying out that vision. Board members listen to feedback from constituents and oversee the implementation of state policies established by the State Legislature and State Board of Education. School boards set budgetary priorities for the district and lead parcel tax and bond measure campaigns to supplement school

district revenue. School board members utilize their local experiences and expertise to advocate for how state educational policies should be shaped, and work through CSBA and other entities to provide advocacy and training to other school board members on board governance and how to best meet the needs of the district. It's important to me that school boards are managing their own affairs according to what their local communities need, rather than taking top-down direction from Sacramento.

When I joined the West Contra Costa Unified School District Board in 2008, I joined a district in financial crisis. Our district had been in state receivership for more than 20 years. Our board brought together all sides to pay off – 4 years early – the state debt we inherited and restore local control to the district in 2012. As Superintendent of Public Instruction, my mission will be to provide support and resource to local school boards to help them be successful in improving their local schools.

1b. Locally elected school 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).

**Q2: Please describe any interactions/experiences you have had either personally or professionally with local school boards?**

As a school board member, I helped restore fiscal solvency and local control to my school board, while supporting campaigns to put millions of dollars toward preserving counseling, after-school, music, and athletic programs. We rebuilt dozens of schools to provide state-of-the-art student learning facilities. We funded programs to help students learn about and apply to top universities. I also led efforts to expand drug and alcohol treatment services for youth, and to bring nutrition and wellness programs to schools. Additionally, I spearheaded a campaign that reduced school suspensions by 27%.

After my term on the school board, I ran for the State Assembly because my school district needed more state funding and I saw the State Legislature as the place where I could provide the most help to our local schools. One of my first pieces of legislation was AB 1014 which provided over \$35 million to 30 school districts and county offices of education across the state to invest in restorative justice, community schools, programs to reduce chronic absenteeism. I've helped secure billions in funding for early education, bilingual education, and career technical education. I coauthored legislation to infuse an additional \$300 million in LCFF to serve our lowest performing students.

Most recently, I worked with two school boards in the state that were facing insolvency to craft policy that would provide them with millions to keep the districts solvent. This included allowing district to sell surplus property to help pay down debt. I also passed legislation that will provide each school board with a student voting member. With my colleagues in the State Legislature, I provided billions of dollars to help districts cover increased pension costs and supported a state bond that provides billions to help school districts address deferred maintenance and school modernization needs. I supported legislation that expands from 3% to 10% the amount of

reserves a district may hold in order to deal with unforeseen expenses and to be able to maintain the highest bond ratings possible.

This year I co-authored legislation which the Governor signed to ban for-profit charter schools. I've supported legislation to promote accountability of charter schools, including preventing charter schools from pushing students out because of high costs associated with the provision of special education. Further, I have supported legislation that if passed would have required charter schools to follow the Brown Act and to disclose conflicts of interest.

I'm the only candidate with experience working both on a local school board and in Sacramento – experience that will make me the most effective Superintendent working in Sacramento for local school districts.

1c. School 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. School boards need timely reporting from independent and objective audits to determine the fiscal stability of school systems.

**Q3: Please explain any changes that you believe may be necessary in state law, including the LCFF or the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) processes, to ensure or enhance school board authority, community engagement, and accountability over the use of funds and implementation of effective educational programs?**

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was created through landmark education funding legislation in 2013 that returned spending decisions to communities and makes sure that school districts with the greatest number of high-need students get more resources to support those students. We must have oversight of the LCFF to ensure funding is going where it is supposed to go – directly to students and the programs that benefit them – while streamlining the bureaucracy faced by school districts and providing flexibility.

LCFF funding data must be made available online so the public can see how their tax dollars are being spent. Publicly available, easily accessible data will also allow school districts to learn best practices from high performing districts throughout the state. By providing necessary resources, we can empower County Offices of Education, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, and the California Department of Education to support districts in need of improvement.

Adhering to LCAP processes and making data publicly available in a way that will support the growth of effective educational programs will require a commitment to supporting and being responsive to local school districts. For example, this year my colleagues and I in the State Legislature worked with the Governor to find \$1.1 billion in the state budget for flexible funding that school districts can use. Since 2014-2015, we have provided districts with more than \$5.7

billion for this purpose. Additionally, funding was approved last year in the California state budget to provide coaching to school districts on strategies to close the achievement gap.

As SPI, I would look for more funds like this to aid districts in their efforts to close the achievement gap. I will also work to further streamline the Local Control and Accountability Plan process and to effectively utilize 21st century technology to simplify the process for district end users. In all of this work, we need to be consistently guided by the principles of equity, performance, and local control embedded in the LCFF.

We should also continue to empower students to hold their schools accountable. Last year Governor Jerry Brown signed into law my legislation, AB 261, which guarantees students in high school have a vote and a voice on their school boards.

### **Policy Pillar 2: Secure Fair Funding**

Public education is a fundamental component of 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.

2a. California's economy is strong, diverse and vibrant, ranking 5th in the world and first among all of the other states in the U.S. Yet, California ranks well below the national average in terms of the amount of revenues provided per pupil.

### **Q4: What is your view on these kinds of statistics and do you support increases in the state's financial investment in public education throughout California to that of the national average in per-pupil funding or the Top 10 of all states?**

California is the 5th largest economy in the world, yet we rank in the bottom ten in the nation in per-student funding. With the rising cost of special education, pension contributions, and other critical school district needs, we must act now to get our students, teachers, and districts the money they need to improve student outcomes.

In the Assembly, I am constantly fighting to find additional revenue sources for our public education system. During my two terms in office, I secured an additional \$1 billion for early education programs. I provided \$100 million in this year's budget to support special education and STEM, and \$300 million for career technical education including through a bill I authored that moves \$150 million in CTE funding directly to school districts. To give California's kids a fair shot in the global economy, we must provide the resources that will set them up for success.

A recent survey showed that nearly two-thirds of Californians believe funding for our state's public schools is inadequate, and 59% reported they would support a local parcel tax to fund their district's schools. To tap into this public support, we should change the voter threshold for passing these local parcel taxes from two-thirds majority to 55% in all districts.

I believe everything should be on the table when it comes to increasing funding for our schools, including a 2020 ballot measure that I am supporting that would generate more than \$11 billion for the state by enacting split roll tax reform for Proposition 13. If elected as SPI I would be establishing a working group of school board members, business leaders, education stakeholders, and government officials whose sole job is to identify permanent funding sources that can help CA to ultimately become number one in per pupil spending.

2b. School construction and modernization in California has been and continues to be a state and local partnership. State bonds, such as those approved by voters in Proposition 51 from 2016, provide the state's matching share to revenues raised locally by school boards through local bonds and other sources.

**Q5: What actions would you take to ensure faster sale of voter approved bonds at the state level to provide critically needed matching funds for local projects?**

Last year I urged the Governor to increase the allocation of bond funding for school facilities to fully fund all applications submitted through summer 2017. California has an extreme backlog in applications for bond funds for school facilities improvement and modernization. This backlog, which has been made more urgent by recent wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters, is unnecessarily endangering the health and safety of students who have to go to schools that are in desperate need of repair and refurbishment. Voters approved \$9 billion in bond funds in 2016, but too many schools have not yet seen those funds meet their needs. As SPI, I'll work closely with local superintendents and school boards to ensure that their school bond applications are processed timely by the state. In this role, I would be the statewide champion for school districts, using my connections in Sacramento to get money on the ground.

**Q6: How do you plan to support the state and local partnership to build and modernize public schools and how do you plan to keep that partnership strong into the future?**

I'm the only candidate who has had to work as a school board member both under and not under state receivership to build and renovate schools. I've run bond campaigns. I understand what the school board needs firsthand and so I believe I have the perfect experience to support local school boards in their efforts to build and modernize public schools.

For the past two years, I've been working on legislation to allow school districts to use extra parcel land to build affordable housing for teachers and school employees. This legislation was a direct response to school districts which are struggling to retain teachers who either could not afford to live where they work (as is the case in many urban districts) or could not find housing in the communities where they work (as was voiced by rural districts). As Superintendent I'll continue to work with school districts to pass that legislation.

### **Policy Pillar 3: Improve Conditions of Children**

The primary responsibility of public schools is to educate students. The ability of children to attend school, to be engaged and learn in the classroom and to achieve academic success is significantly affected by conditions in their daily lives. The physical, mental and 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 emerging 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.

3a. Effective teaching and learning occur when students and staff are healthy and feel safe, supported and connected.

### **Q7: What do you believe is needed to ensure safe learning environments for students and staff in all schools in the state; all sizes, all types and all locations?**

As Superintendent, I will ensure the safety of our students is our number one priority. For too long, we have lived with the tragedies of school shootings in states across the nation. My heart breaks for the families who have been affected by these horrific events. We must do more than offer our thoughts and prayers. We must act to keep our children safe.

We need violence prevention training in every school in California. The solution is not to arm teachers – in fact, we must vehemently resist efforts by the federal administration to place weapons in classrooms – but to invest in commonsense mental health services and gun violence prevention programs for our students and educators.

I have been working with the Sandy Hook Foundation to provide free gun violence prevention training in school districts inside and outside of Assembly District 15 (anyone interested in learning more about this program should reach out to my Assembly District Office). I'll continue this outreach as SPI. Last month, we held a school safety town hall where we heard from national nonprofit gun violence prevention organizations, local school administrators and counselors, and students on what needs to be done to reduce gun violence in and around our schools.

As a school board member I had responsibility for chairing the Board Safety Committee and in that role oversaw trainings to help the district improve its school resource officer program to keep students safe. Later I introduced legislation in the State Assembly that will provide

resources to schools so they can provide physical, social, and emotional services through on-site counseling. I have convened roundtable discussions with local educators and social justice advocates to discuss ways in which our schools can prevent acts of hate on campuses and prevent bullying for LGBTQ students.

As SPI, I will continue to sponsor and advocate for legislation that provides for safer school environments for our students – and also that which provides for healthy and supportive environments. I'll continue to be an advocate for more health services in schools and to alleviate the strains of poverty on students, like my legislation that expanded the free lunch program to 400,000 students in California.

3b. 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.

**Q8: How will you champion the efforts of schools to access community resources and encourage family participation?**

As mentioned above, I support changing the voter threshold for passing these local parcel taxes from two-thirds majority to 55% in all districts. I've also created funding specifically for community schools and will continue to support the expansion of community schools. As a school board member, I worked with our local cities to fund our schools during a financial crisis, and as a social worker with a school-based mental health organization, I created programs like one called "Chat and Chew" to provide a welcoming and safe place for parents to engage in their children's schools. My experience as a social worker gives me a unique understanding as to what our highest need families need to feel supported and engaged in their local schools.

I know I'm not the only school board member who has implemented a successful idea. As a state legislator, I've brought together school leaders, educators, and students for several statewide roundtables to share strategies to reduce hate in our schools, support LGBTQ students, expand STEM programs, and more. As Superintendent, I will create collaborative spaces and task forces for school board members to share best practices and learn from one another to spread the great ideas around as they fit each unique community in California.

**Policy Pillar 4: Ensure Achievement for All**

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.

**Q9: In your view, what are the most critical needs in California to close achievement gaps between various student groups?**

Our success should always be measured by the number of high school students that are prepared for college and career pathways, and by closing the achievement gap for African American and Latino students, English Learners, special education students, foster youth, and students from low-income backgrounds. We must employ new and innovative strategies to significantly improve outcomes for all students. The achievement gap begins before a student ever enters a kindergarten classroom – we must invest in high-quality early education and care programs and make universal preschool a reality. But for too many of our kids, the barriers to student success exist outside the classroom, like poverty, homelessness, and trauma, so we must recommit our investment in school-based health and mental health services, the free lunch program, and truancy prevention, to ensure all of our students are in school and ready to learn.

To fight the achievement gap, we must also engage school administrators, teachers, families, and other stakeholders. And sometimes evaluating how best to approach the achievement gap requires specialized help. That's why in last year's budget I worked to secure funding that provides school districts with technical assistance aimed at closing the achievement gap, including hiring professional coaches who can evaluate a district's root causes of the gap and offer solutions. This year, I am hosting a roundtable series to convene educational leaders from across the state who can develop strategies and interpret data that will help reduce the achievement gap.

Research shows the achievement gap for some students starts even before kindergarten. Low-income students in particular tend to be at a disadvantage when they start school, as many of their families cannot afford to send them to increasingly expensive preschools. For that reason, I am working tirelessly to remove the barriers to pre-K education programs. In my first three years in the Assembly, I have fought to secure an additional \$500 million in funding toward early childhood education. Another of my bills, AB 2303, will generate millions of dollars to fund high-quality preschool education, as well as critical after-school programs, by placing a tax on private prisons. We must educate our students, not incarcerate them. By funneling money from prisons back to schools, we can address the achievement gap at its earliest stages.

This year the Governor signed by bill AB 2514 to provide funding to districts for dual language immersion programs, which will support achievement gap reduction for English Learners, and legislation I coauthored to provide \$300 million in LCFF to support the needs of the lowest performing students. I intend to launch a statewide literacy campaign to promote early literacy and to use literacy interventions like the Freedom School, an Afro-centric literacy program that helps students improve by at least one who grade in reading in a six week program. I got involved with the Freedom School when I taught high school civics to students incarcerated in a county juvenile camp.

**Q10: What kinds of supports can the state provide to ensure that governing boards have the resources, tools, staffing, expertise, etc. necessary to prepare all students for successful career pursuit and civic engagement throughout their adult lives?**

I would work closely with school boards to provide the support districts need and advocate for the additional funding necessary to educate students. I would meet regularly with school boards and hear feedback on from improvements that need to be made on the LCAP to measures that need to be taken in times of crisis, like I've done for Oakland USD and Inglewood USD. I would work with CSBA and individual districts to generate funding to support board governance training and trainings that lift up best practices that can be replicated district to district to support school achievement. I will be the voice for school districts in the Governor's office figuring out how we fix those problems that only the state can, and the convener of statewide education leaders to facilitate the sharing of best practices.

When we invest in strategies to close the achievement gap, the door opens to the possibility of every student leaving high school prepared for college or other postsecondary education. Those strategies will help us recruit, retain, and train teachers, invest in services and programs that support our kids including those in special education, English Learners, foster youth, and low-income students, and prepare every student with the critical thinking skills they need to succeed in the 21st century economy.

I invite you to learn more about my plan to provide every student in California with a quality public education at [tonythurmond.com/tonys-plan](http://tonythurmond.com/tonys-plan). I hope you will join me in a deeper discussion on Wednesday, October 25, from 6:00-7:00 pm for my school board tele-town hall. Please RSVP and submit your questions, ideas, and concerns by emailing [townhall@tonythurmond.com](mailto:townhall@tonythurmond.com).

## About CSBA

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) is the nonprofit education association representing 5,000 elected officials who govern public school districts and county offices of education. With a membership of nearly 1,000 educational agencies statewide, CSBA brings together school governing boards, superintendents and other administrators from school districts and county offices of education to advocate for effective policies that advance the education and well-being of the state's more than 6 million school-age children. A membership-driven association, CSBA provides policy resources, original research, training and professional development and workplace productivity technology to members. The organization also represents the statewide interests of public education through legal, political, legislative, community and media advocacy.

CSBA serves as a unified voice for school districts and county offices of education, fostering effective relationships with the Legislature, the Governor's office, constitutional officers, Congress, the White House, administrative agencies, educational organizations and the public at large.

CSBA works to educate the public and media about the role of governing boards and the fundamental nature of public education in California and the nation. We build support for public education by being a leader in advocacy on policy and fiscal issues at the state and federal levels.

### 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.

### Core Beliefs

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

#### **Children**

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

#### **Schools**

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

#### **Local governance**

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

## **State and federal government**

10. Schools must have adequate, predictable and equitable funding.