November 11, 2020
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Election update: Joint Assembly hearing highlights ongoing digital divide concerns and possible solutions

After four days of vote counting and an election year like no other, the President-elect of the United States is Joseph R. Biden. Current President Donald Trump is expected to continue challenging several aspects of vote counting in courts following the call by the Associated Press on Saturday, Nov. 7. As the education community looks toward a new presidency, questions swirl around who will be the next U.S. Secretary of Education and just how much a Democratic president and Republican Senate can accomplish together.

Meanwhile, in California-specific results, education-related propositions on the ballot did not fare well. As reported in last week’s update, Proposition 16, which would have repealed the state’s ban on affirmative action, failed. As of Tuesday, Nov. 10, Proposition 18, which would have allowed 17-year-olds who will be 18 at the time of the general election to vote in the state primary and special elections, also failed. And Proposition 15, which would expand the tax base by assessing commercial property tax based on market value for businesses that own California property worth more than $3 million, was trailing with 51.8 percent ‘no’ votes.

Good news for local educational agencies across the state continued for local bond passage, however. In a marked turn of events from the March 2020 election, a CSBA analysis of the current state of 56 school bond measures finds that about 80 percent are on track for approval.

COVID-19 update: State releases playbook for community-based testing sites; no specific guidance or funding for schools

The California Department of Public Health on Nov. 4 released the “Playbook to stand up community-based testing sites,” which offers a guide on how organizations, including schools, can partner with the new Valencia Regional Laboratory (VRL) to ramp-up capacity of COVID-19 testing. The laboratory will have results within 48 hours.
While the state will pay for processing the tests and purchasing at least some of the tests, that is all they are offering. Organization responsibilities include assessing testing demand within your community; requesting kits through state vendor; providing physical space for testing; gathering patient data and submitting via web platform; collecting sample at the testing site; transport sample in-person or via courier to VRL within 24-hours of collection; paying for essential site costs: e.g., courier service, staff, outreach programs, materials etc. The playbook notes that "you should consider partnering with other local organizations who can meet collection needs including community testing sites, pharmacies, clinics, etc."

A Nov. 4 letter to school leaders from California Health and Human Services Agency Secretary Mark Ghaly stated that "LEAs will be able to secure tests at a fraction of the market rate, and the state will front costs and seek reimbursement through health plans." The letter also said that "LEAs may use the 5.3 billion in additional funds allocated in the Governor’s 2020–21 Budget to pay for testing-related expenses."

CSBA embraces the call for robust school testing but has concerns about the current blueprint and the burden it places on school districts without providing the funding, staffing, resources and logistical support to properly implement on-site testing. CSBA will continue to advocate for more support from the state in these and other critical areas related to the safe and successful reopening of California public schools.

Register for new CSBA webinar on educational equity during the pandemic

Join CSBA for “Equitable Support for California Students During the COVID-19 Crisis: Strategies for School Board Members” on Thursday, Nov. 19 at 1 p.m. This webinar brings together California leaders to share their insights on education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The panelists will draw on their expertise as practitioners and researchers who focus on school reopening plans, school finance, the digital divide and best practices for English learners. The webinar will also preview a series of CSBA briefs focusing on strategies to promote learning for all California students during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly students most likely to be impacted by disparities in access. Register today »

Fire Management Assistance Grant deadline this Friday

Local educational agencies impacted by wildfires in the counties that are part of the September 2020 wildfires major disaster declaration (FEMA-4569-DR-CA) are encouraged to attend Applicants’ Briefings and submit a Request for Public Assistance (RPA). The briefings are for LEAs that provided an essential social service related to the fires in Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, Napa, San Bernardino, San Diego, Shasta, Siskiyou and Sonoma counties. The RPA deadline is Nov. 13, 2020. Learn more »

AEC spotlight: Hadi Partovi, founder and CEO of code.org

CSBA’s 2020 Annual Education Conference will be presented in a virtual format — giving attendees access to critical expertise and perspective from the comfort of their home or office. The conference takes place Dec. 3–4, with virtual preconference activities happening from Nov. 30–Dec. 2. Registration closes Nov. 24. Register here »

The always dynamic and inspiring General Session speakers provide one of the highlights of AEC. CSBA spoke with General Session speaker Hadi Partovi about the importance of digital literacy during distance learning, closing the digital divide and what progress the leading provider of K-12 computer science curriculum has made in making the subject more accessible for all students. Read the interview »

State Board approves shorter Smarter Balanced assessments
The State Board of Education in its November meeting approved a shorter version of the 2020–21 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, shortening the exams that students in grades 3-8 and 11 are required to take in math and English language arts by nearly half.

The board also approved detailed indicators for the implementation of Assembly Bills 1505 and 1507 that define “verified data,” defined as “assessment data from nationally-recognized, valid, peer-reviewed, and reliable sources that are externally produced,” for renewals of charter schools that fall within the low-performing and middle-performing categories.

State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond also acknowledged the challenges facing the state’s schools and shared news indicating that, while there is a long way to go, more students are engaged in learning. as of the end of October, there were about 750,000 students attending in-person classes in 21 mostly rural counties. In 20 counties serving about 1.7 million students, there is a mix of districts offering in-person instruction and distance learning. Now, only 17 counties, serve about 3.6 million students, report they will remain in full distance learning models until at least through Jan. 1, 2021. Read the full report »

California Latino School Boards Association Unity Conference begins Nov. 12

CLSB’s Annual Unity Conference will bring together school board members from across the state for candid discussions about what education leaders and elected officials are doing to remain resilient and thrive in this challenging environment. This year’s theme is Resistance and Resilience: La Lucha Sigue and features three half days of insights and networking with California’s champions of equity, ethnicity studies and PK-12 education — at no cost. The Saturday, Nov. 14 panel, “Uplifting Communities through Civic Engagement,” includes CSBA President Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez. Learn more and register »

Help balance your budget with the California Cash Reserve Program

The 2020–21 state budget relies heavily on deferrals to continue funding K-12 education at the same level as last year. To help local educational agencies balance budgets, CSBA offers support through the California School Cash Reserve Program. The program, provided in partnership with Dale Scott & Company; Piper Sandler; and Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe, creates an additional cash reserve to the general fund, helping guard against temporary cash flow shortages in a safe, cost-effective way. Participants issue Tax and Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANs) through a streamlined, pooled process so that districts don’t have to shoulder the burden alone. LEAs that would like to be included in the February pool must apply by Nov. 20, 2020. Learn more and apply »

COVID-19 resources

Stay up to date with the latest news and resources related to COVID-19 on CSBA’s dedicated webpage and with articles frequently posted on the newly redesigned CSBA blog.

View complete calendar