

March 21, 2023

The Honorable John Laird
Senate Budget Subcommittee #1 on Education
Legislative Office Building, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #2 on Education
1021 O St, Suite 4510
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Laird and Assemblymember McCarty,

I deeply appreciate your leadership and advocacy for investments to support learning and the social-emotional well-being of our students. As superintendent and a life-long educator at the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), I strive to foster a culture of equity, belonging, and thriving in our schools, where each member of the school community feels welcomed, respected and included, and where each student has equitable access to the supports and opportunities, they need to reach their full potential. This requires sustained and intentional investments. Towards this goal, SDUSD has leveraged state and federal funding to make focused investments in mental health, staffing, student engagement, and high quality universal transitional kindergarten. With this context in mind, we urge you to consider the following recommendations and feedback in response to the Governor's Proposed Budget ahead of the May Revise.

Avoid mid-year cuts to the Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Block Grant. The January budget proposes a retroactive \$1.2B cut to the Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Block Grant. Such a cut would be highly disruptive to current-year budgets and future planning and would impact critical programs for our students. Unlike Proposition 28 funding, which is primarily earmarked for hiring new arts teachers, the Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Block Grant provides districts with greater flexibility to meet the unique needs of their students. In addition to arts, music, and instructional materials, the statute authorizes districts to use this funding for operational costs, retirement, professional development to improve school climate, and COVID-19 safety. As federal COVID recovery funding expires, such discretionary funding is critical for school districts to continue to provide programs that have proven effective for supporting student outcomes. SDUSD has used federal ESSER III funds to support students academically and socio-emotionally by investing in transitional kindergarten educators, literacy acceleration reading specialists, counselors, family services assistants, health techs, and other staff. Flexible funding such as the Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Block Grant will help sustain these crucial investments past 2024, in addition to purchasing arts equipment and instructional materials.

Prioritize LCFF and Fully Fund the Statutory COLA. SDUSD supports the Governor’s proposal to prioritize funding for LCFF and fully fund the statutory COLA. The LCFF and COLA support SDUSD’s core programs for all students, as well as additional programs and services for our English learners, low-income students, and foster youth. This ongoing, flexible funding allows us to intentionally meet the unique needs of *all* of our students and make long-term investments to support student success. With rising inflation, the full statutory LCFF COLA is critical to address rising educational and operational costs at SDUSD, including personnel and other expenses that are essential to maintaining high-quality programs for our students. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, SDUSD has invested in the academic recovery and social-emotional wellbeing of our students by hiring literacy acceleration reading specialists, counselors, family services assistants, and other staff and establishing partnerships with mental health, expanded learning, and literacy acceleration providers. Ongoing, flexible funding through LCFF is critical to sustain these supports and services.

Align New Accountability Measures with Existing Practices. SDUSD appreciates the intent behind the proposed addition of focused goals and other changes to the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). Flexible funding and local control enable us to best serve our students, and we welcome accountability and transparency as an integral part of the state’s local control funding model that empowers districts to meet unique local needs. However, the LCAP is a public document, and we believe that streamlining the LCAP is critical for meaningful community engagement and transparency. Finally, we recommend that any mid-year update to the LCAP should be aligned with the existing timeline for interim budget updates, as this cohesion would provide a more complete picture of progress towards our LCAP goals.

Provide Clarity for Transition to 1:10 Transitional Kindergarten Ratios. SDUSD applauds the Governor’s continued commitment to expanding universal transitional kindergarten (TK) and supports the proposal to include funding for additional TK students with birthdays between February 2 and April 2 in Proposition 98. SDUSD has fully expanded universal TK, and we had over 4,300 TK students enroll this school year. Of these, 840 are in the cohort of TK students with birthdays between February 2 and April 2. Ensuring this growth is reflected in Proposition 98 funding is necessary to support high-quality, enriching programs for our youngest learners.

SDUSD recognizes the budgetary and workforce challenges of funding 1:10 staffing ratios in TK classrooms in the current budget year. **However, SDUSD urges the legislature to provide clarity on the timeline for implementing 1:10 staffing ratios.** This transition will require a concerted recruitment strategy that will take time to develop and implement to ensure that the district can attract educators that meet the minimum qualifications to teach in TK classrooms. A clear timeline will allow districts to strategically prepare for this transition.

Additionally, SDUSD supports the Governor’s commitment to sustain funding for major programs established in recent years, including the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, Universal Meals, Universal Transitional Kindergarten, and Community Schools.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests. Please feel free to contact my Director of Government Relations, Dr. Sierra Cook (SCook@sandi.net 510-529-9075), if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,



Lamont A. Jackson, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Public Education

cc: San Diego Unified State Legislative Delegation
Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair of the Senate Budget Committee
Honorable Phil Ting, Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee
Honorable Josh Newman, Chair of the Senate Education Committee
Honorable Al Muratsuchi, Chair of the Assembly Education Committee
Andrew Medina, Office of the President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins
Lynn Lorber, Senate Education Committee
Elisa Wynne, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Yong Salas, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Lenin Del Castillo, Senate Appropriations Committee
Misty Feusahrens, Office of the Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
Tanya Lieberman, Assembly Education Committee
Christian Griffith, Assembly Budget Committee
Erin Gabel, Assembly Budget Committee
Natasha Collins, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Ben Chida, Office of Governor Newsom
Nichole Muñoz-Murillo, Office of Governor Newsom
Brooks Allen, State Board of Education
Chris Ferguson, Department of Finance