

California schoolnews

Weekly Update

October 21, 2020

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COVID-19 update: Joint Assembly hearing highlights ongoing digital divide concerns and possible solutions



A joint Assembly committee hearing on Oct. 14 offered an array of perspectives on **the digital divide, which has long plagued California but is now being considered with new urgency due to the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread distance learning**. About 300,000 California students still lack internet adequate for distance learning; however, citing decreased survey participation, **State Superintendent of**

Public Instruction Tony Thurmond estimated that up to 1 million students could be lacking either computers or internet access.

Legislators from both committees shared enthusiasm and commitment for a comprehensive plan to address the divide via long-term funding through legislative efforts when the new session arrives in January 2021. In the last legislative session, however, **two bills to expand broadband access died** in the Capitol without even receiving a floor hearing. A third CSBA-supported proposal, to place a technology bond on the ballot to build out the necessary broadband infrastructure statewide and buy computing devices, wasn't allowed to be amended into a bill. **CSBA will continue to advocate at the state and federal level to help LEAs address barriers to broadband connectivity that have left many students at an academic disadvantage in the 21st century.** [Read more on the CSBA blog »](#)

In other COVID-19 developments:

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released [updated guidance Oct. 13 on what K-12 school administrators and public health officials should consider when testing students or staff.](#)** "Interim Considerations for Testing for K-12 School Administrators and Public Health Officials" provides a framework for determining who should be tested first and how such a screening should be incorporated into schools' overall strategies for controlling the spread of the virus. Recommendations include prioritizing symptomatic individuals and those who've had close contact with someone who may be ill with the virus. **Reflecting a shift away from previous CDC guidance, the update says schools in areas with higher risk of transmission may test broader pools of students and staff as a surveillance tool to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation efforts.** [Read more on the CSBA blog »](#)

New CSBA advisory provides guidance to boards struggling with school reopening negotiations



As governance teams plan when to reopen schools for in-person instruction, **school boards must consider the health and safety of all stakeholders, family circumstances, and students' academic, social and emotional needs.** There are no easy answers about how to balance these competing concerns, so it's no surprise that some members have found the bargaining process difficult. **In response to**

member requests for guidance, CSBA has released [an advisory document](#) describing the general types of protected and unprotected activities that employees can use in opposition to resuming in-person instruction. While this guidance is not a replacement for consultation with legal counsel, it should provide a useful reference in the event the bargaining process breaks down. [Read the advisory »](#)

CDE announces fundraising drive to support schools impacted by wildfires



Following CSBA's lead, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced Oct. 15 the launch of a **statewide fundraising effort to bolster aid for schools in regions ravaged by wildfires and other disasters.** The new California Department of Education Emergency Response Fund **will support the rapid generation of resources to schools facing unprecedented loss and uncertainty**

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, power outages and poor air quality. Those wishing to donate to the CDE Emergency Response Fund can visit its [GoFundMe page](#). **Funds will be used for essentials such as food, water, computers, internet hotspots and personal protective equipment.**

The CDE effort follows CSBA's **2020 Fire Relief Fund, begun in early September, for the purpose of generating ongoing support (via the American Red Cross)** to support communities that have suffered damage from wildfires — in particular, the state's public school students and those who work to serve and support them. [Donations can be made here »](#)

PACE brief explains California school funding through a series of easy-to-understand charts



Despite being home to the technology, entertainment and other lucrative industries, **California's education funding has long been insufficient to meet educational goals and address the needs of students.** Many of these students live in low-income households, struggle with homelessness, or are English learners or students with disabilities — all groups that often need additional supports and services at school.

"California's Education Funding Crisis Explained in 12 Charts," released Oct. 20 by Policy Analysis for California Education aims to simplify what can be a complex topic for board members and community stakeholders. [Read the brief »](#)

School crisis communication services available statewide through new CSBA partnership



Board members and school and district leaders can now **access around-the-clock expert assistance when dealing with situations requiring quick, clear and accurate information.** **CSBA has partnered with the Donovan Group — a communication, public relations and marketing firm that focuses exclusively on public K-12 education — to ensure all California's local educational**

agencies have access to experts well-versed in handling crisis situations large and small. The urgent and crisis communication service includes live counsel over the phone, with the Donovan Group team helping school leaders gather the facts, determine who they need to reach first and identify the best communication channels. The firm will also provide custom talking points, parent letters, news releases, social media posts and other written content, working with school leaders to revise or fine-tune it as needed.

"As any education leader knows, an urgent or crisis situation can arise at any moment. While this has always been the case, it has never been more true than now, during the COVID-19 pandemic," said CSBA CEO & Executive Director Vernon M. Billy. **"When your school or district is dealing with one of these situations, you must communicate quickly and**

accurately to address the situation and keep your stakeholders informed. That's why we are so excited to partner with the Donovan Group to offer this new service to our members, giving them a much-needed resource to help communicate when time is a key factor." [Learn more »](#)

Upcoming webinar highlights county perspectives on addressing student mental health issues



As district and county office of education officials examine how best to operate schools in 2020–21 — including distance learning or reopening for in-person and/or hybrid models — they must **consider the mental health needs of students and how they can be addressed to enable successful learning.** Communities and families have been hit hard by the pandemic, and are likely facing increased stress due to the changes,

fear and uncertainty caused by illness, isolation, impending homelessness, job and healthcare loss. **Children Now and the Steinberg Institute announced an Oct. 29 webinar, “Supporting Student Mental Health: A County Perspective,”** in which attendees will hear from Sacramento and Fresno County representatives on how they are supporting student mental health. Speakers include Sacramento County Superintendent David Gordon, Deputy Director of Clinical Operations for Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health Susan Holt, Executive Director of California’s Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission Toby Ewing and more. [Register now »](#)

86.5 percent reduction in over-identification for special education



SI&A has a different path for teachers and student support teams to realistically manage prereferral interventions in general education.

As special education costs and enrollment rise, so does the need for general education support. Now K-12 school districts can give their teachers practical solutions for struggling students whether online or in the classroom.

Partnering4StudentSuccess consistently

manages effective interventions to decrease the number of ineligible referrals. It's collaborative problem-solving made easy. [Learn more »](#)

California School Cash Reserve Program  **DON'T GET CAUGHT SHORT ON FUNDS IN FEBRUARY FROM STATE DEFERRALS.** Secure funds for your LEA and apply to our Cash Reserve Program by **November 20, 2020**

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](#).

Virtual events

2020 Annual Education Conference
Dec. 3-4 | [Register here](#)

*All October in-person events have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*All Masters in Governance courses through Nov. 14, 2020 are sold out.

[View complete calendar](#)

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