

# The Bottom Line

The definitive guide on California school business & finance for 2023-24



*The foremost authority in school business since 1928.*

Dear Esteemed Colleagues,

As stewards of California's educational future, it is imperative to grasp the intricacies of public school finances that pave the way for the educational journeys of nearly six million students statewide. The financial structure of our schools, shaped by the pivotal choices of our state and community leaders, serves as the backbone for fostering learning and growth opportunities.

The California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) presents "The Bottom Line," an essential resource designed to enhance leadership and informed decision-making in the realm of education finance and business. This comprehensive guide features:

- 1** An analysis of California public school funding mechanisms, including Proposition 98 and the Local Control Funding Formula, along with an evaluation of school facilities funding.
- 2** An exploration of contemporary issues impacting school business and finance.
- 3** An overview of the fundamental components of local school district budgeting.

In recent times, our schools have navigated through some of the most trying periods, recalibrating for a post-pandemic reality. In this context, recognizing these key facts is crucial:

- Our state's student demographic remains the most varied nationwide, with many facing socioeconomic challenges, language barriers, disabilities, and housing insecurities.
- While a recent funding increase presents a unique chance to enhance educational quality, we must concurrently address persistent challenges such as escalating costs and the imperative to support the comprehensive wellbeing of our students.
- A critical shortage of qualified educators and essential staff further strains our education system, highlighting the need for sustainable solutions.

Understanding the financial underpinnings is vital to the daily success of our students across all classrooms.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the educators, staff, leaders, and school business professionals throughout California for their relentless dedication to serving our students and communities.

With gratitude,

Sincerely,



Tina Douglas, President



Tatia Davenport, CEO & Executive Director



The foremost authority in school business since 1928.

# 1 How are California public schools funded?

## What are the main sources of funding for local schools?

State, local, and federal dollars support California’s nearly six million students in K-12 public schools. Since 1978, the largest source of general operating funding stems from the state budget General Fund. That’s a significant change from the prior years, when most school funding was generated from local property tax revenues.

Funding from the state typically flows to what are called **Local Education Agencies (LEAs)**, which are school districts, county offices of education, and most charter schools. These LEAs then allocate funds for individual schools and services.

## How is the state’s total allocation to schools determined?

Proposition 98, passed by voters in 1998, continues to drive the amount for our overall funding the state sends to our K-12 schools and community colleges each year.

Proposition 98 uses a complex formula to set a minimum level for funding (about 40% of state revenues) that ideally scales with the economy. However, when the state’s overall tax revenue growth is low, education funding scales proportionately – with the understanding that it will be restored when revenues rebound. (With a two-thirds vote, the Legislature may also take the extreme action of suspending the Proposition 98 funding requirement.)

Instead of serving as a minimum, Proposition 98 has most often been treated as a maximum by the legislature which has rarely allocated more than the required minimum amount to schools.

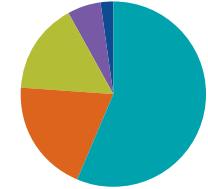
The state budget’s heavy reliance on state income tax, as opposed to local property tax revenues, to support schools increases potential revenue volatility. Property values (and therefore property tax receipts) tend to vary moderately with economic cycles, as opposed to state income tax receipts, which are fully exposed to the booms and busts of the stock market.

## How much state funding do schools receive in total?

The 2023-24 enacted budget includes a total funding of \$129.2 billion (federal, state and local) in K-12 education programs, with a per-pupil spending rate of \$23,791. Proposition 98 funding is estimated at \$108.3 billion, with a TK-12 per-pupil funding of \$17,661.\* As revenue amounts are finalized at the end of each fiscal year, the Proposition 98 amount is adjusted for prior years. Over the past three years, these adjustments reflected greater than expected revenues, thus, even more one-time funding for schools.

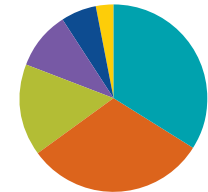
\* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/eb/ba2023-24.asp>

2023-24 State General Fund revenue sources



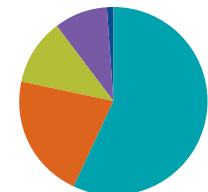
- 57% Personal income tax
- 20% Corporate tax
- 16% Sales use tax
- 5% Other
- 2% Insurance tax

2023-24 State General Fund expenditures



- 34% K-12 education
- 31% Human services/health
- 16% Other
- 10% Higher education
- 6% Corrections & rehab
- 3% Natural resources

Main source of funding for school districts



- 58% State funds
- 21% Local property taxes
- 11% Federal funds
- 9% Other funds
- 1% Lottery

# How LCFF works

1

All districts receive a **BASE GRANT** for each student. The Base Grant is larger for grades 9-12 than for other grades.

2

If more than 55% of children in the district are higher needs, the district receives an extra 65% of the base grant for each student beyond the 55% threshold. This is called a **CONCENTRATION GRANT**. These grants recognize that it costs school districts more to effectively address the challenges of high-needs students concentrated in high-poverty communities.

3

Districts receive an additional 20% **SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT** per student for students with higher needs – identified as children in poverty, English learners, and foster and homeless youth.

## What determines how state funds are allocated to school districts, county offices of education or charter schools?

School revenue is set mainly through the **Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)**, a state law adopted in 2013. The LCFF allocates the same per-student Base Grant amount to each school district, plus additional levels of funding (Supplemental and Concentration Grants) for each district to support the needs of particular student groups in achieving the state’s academic standards – specifically, foster youth, English learners, and students from low-income families. LCFF also promotes greater local flexibility and stakeholder engagement in budget planning and decision-making. **While the LCFF determines how state funds are allocated to local districts and county offices of education, the Proposition 98 formula still largely determines how much state dollars goes out to schools.**

Under the LCFF, total per-student funding amounts vary district to district, dependent upon the number of English Learners, income eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and foster youth pupils. This reflects the state’s fundamental commitment to fiscal equity. Total funding amounts may also differ between neighboring districts due to local revenue sources particular to those districts. Additionally, about 10% of the state’s school districts are considered Community Funded Schools and receive different levels of revenues based primarily on local property taxes.

## How much flexibility do schools have to utilize funds they receive?

A philosophy in adopting the LCFF is that local educators, leaders and their communities are equipped to address the needs of their students. Thus, LCFF funding is considered “discretionary” – as opposed to the prior school funding system in which many funds were allocated to districts with restrictions for how they could be used and intensive compliance reporting requirements documenting their use.

While districts now have greater flexibility to decide how to utilize their LCFF funds, **the past couple of years have witnessed a noticeable swing back by the state towards more categorical or grant-based funding for which districts must apply and/or use for certain purposes.**

Despite the flexibility established in LCFF, the amount of actual, discretionary money available from year to year for school districts can be very limited. The Base Grant must primarily support core expenses for teacher and staff salaries and health benefits, which account for the largest percentage of school expenses (typically 75-80% of a district’s budget). Fixed costs for categories such as utilities and maintenance must also come out of the base. The state has also increased the obligation of districts to fund retirement and pension expenses. Fiscal pressure against the Base Grant, when coupled with inflation, are increasing faster than the growth in school districts’ annual, ongoing LCFF base revenues and cost-of-living adjustment.

## How do schools “count” students for funding purposes?

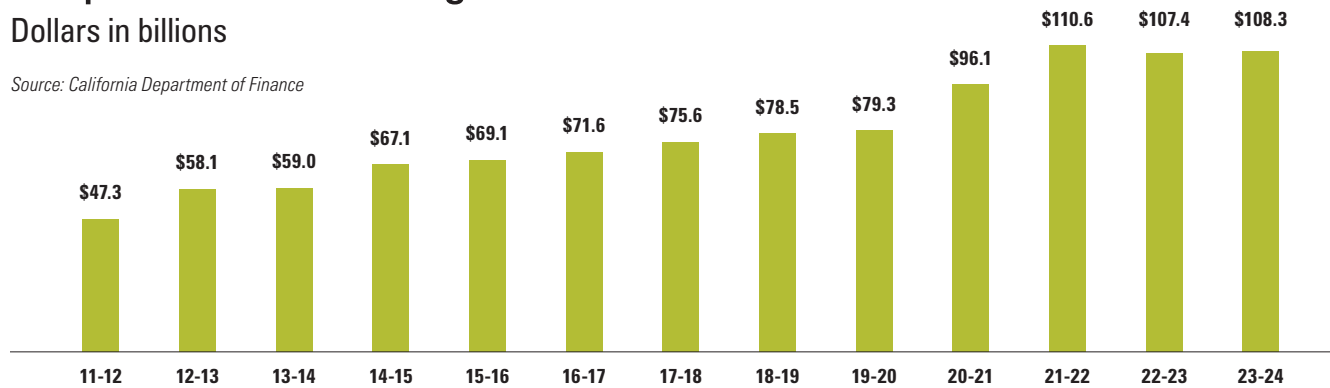
California’s funding formula is based on allocating an amount per student, but how do schools count the number of students they serve for these purposes? Currently, districts must report on the number of students enrolled (that is, all students signed up to attend school), minus the daily average number of absent students.

This results in what is called the Average Daily Attendance (ADA), which the per student allocation is based on. In effect, districts only receive funds for the number of students who show up on a given day – not the total number of students in the school. This is problematic from a school business perspective because most of a district’s fixed costs, such as for teachers and staff, need to be present each day even if some students are absent. California is one of only six states that bases its per-pupil funding on ADA. A bill proposed in early 2023 by Senator Anthony Portantino, Senate Bill 98, would change this and base K-12 district funding on enrollment, rather than ADA.

## Proposition 98 funding: 2011-12 to 2023-24

Dollars in billions

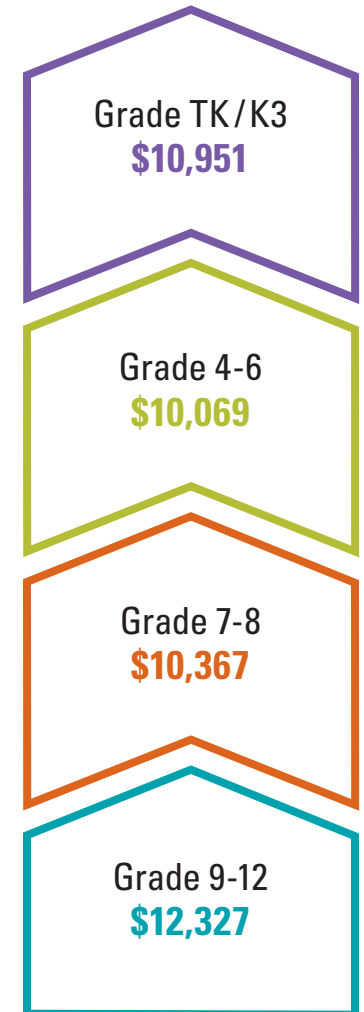
Source: California Department of Finance



## Adjustments to one-time resources

Program	2023 Adjustment	Expenditure Date
Learning Recovery Emergency Block Grant: Final report due September 2029 or all funding must be returned to the state.	\$1.1 billion reduction, with the intent to restore funding beginning 2025-2026	2027-28 fiscal year
Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Discretionary Block Grant	\$200 million dollar decrease, bringing total to \$3.3 billion	2025-26 fiscal year
Zero-Emission School Buses	\$1 billion delay to the 2024-25 and 2025-26 fiscal years	
Preschool, TK and Full-Day Kindergarten Facilities Grant Program	Intended \$550 million delayed to 2024-25	

## 2023-24 Base Grant with add-ons by grade level



Note: The Base Grant for grades K-3 receives a 10.4% increase for smaller average class sizes and grades 9-12 receives a 2.6% increase for Career Technical Education costs.

# Timing of local accountability & engagement



**LATE SUMMER - FALL**  
District engages the community to solicit input on the LCAP. Assess student needs using the CA School Dashboard.  
**Suggested**



**WINTER**  
District creates first draft of updated LCAP, includes community input. Analyze data from CA School Dashboard.  
**Suggested**



**SPRING**  
District presents proposed plan to parent advisory committees for feedback and input.  
**Suggested**



**SPRING**  
District responds in writing to feedback from parent advisory committees and incorporates feedback into plan.  
**Suggested**



**JULY 1**  
School board adopts plan by July 1st in a public hearing.  
**Required by Statute**



**OCTOBER 8**  
County office of education must approve district LCAPs by October 8.  
**Required by Statute**

## What is a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)?

As part of the LCFF, school districts and charter schools must adopt a **Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)**. In creating this three-year plan, districts must consult with teachers, principals, administrators, other school staff, and local bargaining units. They are also required to engage with parents and students when developing and updating their LCAPs, including seeking advice from a parent advisory committee and an English learner parent advisory committee.

Legislation enacted in 2022, requires school districts serving middle or high school students and county offices of education (COEs), by July 1, 2024, to either include two students on an existing parent advisory committee or establish a student advisory committee for purposes of developing and adopting the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Based on a template developed by the State Board of Education, each district LCAP must identify goals and strategies to achieve those goals in each of eight state-identified priority areas, as well as locally determined priorities. LCAPs also must describe how districts plan to utilize additional funding from the LCFF targeted for students with higher needs to increase or improve services for those students and close achievement and opportunity gaps.

After districts' Boards adopt their LCAPs, the plans must also be reviewed and approved by the county superintendent in coordination with the approval of the district budget.

## Eight State Priorities

In the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), school districts, in consultation with their communities, must develop goals and specific actions, as well as measurable student outcomes, for each of the eight statewide priorities and any additional locally defines priorities. These priorities are set by state statute.

**Priority 1 – Basic services.** Providing all students with access to fully credentialed teachers in their subject areas, as well as instructional materials that align with state standards and safe, properly maintained school facilities.

**Priority 2 – Implementation of state standards.** Ensuring school programs and services enable all students, including English learners, to access California's academic content and performance standards, including California's State Standards for English language arts and math, and Next Generation Science Standards and English Language Development Standards.

**Priority 7 – Course access.** Ensuring all students have access to a broad course of study in all required subject areas including math, social science, science, visual and performing arts, health, P.E., and CTE, that prepare them for college and careers.

**Priority 5 – Student engagement.** Providing students with engaging programs and course work that keeps them in school, as measured in part by attendance rates, dropout rates and graduation rates.

**Priority 3 – Parent involvement.** Efforts by the school district and schools to seek input from all parents, and to engage parents in decision-making, as well as promoting parent participation in programs that target the needs of their students.

**Priority 6 – School climate.** Factors both inside and outside the classroom that impact student success such as health, safety, student discipline and school connectedness, as measured in part by suspension and expulsion rates, and surveys of students, teachers, and parents.

**Priority 4 – Student achievement.** Improving achievement and outcomes for all students as measured in multiple ways such as test scores, English proficiency and college- and career-readiness.

**Priority 8 – Other student outcomes.** Measuring other important indicators of student performance in all required areas of study.

## Are charter schools funded differently?

Most California charter schools are authorized by the local school district or county office of education. Similar to a school district, a charter school's per-student allocation is determined largely through the LCFF, although some slightly different rules apply related to the concentration grants calculation. Some charter schools receive their allocation directly from the state, rather than through a school district. Each charter school must adopt a Local Control and Accountability Plan.

## What about the California State Lottery?

The California Lottery is a consistent but modest source of funding for schools. For most of the past decade, the lottery has provided slightly more than 1% of total school funding, with 2% the high mark. In 2020-21, overall record sales of \$8.4 billion generated an estimated \$1.86 billion for schools, or about \$150 per student in funds to be used for any purpose, plus about \$49 per student specifically for textbook purchases. (The cost for a typical textbook may exceed \$150.)

## Who holds districts accountable?

District staff, parents, student community stakeholders: provide input and feedback on district's priorities.

District Board of Education: adopts LCAP/Annual Update and budget, requests technical assistance.

County Office of Education: approves or disapproves LCAP and provides technical assistance.

State Superintendent of Instruction (SPI): intervenes in districts that fail to improve outcomes of three or more student subgroups in one or more priorities in three out of four school years.

LCAPs must include services that target each major student subgroup, including:

- Racial/ethnic subgroups
- Low-income students
- English learners
- Students with disabilities
- Foster youth
- Homeless youth



## Federal COVID-19 funding

The timeline for spending the final rounds of funding runs through 2024. ESSER funds were allocated similarly to most other federal Title I funds based on the percentage of low-income students at schools, although all schools were eligible for at least some funding. On average, these funds amount to a small percentage (roughly \$3,850 per pupil nationally or about 6%) of districts' annual operating budgets when spread out over the full period of time they can be expended, between March 2020 and September 2024. (ESSER III) requires school districts to approve detailed plans for addressing learning loss and recovery as the nation emerges from the pandemic, and to take actions to support overall student wellbeing. This encompasses the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of each student.

## How much funding does California receive from the federal government?

The federal government allocated \$23.2 billion in one-time aid in 2020–21 and another \$9.2 billion in 2021–22. Federal funds accounted for 23% of K–12 funding in 2020–21 and 12% in 2021–22. In most non-recession years, the federal share is only 6% to 9%.

The largest federal contribution is for child nutrition programs, followed by programs that support high concentrations of low-income students, the largest of which is known as Title I. States that accept federal dollars must comply with federal requirements, most significantly as stipulated in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Additionally, federal funds go towards supporting districts in serving students with disabilities, English learners, schools impacted by military bases and other facilities, and for improving teacher quality. Federal funds also support related services for early learning and afterschool programs.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7.3 million (as of school year 2021-22) eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, up to 21 years old – about 15% of all public schools.

## Community funded local school districts

Some school districts – about 10% of the 1,000 districts in California – are funded primarily through local property taxes, rather than state funds. These are called COMMUNITY FUNDED or LOCALLY FUNDED School Districts (sometimes also known as “Basic Aid” districts.)

Here's how they work: Once the state calculates the annual allocation for school districts using the Local Control Funding Formula, local property taxes first are counted towards meeting that allocation, then the state makes up the rest from the State General Fund. However, some districts' local property tax revenues are sufficient to meet their total LCFF amount. These districts keep all of their local property tax revenues for education purposes.

From the state, they receive only the minimum Basic Aid funding required by the State Constitution – \$120 per student – or as guaranteed through the Minimum State Aid provision of the LCFF. Community funded districts are found throughout the state and have student populations that vary. There are historically more community funded districts when education funding is being cut by the state and fewer when the state sets higher funding levels for education.

Source: School Services of California, Inc.

*Source: School Services of California, Inc.*



## How are the costs for building new school or modernizing facilities paid for?

Both the state and local school districts contribute to the cost of facilities, largely by issuing bonds. In addition, developer fees also contribute to school facilities. The state provides districts with financial support for new school construction and modernization projects through the School Facility Program, which provides grants to school districts that cover half the cost of new construction projects and a larger share for modernization. The State Allocation Board administers the facilities program, and the Office of Public School Construction supports and serves as staff of the Allocation Board. The State Allocation Board membership is composed of the Director of Finance, Director of the Department of General Services, Superintendent of Public Instruction, three members of the Senate, three members of the Assembly, and one governor appointee.

Local communities also contribute to building and modernizing school facilities. Local school districts finance school buildings primarily with revenue raised through local general obligation bond elections and developer fees. Local school bonds have traditionally been popular with voters. Between 2008-2020, 73% of measures were approved; however, the passage rate dipped to 51% in 2020. These bonds are repaid through local property tax surcharges.

School facilities funding tends to be higher in districts with the highest median household income and lower in districts with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged or nonwhite students. However, school districts that meet financial hardship criteria are eligible to receive up to 100% of state financial hardship grants. It is important to note that districts that are not able to pass bonds have significant facilities needs, plus, even districts that have passed bonds struggle to accomplish their facilities goals and provide equal opportunities for students because bonding capacity is tied to the value of properties in the district.

## What is the state's overall estimated school facilities need?

California's public schools serve nearly six million students at about 10,500-plus schools and in more than 300,000 classrooms. In 2017, it was estimated that 70% of those were more than 25 years old. The California State Auditor estimated in a 2022 report that the state will need to provide \$7.4 billion in funding to meet existing and anticipated modernization requests over the next five years. Modernization projects include making facilities ADA accessible, lighting and electrical systems, air conditioning, plumbing, roofs, and technology, among others.

Looking ahead even farther, researchers estimated the total need from the state and local communities for maintaining school facilities, including modernization and new construction costs, at more than \$100 billion in the coming decade. About 60% of that will be needed for school maintenance and modernization. Several of the state's new initiatives, such as expanding transitional kindergarten, and community schools create additional facilities needs.

## Funding for the School Facilities Program

To partially address the need, especially in the absence of a new statewide school bond, the enacted 2022-23 budget allocated \$1.3 billion in state general fund (Non-Proposition 98) funding in 2022-23. In 2023-24, \$875 million was added, with \$875 million also projected for 2024-25 to augment the School Facilities Program.

**\$1.3**

billion in 2022-23

**\$1.96**

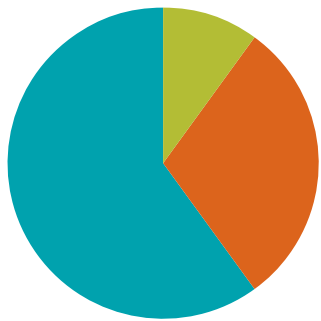
billion in 2023-24

**\$875**

million in 2024-25

# Special Education funding

Special Education in California is funded through a combination of federal, state and local funds. Special education funding sources for 2021-22 total \$18.3 billion.



**60%**

Local funds

**31%**

State funds

**9%**

Federal funds

## Special Education in California

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state law require that students with exceptional needs, ages birth to 22 years old, be provided a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. From its inception in 1974, IDEA authorized federal funding for up to 40% of average per-pupil spending nationwide to pay a portion of what it costs to provide special education services for students with disabilities. Yet, federal funding has never reached full funding, leaving school districts to cover the costs.

Since the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was enacted in 2013, California consolidated most state categorical programs into district base grants in order to move decision making to the local level. However, Special Education funding was preserved as California's largest funding stream operating mostly outside the Local Control Funding Formula governance framework, although outcomes for students with disabilities are to be addressed in the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and additional alignment is intended through a forthcoming IDEA Addendum to the LCAP.

## Special Education funding adequacy

- AB 602 allocates funds based on the total number of students attending within the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), not the number of students with disabilities.
- This removes any financial incentive so that students with special education services would not be overidentified. While the AB 602 funding model was historically both unequitable and underfunded, between 2019-20 and 2022-23, California took important steps towards equity by providing nearly all students with the same special education funding rate; as of 2022-23, only two SELPAs have a local funding rate higher than the statewide AB 602 base rate.
- During this time period, the state increased funding for students with disabilities by more than 60%, significantly increased funding for students with low-incidence disabilities, and provided additional reimbursement for high-cost special education placements.
- However, due to the cost of education in general and special education in particular, local general fund dollars have been covering an increasing share of special education costs.
- Additionally, the percentage of students identified for special education services has increased to over the past few decades from around 11% to nearly 14% of the student population, and the percentage of students with high-cost needs such as autism has also significantly increased.
- AB 602 does not fund preschool programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities; the current system for funding the state's youngest learners with disabilities is based on which LEAs were serving infants pre-Proposition 13, the gradual evolution of regional center responsibilities in the 1980s, and a small pot of federal IDEA funds in the 1990s.

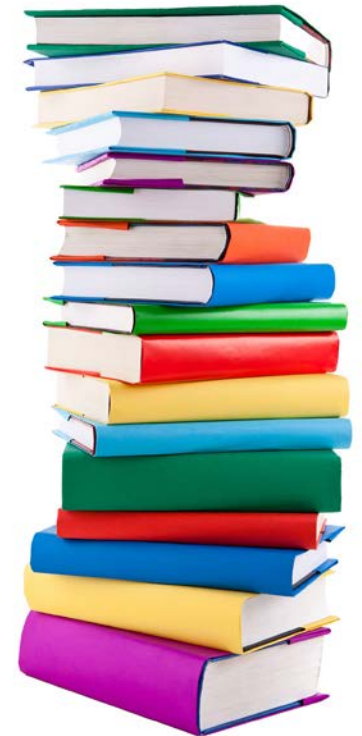
## 2 Current issues in school finance & business

### What are some of the state's major new education-related initiatives?

Historic levels of state revenues in the past three years have enabled the governor and legislature to launch or expand several major initiatives aimed at helping schools address students' needs.

Many of these initiatives reflect a holistic strategy to serving students, often referred to as a "whole child" approach. The initiatives allocate billions of dollars in a combination of one-time and ongoing funding that must be used for specific purposes. Equitable access to supports and services for children and students with the most barriers to overcome is prioritized in many of the programs. Additionally, some allocations are in the form of grants for which districts must apply. Major new or expanded initiatives include the following:

- **Transitional Kindergarten (TK)** – Promotes school readiness by expanding access to all four-year-old children and increasing access to full-day, full-year preschool programs
- **Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P)** – Expands the learning day for students and increases academic and enrichment activities through before and after-school and summer programs, especially for students in low-income communities
- **Universal Free Meals** – All California schools must provide one free breakfast and one free lunch per school day to any student requesting a meal, as opposed to current practice where mostly only students eligible for free meals based on family income levels are served.
- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** – Supports the physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students, in part by increasing access to more programs or services at or connected to school sites
- **Community Schools** – Public schools that serve as hubs for integrating academic and student supports; expanding and enriching learning time and opportunities; actively engaging families and communities; and promoting collaborative leadership.
- **Addressing Staff Shortages** – Recruitment, training, and retention of teachers and other staff to solve for critical shortages
- **Zero-Emission Buses** – Commencing January 1, 2035, all newly purchased or contracted school buses of a local educational agency (LEA) must be zero-emission vehicles.



# CalPERS, CalSTRS and unfunded liabilities

There are two major pension funds for employees in K–12 education in California: the California State Teachers Retirement System (CalSTRS) and the California Public Employees’ Retirement System (CalPERS).

**CalSTRS**, which administers pension benefits for teachers, principals, and other certificated employees such as speech therapists, school psychologists, and nurses, is the nation’s second-largest public employee pension fund.

**CalPERS** provides pension benefits for classified employees such as classroom aides, school security officers, and food services, maintenance, and clerical staff. To provide benefits to their members, CalSTRS and CalPERS funds rely on contributions from members, employers, and the state, as well as income from investments.

Unfunded pension costs are the difference between the benefits promised to employees and the current savings available in the funds to meet those financial commitments. It is this unfunded liability that has driven dramatic increases in the amount that school districts must contribute to the funds.

## Is declining enrollment an issue for California schools and why does it matter?

California’s public K-12 school system has entered a steeper period of declining enrollments. By 2027-28, statewide enrollment is projected to fall nearly 7%, compared to 1.5% over the preceding decade, primarily due to low birth rates. Enrollment declines accelerated in many parts of the state since the pandemic. While not all districts are experiencing declines, enrollment in about half of all counties is declining, with larger counties experiencing more – and enrollment decline is anticipated to be persistent over the next 10 years. Districts with declining enrollment face increased fiscal pressures because state funding is tied to the number of students they serve. While districts can respond by “downsizing,” this does not necessarily lead to budget savings because certain costs are fixed and certain “economies of scale” for services and staffing are lost.

## Are there some ways to mitigate the fiscal impact of declining enrollment?

In recognition of the dramatic impact on school district funding, the state enacted two policy changes to cushion school districts from some more immediate fiscal impacts of declining enrollment. School districts will be allowed to use the greater of current year or prior year average daily attendance (ADA) or an average of the three prior year’s average daily attendance to calculate their LCFF funding. In addition, all classroom-based local educational agencies (districts, county offices of education and charter schools), that can demonstrate they provided independent study offerings in 2021-22, will be funded at the greater of their current year average daily attendance or their current year enrollment adjusted for pre-COVID-19 absence rates in the 2021-22 fiscal year. It is true that based on Proposition 98, declining enrollment overall could boost statewide per pupil spending by about \$100 per student in each of the next several years. However, a loss in enrollment of 200 students could translate into nearly \$3 million in lost funding for some districts, whereas an additional \$100 for each of those students would add up to only \$20,000.

## What pressures do pension costs create?

For California – as for many other states – the rising cost of pension obligations presents a serious challenge, particularly for school districts. Despite significant overall increases in state funding to schools, some districts are or may soon be in the difficult position of making budget cuts due to the need to fulfill rising pension obligations. School districts are primarily funded by the state based on the set LCFF formula – but their pension contribution rates for CalSTRS, which covers retired teachers, and CalPERS, which covers other retired public employees, are set by the Legislature. Thus, districts have little ability locally to control these increased pension costs. Since 2013, school districts’ pension contributions have more than doubled, from 8.3% to 19.1% in 2020-21. Employer contribution rates for CalSTRS and CalPERS are scheduled to increase.

## Districts' pension contribution rates and amounts

Dollars in millions

	Actual			Projections <sup>a</sup>			
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<b>Contribution Rates</b>							
<b>CalSTRS</b>	17.1%	16.2%	16.9%	19.1%	19.1%	19.1%	19.1%
<b>CalPERS</b>	19.7%	20.7%	22.9%	25.4%	27.0%	28.1%	28.8%
<b>Contribution Amounts</b>							
<b>CalSTRS<sup>b</sup></b>							
School districts	\$5,183	\$5,045	\$5,413	\$6,160	\$6,376	\$6,600	\$6,830
Community colleges	438	427	464	515	533	551	571
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(\$5,621)</b>	<b>(\$5,472)</b>	<b>(\$5,877)</b>	<b>(\$6,675)</b>	<b>(\$6,909)</b>	<b>(\$7,151)</b>	<b>(\$7,401)</b>
<b>CalPERS<sup>c</sup></b>							
School districts	\$2,392	\$2,625	\$2,982	\$3,277	\$3,586	\$3,836	\$4,042
Community colleges	415	456	522	574	628	672	708
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(\$2,807)</b>	<b>(\$3,081)</b>	<b>(\$3,504)</b>	<b>(\$3,851)</b>	<b>(\$4,214)</b>	<b>(\$4,508)</b>	<b>(\$4,750)</b>
<b>Total District Contributions</b>							
School districts	\$7,575	\$7,670	\$8,395	\$9,438	\$9,962	\$10,436	\$10,873
Community colleges	853	883	986	1,088	1,161	1,223	1,278
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$8,428</b>	<b>\$8,553</b>	<b>\$9,381</b>	<b>\$10,526</b>	<b>\$11,123</b>	<b>\$11,659</b>	<b>\$12,151</b>

<sup>a</sup> Projections are based on CalSTRS' and CalPERS' most recent actuarial valuations. Rates for 2022-23 are finalized, but contribution amounts for 2022-23 are estimates. Rates and amounts for subsequent years will be updated based on actual teacher payroll and investment returns, among other factors.

<sup>b</sup> Total contribution amounts are LAO estimates based on creditable compensation. Share of contributions from schools and community colleges through 2022-23 are based on the split of payroll from CalSTRS' creditable compensation reports. Thereafter, we assume the 2022-23 share is constant. Excludes payments made by the state on behalf of employers.

<sup>c</sup> Contribution amounts are estimates provided by CalPERS. Excludes payments made by the state on behalf of employers.

CalSTRS = California State Teachers' Retirement System. CalPERS = California Public Employees' Retirement System.

## What are the main expenditures in school district budgets?

Teacher and staff salaries, which go towards providing instruction and instructional support to students, plus health and welfare benefits, make up about 75-80% of expenses in most districts.



**75-80%**  
Teacher & Staff salaries

## 3 Basics of local school district budgets

### What exactly is a school district budget?

The budget is the guiding financial plan for meeting the local school district governing board's goals and objectives for the year. It represents how much a local district estimates it will receive in income/revenue, and the maximum expenditures authorized by the board, and the balance (negative or positive) when the year is done.

Because education funding levels are essentially up for debate every year as part of the annual state budget process, school districts rely on projections but actually do not know for certain the amount of funding to be received until the state budget is approved by the end of June. Therefore, it is understood that:

- Local district budgets change and need to be revised.
- The budget should represent the policy and conceptual priorities of the organization and must inform resource allocation related to the implementation of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).
- The budget should be balanced, and if there is deficit spending, it must be explained, and a plan developed to return the budget to a balanced state.

Budgeting in school districts is based on multi-year projections. Given that,

- A district must have the ability to accurately reflect its net ending balance and maintain a reserve for economic uncertainties throughout the budget monitoring process.
- The long-term impact of current decisions must be assessed and must be multi-year planned (current plus two years).
- The district should have tools and procedures that ensure an early warning of any discrepancies between the budgeted and actual revenues and expenses.



## What factors impact a local budget? What are the main challenges for school districts in balancing budgets and maximizing the amounts available for student support and services?

While every school district is unique, various state and local factors can be major challenges to local district budgeting, such as:

- Enrollment uncertainties
- ADA (average daily attendance)
- The number of students living in poverty, English learners, and foster and homeless youth
- The state's volatile tax structure (highly dependent on personal income tax)
- Collective bargaining costs
- Increased share of state pension costs that districts/employers are required to pay
- Rising costs to serve students with disabilities
- Health and welfare benefits for employees
- Rising minimum wage costs
- Utilities costs
- Staffing formulas
- "Step and column," which defines compensation based on years of service/ continuing education credits as negotiated by districts and their labor unions
- Federal funding uncertainties from year to year
- Other unavoidable expenses

## Who oversees local school district budgets?

Elected local governing boards approve school district budgets. State law (often referred to by its original authorizing legislation, as "AB 1200") sets additional financial standards for school districts and includes mechanisms to ensure adequate oversight. County superintendents of education are required to review and approve the annual budgets of each local school district. Districts must certify if they are able to meet their financial obligations for the current plus two additional years. County superintendents of education validate those self-certifications.

AB 1200 and subsequent related legislation was enacted to help school districts avoid insolvency; it is a progressive law and empowers county superintendents with fiscal oversight to follow a progression of interventions when necessary, ranging from information and collaborative assistance to lowering a self-certification from "positive" to either "qualified" or "negative" to taking more stringent actions such as appointing a fiscal advisor.

## What are the three major certifications of a district budget?

Under the provisions of AB 1200, the budget is certified either:

**Positive.** District will complete the year with a positive fund and cash balance; the district is solvent and can meet its obligations.

**Qualified.** District may not complete the year with a positive fund or cash balance; financial indicators require scrutiny/modest intervention.

**Negative.** District will not complete the year with a positive fund or cash balance; aggressive corrective action is required.



## Can local districts raise additional revenues?

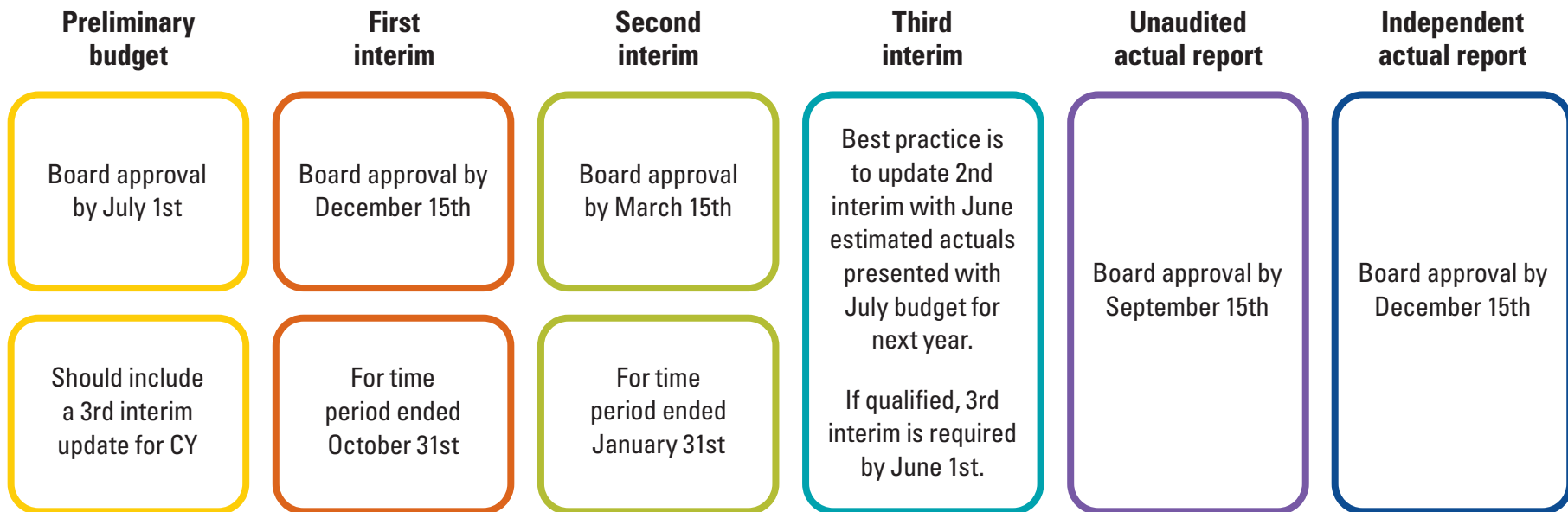
California law severely limits local school districts' revenue-raising authority compared with most other states, and also compared with what was possible in the state prior to the 1970s. Under current state law, districts can augment the local funding of their schools in just a few ways, most notably private donations (such as through local community foundations), parcel taxes (which require a two-thirds vote to assess a flat fee on each parcel of property, no matter what its size or value), and the seldom-used sales tax for schools (which also requires a two-thirds vote and can be done only at the county level).

Taken together, these revenue sources currently generate a very small portion of total K–12 funding in the state, though in some communities they provide substantial amounts per pupil. About one in 10 school districts, primarily districts in the Bay Area, have approved additional taxes.

By contrast, cities and counties in California have the power to raise general taxes, primarily the sales tax, with a simple majority approval, as opposed to the two-thirds requirement for school districts. The one exception is local construction bonds, which school districts can pass with a 55% majority vote of the community. These bond proceeds must only be utilized for construction and modernization projects outlined in ballot language and cannot be utilized to offset rising General Fund expenditures. It would take a constitutional amendment that either the legislature or voters, through an initiative, places on the ballot to provide local districts with more local revenue-raising capacity.

## Basic reporting cycle for schools

The budget is a continuing cycle of planning, updating and reporting. Updates are made to the initial budget through the fiscal year, and officially adopted at the First Period Interim Financial Report (December) and the Second Period Interim Financial Report (March).



## About CASBO

The California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) is the Golden State's foremost authority on school business. Founded in 1928, the non-profit serves more than 25,000 members by promoting excellence and professionalism in all aspects of school operations. Through innovative professional development, advocacy, and legislative programs, CASBO inspires efficient and effective leadership of California's K-14 institutions to support the state's 5.9 million students in the 21st century and beyond.

CASBO supports a robust school finance system that empowers local educational agencies to invest in high-quality instructional services and programs that meet the needs of our students, as well as policies that foster local innovation to improve student achievement and create safe and optimal learning environments for our students, educators, and local communities. CASBO advocates for and recommends the following areas for local and state officials to focus on:

### **Funding stability**

Stabilizing the state's fiscal structure and local revenue authority to ensure public education has the appropriate funding support that aligns with providing equitable and high-quality education to all of our students.

### **Investing in our students**

We aspire towards a future that commits to putting our students' academic success first and helps schools sustain innovative programs that ensure they are college and career ready.

### **Supporting special education**

Our students with exceptional needs deserve equitable resources to support high-quality services and early childhood intervention. Unfortunately, the federal government has not maintained its commitment to fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **Supporting safe school environments**

CASBO supports the historic partnership between the state and local school districts and county offices of education to finance school facility construction and modernization projects.

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