

2021-2023

Riverside Unified School District State Government Relations Principles (DRAFT)

Legislative Priorities for 2020-21

The Riverside Unified School District's legislative priorities are intended to provide information to the school district's elected representatives in the Legislature, Governor's Administration, and various state agencies on education policy and finance. While the entirety of this document is intended to help provide a point of reference for the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) Governing Board's positions on pending legislation and critical issues in the current session of the State Legislature, the Board has also identified the top five legislative priorities for this year. These include:

- **Mitigating the Impacts of COVID-19**

The Legislature and Governor have been tremendously responsive to the COVID-19 crisis with swift action in the Spring of 2020 and in subsequent actions throughout the pandemic. We are grateful for a courageous budget vote to reject proposed cuts to K-12 schools and significant investment of one-time dollars to mitigate the wide array of needs for our students and families. Learning acceleration, extended learning and intervention, and efforts to safely return our student to in-person instruction are our top priorities. Our thanks and appreciation for all of your efforts to address the urgent needs of our schools.

- **Base Funding for Education**

Despite the unprecedented one-time funding that has been provided to K-12 schools from Federal and State resources, the persistent challenge of ongoing basic funding for K-12 public schools remains a priority. The one-time funding, aimed at specific objectives to lift student performance and address the many challenges brought to public education by the COVID pandemic, will run out in 24-36 months and will result in a cliff-effect for ongoing funding. Protecting last year's "supplemental payment" to Prop 98 to lift school funding will be essential. Funding COLAS across all K-12 programs in addition to LCFF is crucial. The board has

further identified the continuing challenges of CalSTRS and CalPERS state mandated pension cost increases as a significant drain on local base funding levels for schools.

- **Special Education Funding & Student Mental Health**

Special education funding has been one of the greatest fiscal challenges to RUSD and school districts across the state and the country. The board is strongly advocating continued support for action by the Legislature and Governor to increase investments in special education and that the Federal Government finally move toward providing the long-promised funding necessary to offset the huge costs that have been largely covered by the local district. RUSD has a deep commitment to ensuring the civil rights and educational opportunities of all students with disabilities, however the Federal government has not met its funding obligation under the law and the State should help districts to financially manage these ever-increasing costs.

Addressing the mental health conditions and wellness of our students has been an ongoing priority for the board and made especially urgent during the course of this past year. Special education funding and requirements only address some of these issues and county government services are poorly coordinated with K-12 education agencies. Governor Newsom has called out the need for better coordination and access to other funding sources in his budget and the Legislature could do more to require counties to plan with K-12 for these unique health needs of our students. Schools are an essential starting place for early identification, planning and treatment in a collaborative, cross-agency approach, but mental health challenges of the school-aged population in California cannot be managed by public schools alone.

- **Career Technical Education (CTE)**

Only recently, California has slowly begun to reverse a trend toward disinvestment in CTE. The Local Control Funding Formula dismantled dedicated funding for this important purpose and the current-year budget has less than half of historic funding levels. RUSD is implementing ambitious and successful CTE programs but needs the State to increase its commitment to these educational programs that are directly linked to job creation and our regional economic future. RUSD supports proposals to redirect \$150 million to K-12 that is currently allocated to non-K-12 agencies and to add another \$150 million next year in order to ramp up overall funding.

- **School Facilities Modernization, New Construction and Maintenance**

Local school districts across the state, including RUSD, have made important local commitments to raise the dollars necessary to match state resources for school construction. The district strongly supports a statewide school construction bond measure and other infrastructure bonds placed on the ballot by the State Legislature that will help Riverside maximize financial opportunities for school facility funding and generate new dollars for modernization, new construction and maintenance. As new resources become available at the State level, statutory and regulatory changes will be taking place that impact the distribution and priority for those funds. It is imperative that our lawmakers are sensitive to those rule changes and how they impact RUSD specially. Riverside schools are particularly in need of help with modernization of its aging school facilities. We support prioritization and eligibility included in the State bond authorization legislation that places greater emphasis on certain factors, including the number of students in poverty, English Language learners, and overall bonding capacity.

Guiding Principles

The District embraces ten core beliefs about children, schools, local governance and state 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 irrespective of their social, ethnic, language or economic background, gender or special needs.
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 is necessary for student success.

State and Federal Government

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

State Legislative Priorities

1. School Finance

Public education is a fundamental component of our 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.

Fair Funding. Ongoing school funding should place California in the top tier of national per-pupil funding and fully cover the cost of educating our students. The funding system should equitably distribute resources across LEAs to pay for the real costs of educating each of California's students. Four fundamental criteria for fair funding include:

- California must provide enough resources to support the actual cost of ensuring that all public school students and the LEAs who serve them perform at the highest possible levels. Funding for non-basic aid districts should be based on enrollment—the actual numbers of students served—and provide sufficient per-pupil resources to ensure the success of all California's students. California should provide LEAs the resources for non-instructional services and infrastructure necessary for effective school operations. California should fully fund state mandates and impose as few mandates as possible.
- Funding must be allocated to account for the actual cost of meeting the differential needs of all students. This also requires the equitable distribution of funds among all LEAs, including county offices, school districts, and charter schools. LEAs are responsible for the equitable distribution of resources to meet each student's needs.

- Funding must be sufficiently allocated for school districts when the state imposes local cost pressures, such as mandates, restrictions on uses of funds, and other financial obligations.
- Public funding should be protected from being used in support of vouchers or for providing education in non-public schools for general education purposes.

Stable Funding. Funding should be predictable. It should empower LEAs to anticipate and respond to changes in a manner that mitigates the harm to student programs and maximizes LEA capacity to plan for proactive change. Stable funding must be consistent and guaranteed.

- Funding streams should be dependable and not subject to substantial shifts in funding levels from year to year.
- Funding streams should be protected from encroachment, deferrals, replacement or other political or legislative adjustments that reduce agreed-upon funding levels.

Local Flexibility. The District embraces the principle of subsidiarity—authority and control are best vested at the lowest level of organization, closest to those served by the organization. Education funding must allow for local autonomy appropriate for the level of accountability placed upon LEAs. Locally elected boards need authority and flexibility to generate local revenue, control the allocation of their resources, and greater autonomy for the development and use of facilities.

- Local governing boards need authority and flexibility to make decisions about how to best maximize and allocate resources.
- Governing boards must have final authority over the use of all LEA property. They also need flexibility to provide facilities that are safe and educationally appropriate. Greater flexibility is needed in regulations for construction, modernization and use of school facilities and local collaboration for infrastructure.

2. Governance

Consistent with the California School Boards Association's position, the District believes 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 K-12 public schools.

The governance role of the school district must be maximized through subsequent state resources and clear statewide expectations for the performance of public schools. The state should not, however, prescribe how those expectations should be met. These roles should serve as the foundation of a statewide master plan for preschool through adult education. The District supports policy to accomplish the following:

Local Authority & Flexibility. Locally elected boards are accountable for ensuring that K-12 education programs lead to achievement for all students and for the long-term financial health of LEAs. Responsibility and authority go hand-in-hand, therefore boards must have the authority and flexibility over all aspects of the LEA for which they are held accountable. Local authority and flexibility must include:

- Boards must have final authority for all policies related to programs, curriculum, instruction, assessment, student placement, as well as class-size, instructional time and the school calendar.
- Boards must have final authority for non-academic student services including discipline, extracurricular programs and programs for health and safety.
- Boards must have final authority for the recruitment, selection, compensation, professional development, assignment, supervision, evaluation, promotion and termination of staff.
- 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. Boards need timely reporting from independent and objective audits to determine the fiscal stability of school systems.

Engaged Public. Public education reform will be strengthened by a more engaged public. Well-informed local residents can more meaningfully engage in and contribute to improving public education in three key areas.

- Local school board elections are an expression of American democracy at its most fundamental level. Local governing boards are stronger when the

community they serve: 1) understands school governance and the beliefs, skills, and knowledge that characterize effective board members; and 2) actively participates in selecting non-partisan school board members by exercising their constitutional right to vote. Local determination of district size, trustee areas / at-large elections, terms of service, and local revenues strengthens local elections.

- Boards must play a leadership role in the promotion and development of collaborative approaches among schools, cities, counties, other local government agencies, community-based organizations, local businesses and service organizations to meet the needs of students.
- Education reform can be accelerated by greater participation of school boards and the public in state and national policy issues that impact education, including supporting the position of an elected state superintendent of public instruction.

3. Curriculum & Instruction

The primary responsibility of public schools is to educate students. The ability of children to attend school, to be engaged and learning 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.

California students need a well-aligned education system that prepares them for 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 and balances the 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.

Integrated Student Services. Addressing the conditions that impact students is not the sole responsibility of schools. The needs of all students must be identified and comprehensively addressed through the coordinated and collective efforts of schools and other agencies, institutions and organizations, each held to high standards of accountability.

- Partnerships and collaboration among all public and private agencies, businesses and community organizations should eliminate barriers to sharing appropriate data and increase flexibility in the coordination of funds to simplify access to education, health and support services for children. Responsibility for meeting the needs of all students should be shared across agencies, organizations, communities and schools. All entities providing integrated services to students should hold each other mutually accountable.
- The State, schools, and communities should provide developmentally appropriate programs that lead to early success in school. It is important to identify student needs and provide services and supports that address the barriers students face to attending, engaging, learning and achieving in school. Appropriate and effective solutions should be developed for students whose needs cannot be met in regular education programs.

Alignment. California Students need a well-aligned education system that prepares them for college and career success. A well-aligned education system requires effective collaboration, coordination and articulation among districts, county offices of education and California's institutes of higher education.

- A well-aligned education system requires consistent standards of accountability and performance among all schools that provide Pre-K, K-12 or post-secondary education.
- A well-aligned education system ensures that there are consistent standards for admission and matriculation between Pre-K, elementary, high school and post-secondary institutions.

Rich and Challenging Local Curricula. A high-quality and comprehensive instructional program offers a rich curriculum beyond what is tested on state assessments as the foundation for high expectations and achievement for all students.

- Educational programs should prepare all students for graduation and successful transition to employment or postsecondary education in the multi-cultural and global economy of the 21st century. The full PreK-12 program must help students advance their proficiency in English-language arts, mathematics, science, history-social science, technology, the visual and performing arts and physical education, and support the development of their physical and emotional health. College and career-ready students should also have opportunities to learn an additional language, utilize applied and experiential

learning and explore the principles of personal character, productive citizenship and co-curricular interests.

- School environments should respect the diversity among students and families in languages, customs, cultures, and beliefs. Educational programming should offer insight into different cultures and offer role models that highlight and promote acceptance of our multicultural society.
- Boards need local flexibility and freedom to adopt and approve curricula that provides students with a curriculum that meets local needs.

Assessment & Accountability. All children deserve high-quality educational services. Curriculum, instruction and assessment must be designed based on what students need to meet high expectations for performance.

- Instruction and assessment should be research-based and address the learning needs of all students, and be adapted to meet the needs of English language learners, special education students, and students with learning differences. Accountability for student achievement should be based on multiple measures over time, including standardized and performance-based assessments. Assessment results should be included in the regular evaluation of program effectiveness in order to revise or terminate programs as needed.
- All students need equitable access to effective teaching and learning experiences and resources including instructional materials, technology, media and other innovations appropriate and effective for learning.
- Schools must use accurate data and reliable assessment results to regularly measure student progress. Assessment results effectively improve student performance when they support appropriate changes in curriculum and programs, instruction, assessment, and intervention strategies. They are also a valuable tool in the creation of alternative instruction programs to meet student needs. The state must provide a data system that tracks students through graduation and connects to student support services and higher education.
- The state must support and assist in the development of an accountability system for alternative education that recognizes all growth using a “save-rate” metric that provides credit for short-term, accelerated growth as well as annual student achievement growth. Support alternative education settings, as well as programs for students with special needs with a dedicated funding stream to

ensure that all students succeed.

4. Early Childhood Education

Many issues that arise later in a child's life, such as poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and behavioral and social problems, can be prevented by ensuring that the state and its schools provide high quality early childhood education and child care. The District supports policies to augment early childhood education and child care programs.

The district believes it is important that the state carefully implement these programs with full and appropriate funding from the outset in order to prevent a systemically underfunded program for early education that suffers the same challenges as K-12 education. Furthermore, it is important that the funding for early education not be drawn from already underfunded K-12 school funding.

5. Special Education

The District advocates full funding of special education programs through state and federal resources given that local districts have had to carry the overwhelming majority of the costs to ensure all students with disabilities have access to the educational opportunities available to all students. The district supports state funding solutions for special education that provide fiscal relief from the existing cost burdens, and the growing costs experienced annually.

The district strongly supports efforts at the Federal level to ensure the federal government honors its commitment upon enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) to fund 40 percent of special education costs.

6. Pupil Wellness, Mental Health & Safety

Students benefit from coordinated programs that promote student health and wellness, fitness, mental health, disease prevention and nutrition. In addition, pupil and school safety directly impact the learning environment and the overall well-being of our students. Effective teaching and learning occur when students feel safe, supported, and connected. The state should promote a positive school environment that identifies and reinforces nonviolent solutions to problems and respect for all students and staff.

The state should give schools the tools to implement fair and effective practices for student discipline, safe use of appropriate technology and media resources, and appropriate emergency response and communication plans. The state must also provide local schools with the resources necessary to appropriately protect confidential student information. Additionally, the state must provide schools with the necessary

resources to implement appropriate emergency response and communication plans to further ensure a safe environment for students and staff.

The District supports policies to accomplish the following:

- Assisting schools in addressing the social and emotional needs of students, eliminating barriers and providing resources for the screening and identification of students with mental health needs and the tools to help meet those needs.
- Student wellness through nutritional improvements that can be met within the funding provided and with achievable timeframes, and sufficiently funded, high-quality nutrition programs for low-income children and families.
- Encourage public and private agencies to collaborate in order to increase flexibility in the coordination of funds and simplify access to pupil health services.
- Promote student success by fostering the active involvement of families in supporting the physical, emotional, and mental health of children.
- Support schools working with social service agencies to provide support for the social and emotional needs of students.
- Work with stakeholders on providing students access to life-saving medical treatments on campus.
- Provide resources to accomplish school safety plans, invest in necessary infrastructure and equipment, and other elements of school safety that help districts create a safe learning environment.

7. At-Risk Students

The District supports policies to address the needs of at-risk students, including students who have been expelled, foster youth, and migrant students.

8. Teacher Recruitment. & Development

Students perform better when they are taught by highly qualified and highly effective teachers. California should provide a well-aligned and coherent system for K-12 teacher preparation including credentialing, recruitment, professional development, and evaluation.

Recruitment & Retention. The recruitment, training, and retention processes for school personnel fundamentally impacts the quality of education in California. Our public education system requires effective credentialing, professional development, and productive evaluation, to ensure that educators deliver high-quality instruction and services to their students. As California addresses its ongoing teacher shortage, the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers is of the highest importance. The District supports policies to accomplish the following:

- Maximize the authority and flexibility of local boards to attract and retain highly qualified staff and provide support and training for new teachers. Longer probationary periods should be established to provide sufficient opportunity for assessing teacher performance. Assignment and transfer of teachers should be based on student needs and teacher effectiveness and qualifications.
- Protect the authority and flexibility of local educational agencies to attract and retain high-quality employees.
- Restore flexibility in credentialing requirements for the hiring of new teachers and options to retain teaching talent longer, even after retirement, as tools to confront teacher shortages.

Credentialing. California's K-12 teacher preparation programs must be based on professional standards for teaching and include a performance evaluation component prior to receiving a credential. Criteria for a well-aligned and coherent system for K-12 teacher credentialing include:

- The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) should create multiple pathways for those interested in entering the teaching profession and simplify the process for credentialing qualified teachers with out-of-state credentials and CTE teacher candidates.
- Teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers for working with students with learning challenges, and actively encourage enrollment of teacher candidates from under-represented groups or with multilingual and culturally diverse backgrounds who can provide strong role models.
- The CTC should coordinate California's teacher and administrator preparation efforts with institutes of higher education, county offices of education, school districts and professional associations to ensure alignment and coherence.

- Improved Special Education credentialing requirements to increase the recruitment and retention of those coming into the field.
- Simplified process for credentialing qualified teachers with out-of-state credentials and CTE teacher candidates.
- Teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers for working with students with learning challenges, and actively encourage enrollment of teacher candidates from under-represented groups or with multilingual and culturally diverse backgrounds who can provide strong role models.

Professional Development. Professional development must be ongoing, relevant, and based on recognized standards for the professional development of educators, focused on the fair and equitable instruction of all students, including those students with varied learning needs. The District supports policies to accomplish the following:

- Increase teacher effectiveness by providing training and feedback to new teachers
- Increase collaboration among school districts, county offices of education, and confidential, classified, and certificated employees.

Teacher Evaluation. The evaluation and assessment of performance of certificated employees should be regular and ongoing and must include assessment of subject matter knowledge, instructional techniques, and progress in student leading.

- Evaluations should include student progress towards appropriate standards, instructional strategies, adherence to curricular objectives, and the maintenance of a suitable learning environment, and, if applicable, the state adopted academic content standards as measured by state adopted criterion-referenced assessments.
- Stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and the community, should be involved when creating and reviewing the process and uses of the evaluations.
- The procedures for teacher placement, layoff decisions, and the dismissal of staff whose performance is unsatisfactory should be streamlined, with maximum authority and flexibility for the local board.

- Establish longer probationary periods to provide sufficient opportunity for assessing teacher performance.
- Professional development should be integrated into any evaluation system.

9. Pension Policy and Finance

The District supports policies to accomplish the following:

- Protect the retirement benefits of our employees, past and present, by addressing the unfunded obligation that is generating volatility and strain for the budgets of local educational agencies around the state.
- Receive additional fiscal support from the state to meet the unfunded CalSTRS and CalPERS obligations that have created unmanageable cost pressures by continuing to increase the employer's contribution rate.
- Improve employee retirement benefits, including health benefits, to make them comparable to the best systems available to other public employees in order to retain and attract the best qualified people. Preserve the pension benefits of employees with the CalSTRS and CalPERS systems.
- Ensure adequate funding of CalSTRS and CalPERS and protect retirement funds from being diverted by the state to non-retirement purposes.
- Protect the current defined benefit structure embodied in the CalSTRS and CalPERS systems by opposing any efforts to convert into a defined contribution structure.
- Eliminate the government pension offset and windfall elimination provision as penalties on social security earnings for school leaders.

10. Facilities

The District supports policies to accomplish the following:

- Reinforce the state's fundamental role in financially partnering with school districts to build, modernize, and provide emergency repairs for school facilities.

- Support statewide school bond measures that are matched with local resources to build new schools and modernize existing facilities.

11. Charter Schools

Charter schools have been part of the state's system of public education since 1992. Charter school authorizers, including school districts, are tasked with providing continuous oversight of financial and educational programs. The District supports efforts to ensure charter schools provide the best education to all our students. We support policy to accomplish the following:

- Allow consistent exercise of local control over all K-12 institutions, including charter schools, to ensure all schools add value to the community.
- Provide charter school authorizers should have full authority over the development, review, approval, oversight, and evaluation of all schools within their jurisdictional boundaries.
- Ensure that every charter school is educationally viable by ensuring any expansion is based on measurable data regarding student progress and fiscal solvency.
- Ensure charter schools are fiscally solvent and do not impose undue fiscal hardships on authorizing school districts.
- Require governance transparency and adequate fiscal accountability along with rigorous academic accountability for all charter schools.
- Increase the clarity and consistency of transparency and conflict-of-interest laws.
- Require charter schools to follow all state and federal laws required of public schools.

11. Education Technology

The District supports efforts to protect confidential student information by securing student privacy related to social media use and data mining. Furthermore, the District supports investment in, and maintenance of, technology and recognition of ongoing costs of keeping technology current in public education to enhance California's economic competitiveness and to ensure that information can be accessed and shared in each classroom, including school libraries.

