



BOARD COMMUNICATIONS - DECEMBER 12, 2025

TO: Members of the Board of Education
FROM: Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

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Board Communications Approved by:
Mao Misty Her, Superintendent



Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

Date: December 12, 2025

Phone Number: (559) 457-3884

Regarding: Superintendent Calendar Highlights

The purpose of this communication is to inform the Board of notable calendar items:

- Presented at the Principal's Meeting
- Held listening session with teachers from Hidalgo, Leavenworth, Mayfair, Rowell, and Yosemite
- Gave interview for *Telling the Hmong American Story* which is part of the Hmong History Model Curriculum project
- Held strategic planning session with Executive Cabinet members
- Attended CART Board Meeting
- Site visits at Advanced Academic Acceleration & Achievement, Early Learning, English Learner Services, Farber, Greenberg, Olmos, Pyle, Roosevelt, School Leadership, and Special Education
- Visited 12 classrooms during site visits
- Participated in the Wallace Equity Centered Pipeline Initiative Superintendent's Quarterly Meeting
- Attended the Ed Center Sweatshirt Drive Event
- Met with Laotian American Community of Fresno (LACF)
- Visited Lindamood-Bell Learning Center in San Luis Obispo

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication, or require additional information, please contact Misty Her at (559) 457-3884.

Cabinet Approval:



Name and Title: Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Kim Kelstrom, Chief Executive

Date: December 12, 2025
Phone Number: (559) 457-3907

Regarding: School Services Weekly Update Reports for December 05, 2025

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board a copy of School Services of California's (SSC) Weekly Updates. Each week SSC provides an update and commentary on different educational fiscal issues. In addition, they include different articles related to education issues. The SSC Weekly Updates for December 05, 2025, are attached and include the following articles:

- Report Calls for Overhauling How California Runs its Schools – December 01, 2025
- California Students with Disabilities Face 'Terrifying' Special Ed Cuts After Trump Changes – December 04, 2025
- Coming in 2026: A Battle Over California Billionaire Tax Proposal. – December 01, 2025

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication, or require additional information, please contact Kim Kelstrom at (559) 457-3907.

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Patrick Jensen, Chief Financial Officer



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DATE: December 5, 2025

TO: Misty Her
Superintendent

AT: Fresno Unified School District

FROM: Your SSC Governmental Relations Team

RE: ***SSC's Sacramento Weekly Update***

SSPI Thurmond Hosts Literacy Task Force Meeting

On Monday, December 1, 2025, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) Tony Thurmond hosted an informational hearing of the Statewide Literacy Task Force at the California Department of Education to discuss major education proposals he is exploring for the 2026 legislative and budget cycles.

Joined by Assemblymember Heather Hadwick (R-Alturas), Senator Susan Rubio (D-Baldwin Park), and a range of educators and experts, the SSPI outlined four key focus areas:

- The future of the California Community Schools initiative
- Providing kindergarten for all students
- A five-year plan to ensure students reach literacy by third grade
- Targeted efforts to close learning gaps for African American and Native American students

The SSPI's [press release](#) notes that, for the first time, every indicator on the 2025 California School Dashboard shows statewide progress. Thurmond framed his proposals as a way to build on historic investments—such as universal preschool, universal school meals, literacy coaches, reading specialists, and community schools—to accelerate student achievement and narrow persistent gaps.

Attorney General Bonta Releases Updated Immigration Guidance for Schools

On Tuesday, Attorney General Rob Bonta issued [updated guidance and model policies](#) to help TK-12 schools navigate immigration-related enforcement issues on campus. The updated guidance incorporates legislation that was signed by Governor Gavin Newsom this fall—Assembly Bill (AB) 49 (Muratsuchi, D-Torrance), AB 419 (Connolly, D-San Rafael), and AB 495 (C. Rodriguez, D-San Fernando). Together, these measures revise procedures for

handling visits from federal immigration officers, prohibit school personnel from sharing student or family information with immigration authorities, and require schools to distribute the Attorney General's "[Know Your Educational Rights](#)" guidance to parents and guardians, as well as post it in all school buildings.

Local educational agencies must update their existing policies on responding to immigration enforcement on school campuses to comply with these new legal requirements by March 1, 2026.

Leilani Aguinaldo

Note: California's school governance system needs to be overhauled to make it more accountable, clear up confusing lines of authority, and address uneven assistance, according to a new report released Monday,

Report Calls for Overhauling How California Runs its Schools

Putting the Department of Education under the governor would clarify responsibilities, one recommendation said

By John Fensterwald
EdSource
December 1, 2025

California's school governance system needs to be overhauled to make it more accountable, clear up confusing lines of authority and address uneven assistance, according to a new report released Monday.

These and other systemic weaknesses are undermining the potential success of state landmark programs like universal kindergarten and support for school districts to tackle the achievement gap, chronic absenteeism and other challenges under local control, the report from the research center PACE asserts.

The expected cuts in federal education funding and transfer to states of oversight responsibilities by the Trump administration add urgency to reorganize a complex and flawed multiagency system, starting with the California Department of Education, the 94-page report titled TK-12 Governance in California: Past, Present, and Future argues. The state must now "meet the demands and opportunities of this moment," the report said.

"Given shifting federal responsibilities, declining enrollment, and widening achievement gaps, California can no longer postpone reforms that have been overdue for a century," Julie Marsh, professor of education policy at USC and one of the report's three co-authors, stated in a press release. "We must take on the challenge of modernizing our governance system now." PACE, which stands for Policy Analysis for California Education, is a research center led by faculty at Stanford, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UCLA and USC.

To read the report

There are two versions of PACE's report on school governance. Go [here](#) for the full 94-page version and [here](#) for a summary.

A key and likely controversial recommendation would transfer control of the state Department of Education from the elected state superintendent of public instruction to the governor and the governor-appointed State Board of Education. The state schools superintendent, in turn, would become the independent ombudsman and "elected chief champion for students." That shift in role would provide what's been missing under the current system — an independent evaluator of the effectiveness of multibillion-dollar programs and school improvement efforts, the report says.

Centralizing authority in the governor would clearly delineate lines of authority by answering a question that has confused Sacramento for decades: Who's in charge of education and the bureaucracy that runs it? Is it the governor and the State Board of Education that sets policies such as academic standards, but doesn't implement them? Or the state school superintendent, who is charged with running the Education Department and campaigns on policy changes without the statutory authority to enact them?

The California Department of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond could not be reached for immediate comment.

A long-standing debate

As far back as 1920, a report by a special legislative committee, called the Jones Report, argued that the “double-headed system” of competing authorities was counterproductive.

It “should be superseded at the earliest opportunity by a more rational form of state educational organization,” said the report, which called for abolishing the state superintendency by a constitutional amendment and replacing it with a commissioner of education, appointed and overseen by the state board.

Eight decades later, the PACE report notes, the Legislature’s Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education also recommended that the operations of pre-K12 be placed under the governor.

Proposed constitutional amendments to abolish the state superintendency have proven unpopular with voters, who may see the position as providing an independent voice. Four times between 1928 and 1968, voters defeated initiatives. One reason the idea hasn’t been proposed since is that the California Teachers Association, which has been a big campaign contributor to the last four state schools superintendents, would likely go all-out to defeat it. California is 1 of only 12 states that elect their state schools superintendent.

CTA could not be reached for an immediate comment.

The PACE report doesn’t endorse abolishing the office. Instead, since most of the state schools superintendent’s powers are defined by statute, it recommends rewriting statutes to redefine the job.

Reactions to the report

The co-authors wrote that the report is intended not as a blueprint for change but as a framework for rethinking how roles, responsibilities and incentives can be realigned. The initial reaction, at least from those given an advance look at the report, was that the co-authors raised the right issues.

Michael Kirst

Michael Kirst, who dealt with the problems firsthand as former Gov. Jerry Brown’s education adviser and state board president for 16 years, was the most emphatic. “The report proposes a state governance earthquake to solve deep problems that have existed for decades. It is bold, comprehensive, coherent, and sensible,” he said in an email. “It will provoke a discussion of a major overhaul of who should control state education policy.”

Josh Newman

A former state senator and now state schools superintendent candidate, Newman has called for abolishing the office he is pursuing. He said, “There’s an inherent problem in a state as large as California, where the primary criterion for getting elected statewide is not management expertise, but whatever it takes to either raise the money or get the message out.” Newman said he isn’t endorsing the report’s proposal to make the state schools superintendent an ombudsman, but “it’s hard to argue with any of their observations. Accountability, alignment, higher standards, innovation — that’s what I’m running for.”

Troy Flint, CSBA

Over the past two months, the California School Boards Association has criticized the state for failing to hold itself accountable for its inability to close the achievement gap. It has called on Gov. Gavin Newsom, legislative leaders, and the Department of Education to develop and adopt “a coherent state-level plan” that lays out “what the state is going to do differently to support school districts.”

CSBA spokesperson Troy Flint said Monday, “PACE is looking at a lot of the right areas. We share some of their concerns, and conceptually, we’re aligned on the call for greater coherence and clarity.” He added that “We’re less focused on the specific position of the state superintendent and more on the fact that the different component parts of the state infrastructure come together.”

Edgar Zazueta, ACSA

The executive director of the School Boards Association’s counterpart, the Association of California School Administrators, largely agreed. “The report reinforced what we’ve been hearing from our school leaders for years — that our system is complex, and that sometimes that complexity makes their job harder,” said Edgar Zazueta.

“Our folks on the ground are being asked to do more than they ever have,” he said. “Often that’s happening without the staffing, without the data systems, without the stable funding needed to succeed.”

The report argues that shifting the authority over to the Department of Education presents the opportunity to better manage it. The state board would be charged with hiring a department director with expertise in education administration and management. If enacted, California would join 20 other states, including Massachusetts, New York and Florida, whose state boards of education choose their chief state school officers, the report noted.

The current and previous state schools superintendents spanning three decades were previously legislators with no experience or showed an intense interest in running a large organization. Some had aspirations for higher office. The political nature of the positions “creates incentives” to overstate positive data and promising results “that raise visibility and public profile, whether to advance their reelection prospects or to position themselves for future opportunities,” the report says.

Thurmond announced in September 2023, one year into his second four-year term, that he planned to run for governor in 2026. Three of the leading candidates to succeed Thurmond are a former Assembly speaker, the chair of the Assembly Education Committee and a former state senator.

Effective leadership is not CDE’s only problem. The PACE report reiterated a 2018 study, which found that the department is underfunded and understaffed for guiding the daunting challenges of guiding new multi-billion-dollar efforts, like after-school programs, and helping underperforming schools close gaps in achievement. The department has had problems attracting and retaining experts in various specialties. One reason, the report said, is that the main source of funding for schools, Proposition 98, cannot be used for administration. It must come from the general fund, competing with Medi-Cal and higher education, the study said.

And so the Legislature and governors have resorted to workarounds to avoid the department, such as creating a new semi-independent agency, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, to work with underperforming school districts, the report said.

One unnamed expert told PACE, “It becomes like this negative cycle or downward spiral where they don’t have the capacity to lead state-level work, so they don’t get the funds in the state budget because they’re not trusted to do a good job.”

Marsh and her two co-authors, PACE Director of Policy Research Jeannie Myung, the lead author, and Heather Hough, senior policy and research fellow at PACE, interviewed 16 prominent education leaders and presented preliminary findings to 30 experts in education governance at a February 2025 convening.

The co-authors granted anonymity to the 16 experts so that they could speak freely. The report included sharply critical assessments.

Referring to an overall lack of strategic thinking that leaves districts feeling overwhelmed, one expert said, “There are so many new shiny things that have incredible potential, but it feels a little like we are throwing spaghetti against the wall. We have community schools, expanded learning, teacher workforce initiatives, and all these things happening that have transformative potential. We have to think about: ‘What does it look like to implement them and learn to improve?’”

The 16 were asked to grade the effectiveness of state governance, based on a half-dozen key elements:

- Strategic thinking — Having a long-term vision for improvement

- Accountability — Establishing mechanisms for responsibility and continuous improvement
- Capacity — Ensuring people and institutions have the resources and training to do jobs effectively
- Knowledge — Providing data and research to inform decisions
- Engagement — Seeking diverse voices in the policymaking process to shape governance
- Whole-of-system perspective — Coordinating efforts throughout the system to achieve shared goals for students

The overall average grade of the 16 experts was 2.8 — in between poor and fair.

Note: Advocates worry that proposed federal cuts and policy shifts could jeopardize critical services and civil rights protections for nearly one million California students with disabilities.

California Students with Disabilities Face ‘Terrifying’ Special Ed Cuts After Trump Changes

By Carolyn Jones
CalMatters
December 4, 2025

Sleep is a rare commodity at Lindsay Crain’s house. Most nights, she and her husband are up dozens of times, tending to their daughter’s seizures. The 16-year-old flails her arms, thrashes and kicks — sometimes for hours.

But these days, that’s not the only thing keeping Crain awake. The Culver City mother worries about how President Donald Trump’s myriad budget cuts could strip their daughter of services she needs to go to school, live at home and enjoy a degree of independence that would have been impossible a generation ago.

“Every family I know is terrified right now,” Crain said. “We still have to live our everyday lives, which are challenging enough, but now it feels like our kids’ futures are at stake.”

Trump’s budget includes nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid, which funds a wide swath of services to disabled children, including speech, occupational and physical therapy, wheelchairs, in-home aides and medical care. All children with physical, developmental or cognitive disabilities – in California, nearly 1 million – receive at least some services through Medicaid.

Meanwhile, at the U.S. Department of Education, Trump has gutted the Office of Civil Rights, which is among the agencies that enforce the 50-year-old law granting students with disabilities the right to attend school and receive an education appropriate to their needs. Before that law was enacted, students with disabilities often didn’t attend school at all.

“We have a delicate web of services that, combined, support a whole child, a whole family,” said Kristin Wright, executive director of inclusive practices and systems at the Sacramento County Office of Education

and the former California state director of special education. “So when the basic foundational structure is upended, like Medicaid, for example, it’s not just one cut from a knife. It’s multiple.”

Republicans have also suggested moving the office of special education out of the Department of Education altogether and moving it to the Department of Health and Human Services. Disability rights advocates say that would bring a medical – rather than a social – lens to special education, which they described as a major reversal of progress.

Trump has chipped away at other rights protecting people with disabilities, as well. In September, the U.S. Department of Transportation said it would not enforce a rule that requires airlines to reimburse passengers for damaged or lost wheelchairs. Trump has also repeatedly used the word “retarded,” widely considered a slur, alarming advocates who say it shows a lack of respect and understanding of the historical discrimination against people with disabilities. It’s all left some wondering if the administration plans more cuts to hard-fought rights protecting people with disabilities.

Fewer therapists, less equipment

The Medicaid cuts may have the most immediate effect. People with developmental disabilities typically receive therapy, home visits from aides, equipment and other services through regional centers, a network of 21 mostly government-funded nonprofits in California that coordinate services for people with disabilities. The goal of regional centers is to help people with disabilities live as independently as possible.

More than a third of regional centers’ funding comes from Medicaid, which is facing deep cuts under Trump’s budget. The money runs out at the end of January, and it’s unclear what services will be cut.

Schools also rely on Medicaid to pay for therapists, equipment, vision and hearing tests and other services that benefit all students, not just those with disabilities. In light of state budget uncertainty, it’s not likely the state could backfill the loss of Medicaid funding, and schools would have to pare down their services.

Uncertain futures

For Lelah Coppedge, whose teenage son has cerebral palsy, the worst part is the uncertainty. She knows cuts are coming, but she doesn’t know when or what they’ll include.

“I go down this rabbit hole of worst-case scenarios,” said Coppedge, who lives in the Canoga Park neighborhood in Los Angeles. “Before this happened, I felt there was a clear path for my son. Now that path is going away, and it’s terrifying.”

Coppedge’s son, Jack, is a 16-year-old high school student who excels at algebra and physics. He loves video games and has a wide circle of friends at school. He uses a wheelchair and struggles with speech, communicating mostly through eye movements. He’ll look at his mom’s right hand to indicate “yes,” her left hand for “no.”

Coppedge and her husband rely on a nurse who comes four days a week to help Jack get dressed, get ready for bed and do other basic activities. Medicaid pays for the nurse, as well as other services like physical therapy. Even though Coppedge and her husband both work and have high-quality private health insurance, they could not afford Jack’s care without help from the government.

They also rely on the local regional center, which they assumed would help Jack after he graduates from high school, so he can remain at home, continue to hone his skills and generally live as independently as possible. If that funding vanishes, Coppedge worries Jack will someday end up in a facility where people don't know him, don't know how to communicate with him and don't care about him.

"It feels like we're going backward," Coppedge said. "Half the time, I put my head in the sand because I'm just trying to manage the day-to-day. The rest of the time I worry that (the federal government) is looking at people like Jack as medical problems, not as unique people who want to have full, happy lives. It feels like that's getting lost."

The current uncertainty is stressful, but it's even harder for families who are immigrants, Wright said. Those families are less likely to stand up for services they're entitled to and are facing the extra fear of deportation. English learners, as well as low-income children, are disproportionately represented among students in special education, according to state data.

"That's the other piece to all this — how it's affecting immigrant families," Wright said. "It's a whole other level of anxiety and fear."

Decades of progress on the line

Karma Quick-Panwala, an advocate at the nonprofit Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, said she worries about the rollback of decades' worth of progress that was hard-won by the disability rights community.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the 1975 law that created special education, actually predates the federal Department of Education. In fact, Congress created the department in part to oversee special education. Removing special ed would be a devastating blow to the disability community — not just because services might be curtailed, but philosophically, as well, Quick-Panwala said.

In the Department of Education, special education is under the purview of education experts who promote optimal ways to educate students with disabilities, so they can learn, graduate from high school and ideally go on to productive lives. In the Department of Health and Human Services, special education would no longer be overseen by educators but by those in the medical field, where they're more likely to "look at disability as something to be cured or segregated and set aside," Quick-Panwala said.

"The disability rights community has worked so hard and gave so much to make sure people with disabilities had a right to a meaningful education, so they could have gainful employment opportunities and participate in the world," Quick-Panwala said. "The idea is that they wouldn't just be present at school, but they would actually learn and thrive."

For the time being, Wright, Quick-Panwala and other advocates are reminding families that federal funding might be shrinking, but the laws remain unchanged. Students are still entitled under federal law to the services outlined in their individual education plans, regardless of whether there's money to pay for it. The funding will have to come from somewhere, at least for now, even if that means cutting it from another program. And California is unlikely to roll back its own special education protections, regardless of what happens in Washington, D.C.

An imperfect but successful routine

Those reassurances are scant comfort to Crain, whose daughter Lena will rely on government support her entire life. Born seven weeks prematurely, Lena has cerebral palsy, epilepsy, a cognitive impairment and is on the deaf-blind spectrum. But she has a 100-watt smile and a relentless spirit, Crain said. Even after the whole family has been up all night, Lena insists on going to school and getting the most out of every day.

Funny and assertive, she has a few close friends and, like many teenagers, plenty of opinions about her parents. She loves her English teacher and spends most of her day in regular classrooms with help from an aide. Her favorite book is about Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist who won a Nobel Peace Prize for fighting for girls' right to an education.

Between school and home visits from aides and after-school therapists, Crain feels the family has pieced together an imperfect but mostly successful routine for Lena.

"Our entire lives are about teaching her self-advocacy, so she can have the most independent life possible," Crain said. "Just because you need support doesn't mean you can't have a say in your life. There's been so much work around the culture and the laws and the education system to make sure disabled people can make their own choices in life. We're absolutely terrified of losing that."

Note: A statewide ballot measure filed with the Attorney General's office in October would impose a one-time 5% tax on Californians with assets worth \$1 billion or more and the funding would be used to backfill cuts to health care and food assistance programs that were part of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Coming in 2026: A Battle Over California Billionaire Tax Proposal

By Nicole Nixon
The Sacramento Bee
December 1, 2025

As Benjamin Franklin once said, "In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes."

In California, the list could also include regular political brawls over tax laws.

Two battles are already taking shape for 2026, including over a high-profile billionaire's tax.

The measure, which was filed with the attorney general's office in October, would impose a one-time 5% tax on Californians with assets worth \$1 billion or more. The funding would be used to backfill cuts to health care and food assistance programs that were part of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Its backers – labor unions representing health care workers and the leader of one of the state's largest nonprofit providers – argue the revenue would come from just 200 California billionaires and would stabilize hospitals and community clinics, along with the jobs they provide.

Similar wealth tax proposals have failed to get far in the legislature under opposition from Gov. Gavin Newsom, who's used his bully pulpit to defend the current setup of the state's progressive tax structure.

Newsom will also be opposing the new ballot measure, said adviser Dan Newman, who recently set up a committee called “Stop the Squeeze” with colleague Brian Brokaw to fight the initiative. The California Business Roundtable last week set up its own committee in opposition.

But a wealth tax could get more debate among Newsom’s potential successors – especially with affordability and wealth inequality front-of-mind for voters.

One Democratic candidate, state superintendent Tony Thurmond, recently endorsed a wealth tax, saying the “growing gap between the poor and the billionaire class is unsustainable.”

A long-simmering fight over voter-approved local taxes could also come to a head next year.

The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association is pushing a 2026 measure to tighten rules for voter-approved special taxes and taxes on real estate transfers. It’s a narrower version of the Taxpayer Protection Act, which was removed from the ballot last year after the state Supreme Court deemed it too broad.

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Marie Williams, Ed.D.

Date: December 12, 2025
Phone Number: (559) 457-3750

Regarding: Language Learning Project

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board with information regarding the Language Learning Project led by Fresno Unified School District.

The Language Learning Project began in Fresno Unified classrooms and continues across early childhood programs throughout Fresno County. The project's success has led to a state policy change, introducing the Family Languages and Interests Interview dual language learner identification tool that is now required for all state-funded California State Preschool Program (CSPP), General Child Care (CCTR), and Migrant Child Care and Development Program (CMIG) contracts.

The Language Learning Project was originally funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's 10-year Starting Smart and Strong Initiative, focused on helping children develop strong foundations in both English and their home languages before entering kindergarten. The project has expanded statewide through funding from the California Department of Education and the California Department of Social Services and now includes Family Child Care and Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers.

Fresno Unified School District currently leads a three-year agreement (Fiscal Year 2025-2027) with the California Department of Social Services to develop and deliver a Training of Trainers professional learning model that elevates high-quality dual language learning practices across California. To date, Fresno Unified has held four statewide Training of Trainers sessions, with 142 participants representing 40 counties across California.

This professional learning strengthens early literacy outcomes for all children by promoting rich language experiences that build vocabulary, comprehension, and communication; supporting the birth-to-five continuum so all children enter school ready to learn; advancing equity by affirming children's home languages and cultures; and sustaining alignment among Fresno Unified, state agencies, and community partners. This work directly supports Fresno Unified's Early Literacy goal and continues to position the district as a statewide leader in ensuring every child enters school ready to excel in language and literacy.

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication or require additional information, please contact Maria Ceballos Tapia at (559) 457-3623.

Cabinet Approval: 
Carlos Castillo (Dec 11, 2025 11:07:48 PST)

Name and Title: Carlos Castillo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer