



BOARD COMMUNICATIONS - JANUARY 16, 2026

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: January 16, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3884

Regarding: Superintendent Calendar Highlights

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

- Site visit at Bullard Talent, Jefferson, Muir, and Vinland
- Held press conference regarding update on retiree insurance coverage
- Held listening sessions with teachers from Addams, Columbia, Cooper, King, Kirk, Lincoln, and Sunset
- Met with Kenneth (Kyle) McDonald, Region President, West Region Aetna and district staff regarding retiree insurance coverage
- Met with Cabinet Teams
- Held two sessions of Leadership Mid-year Collaboration/Updates for site and district leaders
- Met with Aldo De La Torre, Division President, Insurance Services & Managed Care, Craig Wagoner, President & CEO and Michele Von Tersch, Senior VP and Chief of Staff, from Community Health System, Manuel Bonilla, Fresno Teachers Association and district staff regarding retiree insurance coverage
- Met with ACSA Executive Leadership
- Attended Central Valley Community Foundation Board Meeting
- Attended JHMB press conference regarding retiree insurance coverage
- Attended Journey to Success event

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: January 16, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3907

Regarding: School Services Weekly Update Reports for January 08, 2026

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 January 08, 2026, are attached and include the following articles:

- Senate Leader Limón Announces Committee Assignments – January 06, 2026
- Will This Be the Year California Makes Kindergarten Mandatory? – January 05, 2026
- Newsom Proposes Governor Controls the California Department of Education – January 08, 2026

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



500 Capitol Mall

•
Suite 1700

•
Sacramento

•
California 95814

•
TEL: 916 . 446 . 7517

•
FAX: 916 . 446 . 2011

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www.sscal.com

DATE: January 8, 2026

TO: Misty Her
Superintendent

AT: Fresno Unified School District

FROM: Your SSC Governmental Relations Team

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

Legislature Returns to Action

On Monday, January 5, 2026, the California State Legislature gavelled in for the final year of the 2025-26 legislative session. While the Assembly floor session was brief and primarily organizational, the Senate's session saw Senator Monique Limón (D-Santa Barbara) be officially sworn in as the new President pro Tempore. Both houses returned on Thursday, January 8, 2026, as a joint session to hear Governor Gavin Newsom deliver his State of the State address, the last of his term as the state's chief executive.

The biggest priority for the Legislature at the beginning of the second year of the session is to consider legislation introduced in 2025 that is not already in the second house. In other words, any bill introduced in 2025 must clear its house of origin by January 31, 2026. For this reason, the Assembly Education Committee, chaired by Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi (D-Torrance), met on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, to consider four bills. Of the four bills on the agenda, two were approved by the committee and will be moving forward in the process, while the other two failed passage and are effectively dead.

The two bills approved by the committee were:

- Assembly Bill (AB) 296 (Davies, R-Laguna Niguel) would require the California Department of Education (CDE) to create and maintain an online registry where local educational agencies (LEAs) may list career technical education equipment for sale. Listed equipment must be offered exclusively to other LEAs and remain posted for at least three months unless purchased. The program would sunset on January 1, 2032.
 - AB 296 will now go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, where its fiscal impact will be analyzed.
- AB 673 (Jackson, D-Moreno Valley) would require the CDE to administer a pilot Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program, awarding five-year competitive grants to LEAs to provide transitional housing for unaccompanied homeless youth ages 16-17 who are not in foster care.

- AB 673 will now go to the Assembly Human Services Committee for consideration.

The two bills rejected by the committee were:

- AB 68 (Gallagher, R-East Nicolaus) would have required rural school districts and charter schools to ensure that each eligible school has at least one armed school resource officer on campus during regular school hours beginning with the 2028-29 school year.
 - The bill failed 2-5 (two members did not vote). Democratic members raised concerns that research on the effectiveness of school resource officers is mixed and that there is no conclusive evidence that the presence of school-based law enforcement improves students' perceptions of safety.
- AB 1493 (Ávila Fariás, D-Concord) would have required the county superintendent of schools to consolidate a petition-triggered special election with the next regularly scheduled election if it occurs at least 88 days after the order. It would have allowed the provisional appointee to remain in office until the election results are certified, while maintaining existing limits on the appointee's term.
 - The bill failed 2-2, with six members not voting. During discussion, members suggested the author may want to revisit the issue in 2026 and continue collaborating with interest holders, including the California School Boards Association, which is opposed to AB 1493.

The Senate Education Committee, chaired by Senator Sasha Renée Pérez (D-Pasadena), will meet Wednesday, January 14, 2026; however, none of the bills presently on the agenda pertain to TK-12 education.

Governor Newsom's 2026-27 State Budget Proposal

Tomorrow, Friday, January 9, 2026, the Newsom Administration will release its 2026-27 State Budget proposal, which will officially kick off the monthslong budget process.

Since the Governor provided his State of the State address to the Legislature today, the [press release](#) states that California Director of Finance Joe Stephenshaw will be holding the media briefing on the proposal tomorrow. Usually, Governor Newsom introduces his own proposal at the media briefing, but we are speculating that he is not doing it tomorrow due to this State of the State address today.

We will provide more information about what is in the Governor's State Budget proposal in subsequent *Sacramento Updates* over the next several weeks and will provide updates on the proposals as they begin to be vetted by legislative budget subcommittees.

Leilani Aguinaldo

Senate Leader Limón Announces Committee Assignments

By Kyle Hyland
School Services of California Inc.'s *Fiscal Report*
January 6, 2026

On Tuesday, December 23, 2025, the new Senate President pro Tempore, Monique Limón (D-Santa Barbara), announced her committee chair and member assignments for the 2026 legislative year. We provide the committee chair and membership of the relevant education committees below.

Senate Education Committee

Limón proposes no changes to the Senate Education Committee's chair and members. Senator Sasha Renée Pérez (D-Alhambra) will remain the chair of the committee while Senator Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh (R-Yucaipa) will remain vice chair. The full committee membership is as follows:

- Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair
- Senator Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh, Vice Chair
- Senator Christopher Cabaldon (D-Yolo)
- Senator Steven Choi (R-Irvine)
- Senator Dave Cortese (D-San Jose)
- Senator Lena Gonzalez (D-Long Beach)
- Senator Eloise Gómez Reyes (D-San Bernardino)

The Senate Education Committee is tasked with vetting legislation related to education, higher education, and certificated educational personnel.

Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1 on Education

On the budget side, Limón has appointed Senator John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) as chair of the full Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee. Laird previously served for several years as chair of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1 on Education.

To replace Laird as chair of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1 on Education, Limón has tapped Senator Lena Gonzalez. The full membership of Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1 is as follows:

- Senator Lena Gonzalez, Chair
- Senator Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh
- Senator Sasha Renée Pérez

The Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1 on Education is the subcommittee tasked with vetting and approving the education issues in the State Budget.

Senate Appropriations Committee

One of the most powerful positions in the California Senate is chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee as any bill deemed to have a fiscal impact must clear this committee. Last year, Senator Anna Caballero (D-Merced) served as its chair. However, this year Limón has appointed Senator Sabrina Cervantes (D-Riverside) to lead the committee. The full membership of the committee is as follows:

- Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
- Senator Kelly Seyarto (R-Murrieta), Vice Chair
- Senator Christopher Cabaldon
- Senator Megan Dahle (R-Bieber)
- Senator Tim Grayson (D-Concord)
- Senator Laura Richardson (D-San Pedro)
- Senator Aisha Wahab (D-Silicon Valley)

Note: Legislators plan to introduce a new bill to require kindergarten and some are confident that it will meet a better fate than its predecessors, which either died in committee or were vetoed, largely due to the cost.

Will This Be the Year California Makes Kindergarten Mandatory?

By Carolyn Jones
CalMatters
January 5, 2026

The past few years, California has been all about the ABCs, 1-2-3s and the wheels on the bus, investing more than \$5 billion in early childhood education.

But kindergarten, a staple of elementary schools for more than a century, remains optional. Despite nearly a half dozen legislative attempts to require it, California is one of 32 states that doesn't mandate that all 5-year-olds attend school.

That might change next year. Legislators plan to introduce a new bill to require kindergarten and they're confident that it will meet a better fate than its predecessors, which either died in committee or were vetoed, largely due to the cost.

“Kids need to be around other kids, they need to be learning. It matters,” said Patricia Lozano, executive director of Early Edge California, which advocates for early childhood education. “I don’t see why California can’t make this happen.”

The data, advocates say, is clear. Children who attend kindergarten have higher test scores in math and reading in third grade and beyond and higher high school graduation rates. They’re also less likely to be suspended or drop out later in their school careers.

Why some parents opt out

While California requires all school districts to offer kindergarten, it doesn’t require families to enroll their children. Most do, but about 5% a year opt out. The reasons vary: some families believe their children aren’t ready for the rigors of school, and others are happy with their children’s current arrangement, whether it’s a preschool, day care or staying home with family.

Latino families are the least likely to send their children to kindergarten, data shows. Lozano said there’s a variety of reasons for this: they either don’t know about it due to a language barrier; they’re afraid to register their children in school due to immigration concerns; parents are working so hard they’ve missed notices from the school district; or some combination of all three. Regardless, schools need to improve their outreach to that community, she said.

Cecelia Kiss, a bilingual kindergarten teacher in the Sacramento City Unified School District, said she recently had a student whose mother was deported, and the child was unable to attend school because there was no one available to drive her. Even though the child loved school and the family placed a high value on education, it was logistically impossible to get the child to school. It took several weeks for the school and family to make transportation arrangements.

“For Latinos, education is so important. We want to give our kids the best we can,” said Kiss, who is also the parent of a kindergartner. “But sometimes we can’t do everything. We rely on kind teachers to care for our children, to help them learn, to help them be prepared for first grade.”

State Sen. Susan Rubio said that the fact that kindergarten isn’t mandatory discourages already disadvantaged families from enrolling their children. In her experience, Latino families have tremendous respect for the public school system and if the system tells them kindergarten is optional, and therefore not a priority, “they listen to that.”

That’s why she’s proposed two previous bills to make kindergarten mandatory. The state should be unequivocal in its message to families that early childhood education is essential for students’ success in school and life, she said. The state’s already rolled out transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds, expanded state-funded preschool and added more slots to its subsidized child care program. Bolstering kindergarten should be next, she said.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond agrees. He said this month that making kindergarten mandatory is a legislative priority for 2026, and he pledged to support any bill that addresses it. Several legislators said they’d consider sponsoring one.

‘Not an urgent need’

Both of Rubio’s previous kindergarten bills died – one in the Senate Appropriations Committee and another when Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed it. In his veto note, he said he supports early education generally but the state hadn’t budgeted the cost, estimated to be \$268 million annually.

“While the author’s intent is laudable ... it is important to remain disciplined when it comes to spending, particularly spending that is ongoing,” Newsom wrote.

Plenty of groups supported the bills, including the California Teachers Association — the state’s largest teachers union — and a slew of school districts. But it had a few opponents, namely the Homeschool Association of California. The group’s opposition was not based on the merits of kindergarten itself, but on the state’s ability to strip rights from parents.

“Most kids are already going to kindergarten. But some parents have good reasons for keeping their kids at home,” said Jamie Heston, a member of the group’s board. “Parents want the choice to decide what’s best for their individual child.”

The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association hasn’t taken a position on the issue, but generally opposes new initiatives that cost money — including mandatory kindergarten. That stance isn’t likely to change if a kindergarten bill resurfaces, the group’s vice president Susan Shelley said this week.

“From a budgetary point of view, there’s a lot of pressure this year to keep spending under control,” Shelley said. “This would not be a one-time cost. It would be ongoing. And there’s not an urgent need to expand kindergarten, compared to other more pressing needs facing the state right now.”

Bruce Fuller, an education professor at UC Berkeley who studies early childhood education, said the Legislature should focus on more pressing needs facing the under-6 crowd. Those include how the rollout of transitional kindergarten has led to the closure of many preschools, leaving many 3-year-olds without a place to go. Also, Head Start is struggling with funding and other obstacles imposed by the Trump administration, including attempts to bar families who are not citizens. And even though California has expanded access to state-funded preschool, not enough families know they’re eligible.

“Not that many families opt out of kindergarten, so it’s not a huge need,” Fuller said. “There are more immediate concerns.”

Learning gaps among students

Still, Rubio is confident that a kindergarten bill has a good chance of passing this year, largely because the Legislature has seen a significant turnover since it last voted on a kindergarten bill in 2024. Twenty-seven new senators and Assembly members were elected last fall.

For Rubio, whose parents immigrated from Mexico, the issue is personal. Although she did well in school, her twin brother did not. At an early age, he was wrongly placed in special education, fell behind and struggled throughout his time in school, eventually dropping out. Rubio believes he would have fared better if he had a high-quality early childhood education.

She’s also an elementary school teacher who’s seen the gap between students who’ve been to preschool, TK and kindergarten, versus those who had never enrolled in school at all until first grade. Children who’ve been

to kindergarten know how to hold a pencil, write their names, count to 20, take turns and maybe even read or do basic math, she said. Those who haven't lag far behind their peers and some never catch up, she said.

"I have very vivid memories of my students just breaking down crying at the end of the year because they couldn't do a test. They didn't know the answers, and that's so heartbreaking to see," said Rubio, who's on leave from her job teaching at Monrovia Unified in Los Angeles County. "It's hard on them, and it's hard on the teachers because those children need a lot of extra help."

Lozano said she thinks the bill will pass eventually. The initiative would cost money, but the state would save money in the long run if more students succeeded in school and graduated.

"It took us 20 years to get TK. It takes time to change minds, change policies," Lozano said. "There are so many benefits to kindergarten, especially for the kids who need it the most. We believe the benefits outweigh the costs."

Note: As part of his proposed State Budget, Governor Newsom will propose responsibility for managing the CDE into the Executive Branch and strengthening the role of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to foster alignment of state education policies from early childhood through college.

Newsom Proposes Governor Controls the California Department of Education

Under the shift, the state superintendent of public instruction would have a different role.

By John Fensterwald
EdSource
January 8, 2026

Gov. Gavin Newsom will announce Thursday that he will ask the Legislature to shift the operation and control of the California Department of Education from the state superintendent of public instruction to the governor and the State Board of Education.

More than a half-dozen study commissions and reports dating back to 1920 have urged the idea's adoption to eliminate confusion and conflicts over who in California is ultimately accountable for education policies and programs.

All have agreed that competing and overlapping authorities — a governor and state board that create programs and policies, and an independently elected state schools superintendent who oversees and implements them and is answerable to voters, not to governors — makes it unclear who's in charge.

Newsom will disclose his plan in his State of the State address on Thursday. A press release from the governor's office explaining why the idea makes sense contains few details. These will be fleshed out in a preliminary budget "trailer" bill in February, said Brooks Allen, executive director of the state board and an education adviser to the governor.

The release indicates Newsom has already lined up support from key education groups, including leaders of the associations of school administrators, county superintendents, and school district business officers, along with children's advocacy groups Californians Together and EdTrust-West.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, who is running for governor, could not be reached for an immediate comment.

The proposal will not call for eliminating the state schools superintendent as an independent constitutional officer, a role that dates back to the 19th century. Four times voters have rejected that idea.

Instead, department management would be shifted by statute to the governor, who, under the direct authority of the state board, would hire a director of the Department of Education. That person would be comparable to a cabinet secretary — a manager, presumably with knowledge and experience of running educational systems.

The state schools superintendent, in turn, would act as an “independent champion” and ombudsman for education from early childhood through higher education, under the plan that Newsom proposes. The position would gain responsibilities as a voting member of the State Board of Education and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges system.

“This is not a referendum on the current superintendent, but the recognition of historical truth,” said Allen. “Structurally, the system is set up for conflicts.”

The idea of realignment gained traction last month with the endorsement of the concept by the research center Policy Analysis for California Education, or PACE. Its lengthy report said that California's education governance “is fragmented by design, with a double-headed structure that divides authority” and “blurs policy-setting and implementation roles.”

A 2006 report for *Getting Down to Facts*, a series of studies commissioned by the governor and the Legislature, reached a similar conclusion, calling the state governance system “a remarkably crazy quilt of interacting authorities that are not aligned, for the purpose of accountability or action.”

“Kudos to Newsom for pushing for realignment,” said Ted Lempert, president of Children Now, a research and advocacy organization, who is lining up backers of the proposal and is finding considerable interest and support for clearer accountability.

“Experts say governance affects outcomes in the classroom,” said Lempert. Educators and Californians want to know where the buck stops when programs are poorly implemented or promised payments for grants are late, he said.

Currently, only eight states have a governance structure similar to California's, while in 14 states, including Connecticut, Florida, Illinois and Massachusetts, the governor appoints an education board that in turn appoints the chief school officer, according to Newsom's office.

For the past three decades, state school superintendents, including Thurmond, have been legislators without experience running school districts or large organizations.

“We see the benefit of democratic elections, but also the benefits in appointing leaders with expertise. Those who best lead organizations often do not want to run a statewide campaign,” said Jeannie Myung, the director of policy research at PACE and the lead writer for the PACE report.

It’s why, she said, “we elect school board members but let the superintendent run a school district.”

In the governor’s press release, Yolie Flores, president and CEO of Families in Schools, also praised Newsom for advancing the proposal.

“For too long, a fragmented and inefficient system has limited schools’ ability to partner meaningfully with families and has created barriers to equitable student success,” she said. “Thoughtful, systemic reform is essential to ensuring that every child thrives — and that families are empowered as true partners in their children’s education.”

In a PACE release Thursday, Michael Kirst, whom former Gov. Jerry Brown appointed as president of the State Board of Education during Brown’s four terms in office, called Newsom’s proposal “a new vision and a dramatic overhaul” that the Legislature should enact.

“California’s education governance system was created in the 19th century. The lack of fundamental change since then has hindered education progress,” he said.

Myung cautioned that passing statutes will be only the first step for improving a department that studies have shown has been underfunded and overly focused on meeting federal programs’ compliance requirements.

“Change will not be overnight. It will take time to build its capacity,” she said.

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Member of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Amy Idsvoog, Executive Officer

Date: January 16, 2026
Phone Number: (559) 457-3498

Regarding; Let's Talk and Fresno Jo Chatbot Data

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board with updated data regarding the customer service tool, Let's Talk and Chatbot, Fresno Jo. The data supports customer service efforts around compassion, service excellence, communication, and hospitality.

Let's Talk data was compared October 1 to December 31 for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 school years. For this October-December, we have received 2,210 dialogue engagements, compared to 2,472 for the same time last school year. Of those inquiries this school year, 609 were from the district webpages, 873 came from school webpages, and 413 were generated through the Fresno Jo chatbot. Data shows 315 inquiries that came through text, phone, or other engagement sources.

When comparing 2024/25 data to current 2025/26 Let's Talk dialogues nearly all categories have increased this school year. The exception to that can be seen in the text category where there was a decrease of 653 inquiries. Last school year we had three departments that used Let's Talk texting capabilities to garner feedback during listening sessions and staff meetings. Those teams did not use the tool this year which reflects the singular decrease. Outside of that one category, overall usage of Let's Talk has increased when compared to last year.

Most importantly, key district response and Customer Experience (CX) goals were exceeded October through December 2025. The district goal is to respond to each inquiry within two business days. The average response time was 1.3 days which mirrored the same time last year. The CX score was 8.9 out of 10 just slightly higher than the same time last year.

Human Resources plans to provide quarterly data to the Board.

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication, or require additional information, please contact Amy Idsvoog at (559) 457-3498.

Cabinet Approval: 
Name and Title: David Chavez, Chief of Human Resources/Labor Relations

October 1 - December 31, 2025 Let's Talk Data

	24-25 Year	25-26 Year
Dialogues	2,472	2210
CX Score	8.6/10	8.9/10
Average Dialogue Age	1.3	1.3 Days

Dialogue Origin	24-25	24-25 Dialogues	25-26	25-26 Dialogues
District Webpage	32%	782	28%	609
School Site Webpage	25%	623	40%	873
Chatbot	4%	88	19%	413
Text	32%	802	7%	149
Phone	1%	35	5%	120
Other	6%	142	2%	46

Customer Type	24-25	24-25 Dialogues	25-26	25-26 Dialogues
Employee	51%	1258	44%	976
Parent/Guardian	25%	623	20%	435
Community Member	17%	432	18%	387
Student	6%	143	7%	151
Other/Unknown	8%	198	12%	261

