February 2, 2026

Subject: Open Letter from Superintendents — A Shared Call for Sustainable Funding for California's Public Schools

As superintendents of public school districts across California, we share a deep respect for the educators and classified professionals who serve students every day. Many of us began our careers in classrooms or school operations, and we understand firsthand the dedication, expertise, and commitment required to support students and communities. Fair compensation, safe working conditions, and professional respect are essential to a strong public education system.

We also share a responsibility to speak honestly about the fiscal conditions facing California's public schools and to engage collaboratively with our partners in addressing them.

Districts across the state are navigating a convergence of fiscal challenges that is both widespread and structural. Student enrollment continues to decline statewide, reducing revenue in a funding system tied directly to attendance. Federal relief funds that helped stabilize schools during and after the pandemic have expired. At the same time, projected Cost of Living Adjustments have been revised downward, while costs for special education, transportation, employee retirement, health care, insurance, utilities, and facilities continue to rise.

These pressures are not unique to any one district. Large and small districts, urban, suburban, and rural alike are experiencing similar constraints. When nearly every school system in California is facing the same challenges, it is clear that the issue is not isolated decision-making, but the sustainability of the funding model itself.

At the same time, we want to acknowledge, clearly and sincerely, the very real strain these economic conditions are placing on our workforce. Rising housing costs, inflation, and everyday living costs are affecting educators and classified staff across California. Many are making difficult personal choices simply to remain in the profession or continue serving their communities. We see that reality, we hear it directly from our employees, and we do not dismiss the frustration, stress, or urgency they are experiencing.

Educators and staff deserve to feel valued and supported, and districts recognize and respect those realities. At the same time, school systems cannot spend resources they do not receive, nor can local negotiations resolve statewide enrollment trends or the loss of temporary federal funding. Addressing these challenges requires a shared understanding of fiscal limits alongside a shared commitment to finding solutions.

Across California, districts are making difficult but necessary decisions to maintain fiscal solvency and protect students: reducing administrative costs, delaying capital investments, restructuring programs, and carefully evaluating expenditures. These actions are taken to preserve classroom instruction, student services, and long-term stability — not because districts lack commitment to their workforce, but because responsible stewardship demands it.

There is also meaningful progress to protect. California schools continue to recover from pandemic learning disruptions, and recent gains in student achievement reflect the dedication of educators and staff across the state. Just as importantly, schools are among the safest and most stable places for children in our communities. They provide not only learning, but daily access to meals, health and mental health supports, trusted adults, and safe environments. That continuity matters deeply for students and families, particularly in times of uncertainty, and it is essential that actions taken during this moment do not compromise the ability of schools to remain open, safe, and supportive.

This moment calls for partnership rather than polarization. District leaders, educators, labor organizations, families, and policymakers all share a common goal: thriving public schools that serve students well and support the professionals who make that work possible. Achieving that goal will require honest dialogue, mutual respect, and a collective focus on long-term solutions.

We believe this is a critical opportunity to work together — with labor partners and community stakeholders — to advocate for more stable, adequate, and predictable funding from the state. That includes examining how funding formulas respond to enrollment changes, ensuring special education and other mandated services are fully funded, and aligning resources with the real costs of operating schools.

We remain committed to collaboration, transparency, and shared responsibility. By working together and engaging state leaders with a unified voice, we can build a more sustainable public education system that supports students, educators, and communities now and into the future.

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Note: Edited February 3, 2026 to add Santa Ana Unified School District