BOARD COMMUNICATIONS - OCTOBER 23, 2026

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

Page

1. OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

Superintendent Calendar Highlights.docx 3

2. OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT
Ben Amuku Drati, Ed.D., Deputy Superintendent

2.1 Ratify Agreements for Two Outdoor Education Camps.docx 4

3. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
Ambra O'Connor, Chief of Staff

4. OFFICE OF BUSINESS & FINANCIAL SERVICES
Patrick Jensen, Chief Officer

4.1 School Services of California Weekly Update Report for October 15, 2026.docx 5
School Services of California Weekly Update Report for October 15, 2026.pdf

5. OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Adela G. Duncan, Chief Officer

6. OFFICE OF ENGAGEMENT & EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Wendy McCulley, Chief Officer

7. OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES & LABOR RELATIONS
David Chavez, Chief Officer

8. OFFICE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION
Carlos Castillo, Ed.D., Chief Officer

9. OFFICE OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES
Paul Idsvoog, Chief Officer

9.1 Fresno Unified Aviation Academy Career Technical Education Facility Project Update and Next Steps.docx 13

10. OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
Paoze Lee, Chief Officer

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: October 23, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3884

Regarding: Superintendent Calendar Highlights

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

- Attended the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) Annual Conference
- Panel member on a session titled “The Superintendent as a Civic Leader: Stewarding the Future of Public Education” at the CGCS Annual Conference
- Attended the CGCS Superintendent’s Meeting at the Annual Conference
- Presented a session titled “Fresno Unified School District’s Student Outcomes Focused Governance – Shifting into Strategic Planning at the CGCS Annual Conference
- Attended the CGCS Board of Directors Meeting

If you have any questions about the information in this communication, or require further information, please contact me at (559) 457-3884. Thank you.

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: Armen Torigian, Executive Officer

Date: October 23, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3805

Regarding: Ratify Agreements for Two Outdoor Education Camps

The purpose of this communication is to notify the Board about the ratification of two outdoor education camps; agreements for Sierra Outdoor School (Clovis Unified School District) and Wonder Valley.

Student Engagement is asking for ratification on the agreement with Sierra Outdoor School (Clovis Unified School District) because Mayfair Elementary sixth-grade students are scheduled to attend camp Wednesday, October 28, 2026, and due to delays in finalizing the insurance language and obtaining the proper signatures the agreement was not ready for an earlier Board approval date.

Student Engagement is asking for ratification on the agreement with Wonder Valley because Fremont Elementary sixth-grade students attended camp Wednesday, October 14, 2026, February 11, 2026, under the umbrella of the Board approved Award of Request for Qualifications 26-15, Expanded Learning Enrichment Services.

If you have any questions about the information included in this communication or need further information, please contact Armen Torigian at (559) 457-3805. Thank you.

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Ben Drati, Ed.D. Deputy 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: October 23, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3907

Regarding: School Services Weekly Update Reports for October 15, 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 October 15, 2026, include the articles as follows:

- The $3.9 Billion Question – October 15, 2026
- School Test Scores Up, But Just a Little, as Progress Slows in K-12 Classes–October 15, 2026
- Exclusive: How Much Have California Schools Spent in Prop. 28 Arts Funds? We Now Have an Answer – October 15, 2026

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

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Patrick Jensen, Chief Financial Officer

School Services of California INC.
An Employee-Owned Company

500 Capitol Mall
•
Suite 1700
•
Sacramento
•
California 95814
•
TEL: 916 . 446 . 7517
•
FAX: 916 . 446 . 2011
•
www.sscal.com

DATE: October 15, 2026

TO: Misty Her
Superintendent

AT: Fresno Unified School District

FROM: Your SSC Governmental Relations Team

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

CDE Releases the 2026 Dashboard

Today, October 15, 2026, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the 2026 California School Dashboard (Dashboard) and statewide assessment results for the 2025-26 school year. For the first time, the state released both sets of data simultaneously, providing a more comprehensive picture of student performance.

The results show continued improvement in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science, although gains were generally smaller than last year. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards increased to 49.3% in ELA (up 0.5 percentage points), 38.4% in mathematics (up 1.1 percentage points), and 36.0% in science (up 3.3 percentage points). Despite these improvements, fewer than half of California students are meeting grade-level standards in ELA and mathematics.

Other statewide indicators also improved, with the four-year graduation rate increasing to 87.9% and the percentage of students considered prepared for college or careers rising to 55.2%. Chronic absenteeism declined to 18.3%, down 1.1 percentage points from last year and significantly below its peak of approximately 30% in 2021-22. However, absenteeism remains above pre-pandemic levels.

The data also highlights ongoing enrollment challenges. Statewide public school enrollment declined to approximately 5.73 million students, nearly 500,000 fewer than a decade ago, while the number of students with disabilities increased by approximately 25% over the same period. These trends continue to present fiscal and operational challenges for local educational agencies (LEAs), particularly as districts navigate declining enrollment and growing student service needs.

LEAs can review their results here: California School Dashboard (CA Dept of Education).

State Revenues Continue to Outpace Budget Projections

Also today, the Department of Finance released its October 2026 Finance Bulletin, reporting that preliminary General Fund cash receipts totaled $22.6 billion in September, exceeding the 2026-27 State Budget forecast by $2.9 billion (14.9%). For the first three months of the fiscal year, General Fund revenues totaled $50.0 billion, approximately $4.7 billion (10.3%) above budget projections.

All three of the state's major revenue sources, commonly referred to as the "Big Three," exceeded budget expectations through September:

- **Personal Income Tax:** $33.1 billion, exceeding projections by $2.4 billion (7.8%)
- **Corporation Tax:** $5.8 billion, exceeding projections by $1.8 billion (45.1%)
- **Sales and Use Tax:** $8.7 billion, exceeding projections by $252 million (3.0%)

While the stronger-than-anticipated revenue collections are welcome news, it remains to be seen how they will affect the state's overall fiscal outlook and Proposition 98 minimum guarantee. Updated revenue and expenditure estimates will be reflected in the Governor's January 2027 State Budget proposal.

You can find the October bulletin here: October 2026 Finance Bulletin.

Leilani Aguinaldo

The $3.9 Billion Question

By Megan Baier and Patti F. Herrera, EdD
School Services of California's *Fiscal Report*
October 15, 2026

The 2026-27 Enacted Budget notably withheld $3.9 billion of the 2025-26 Proposition 98 minimum guarantee for allocation to local educational agencies (LEAs) and instead used those funds to support other state programs. Since then, LEAs across the state have been asking the question, "*When can schools expect to see that funding?*"

Assembly Bill (AB) 126 (Committee on Budget, Statutes of 2026), the education budget trailer bill, specifies when and how the $3.9 billion owed to LEAs will be paid and appropriated for education. Under AB 126, the state will only appropriate funding to the $3.9 billion obligation if state revenues at the 2027 May Revision exceed the projections included in the 2026-27 Enacted Budget. Only if revenues outperform expectations, a mere one-third of the new available funding would be dedicated to the state's outstanding obligation to the 2025-26 minimum guarantee after the state meets other constitutional obligations such as required deposits into the state reserve account.

Conversely, if revenues perform at the Enacted Budget projections or fall short, no funding would be appropriated toward the $3.9 billion obligation. Instead, the state would address the obligation through a payment schedule developed by the Director of the Department of Finance or future legislation, neither of which offer any assurances of when the $3.9 billion obligation will be paid. Further, AB 126 also specifies that any funds appropriated to the $3.9 billion obligation must be deposited into the Proposition 98 reserve, not allocated to LEAs. As such, even in the event the state does begin repaying its outstanding obligation, LEAs will not immediately see additional funding. Moreover, when the Legislature decides to allocate the funds for local use, there is no guarantee that they will be allocated on an equal per-average daily attendance basis for local discretionary purposes. The Legislature may decide to allocate the funds through a different formula or competitive grant for restricted purposes. Only time will tell.

In addition, there are two pending lawsuits challenging the legality of the state's decision to withhold Proposition 98 funds and use them instead to support programs outside of public education, which we previously reported on (see "Proposition 98 Battle Escalates" and "Second Lawsuit Filed over Proposition 98 Funding" in the September 2026 and October 2026 *Fiscal Reports*, respectively). Depending on the outcome of these legal challenges, the state could be required to take a different approach to meeting its constitutional funding obligations to education.

Absent court intervention, the provisions established by AB 126 will determine how the state addresses the $3.9 billion owed to Proposition 98, with no guarantee that LEAs will receive additional funding in the near future.

Note: State Board of Education President Linda Darling Hammond describes the 2026 Dashboard results as "slow but steady improvement."

School Test Scores Up, But Just a Little, as Progress Slows in K-12 Classes

By Carolyn Jones
CalMatters
October 15, 2026

California's K-12 student test scores improved slightly in almost all categories last year, but progress slowed following a post-pandemic surge, according to state data released today.

"It's slow but steady improvement," said Linda Darling-Hammond, president of the State Board of Education. "It suggests we're continuing to come out of the pandemic, and there's still a lot of work to do."

The percentage of students proficient in math jumped just over 1 percentage point – to 38.5% – and the number of students proficient in English language arts rose half a percentage point, 49.3%. Science scores increased 3.3% percentage points, to 36%.

For the first time, the state released its enrollment, test score and California School Dashboard data together, making it easier for school districts to communicate with parents and the public and for policymakers to analyze gains and declines across broad categories.

Despite the gains, though, scores were lower for some student groups, including white and Asian students, compared to 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic forced most schools to close for in-person learning.

Enrollment decline continues

Statewide enrollment, which has been falling for a decade, plunged to 5.7 million – a loss of 74,000 students from last year. Because the state funds schools based on the number of students who show up every day, the declining numbers will mean less revenue for many districts.

Amid the enrollment numbers, a few changes stood out. The number of students with disabilities jumped 25% over the past decade, to 850,822. And the number of English learners dropped 30% over that same time period due to a decline in immigration among other factors.

Chronic absenteeism, which hit 30% just after the pandemic, dropped to 18% last year, a decline of more than 1 percentage point from the previous year. Prior to the pandemic, only about 12% of students were chronically absent, or gone from school at least 10% of the school year.

Test scores and just about every other academic indicator among California's K-12 students collapsed during the Covid-19 pandemic, but rebounded significantly the first few years back to in-person learning. That progress appears to have settled, at least for now.

Darling-Hammond predicted English language arts scores will rise in the next few years, as a handful of sweeping state reforms go into effect: transitional kindergarten, dyslexia screening, literacy coaches for elementary teachers and a phonics-based reading curriculum, among others.

More grads, better prepared

Highlands charter school, the embattled Sacramento school for adults seeking high school diplomas, loomed large over the data. Last year, Highlands and its sister school, California Innovative Career Academy, had such high enrollments – 17,513 combined – and such low graduation rates – less than 2% – that they skewed graduation data for the entire state.

California Department of Education staff presented numbers with and without Highlands. Including Highlands, the state graduation rate was 87.9%, a slight increase from the previous year. Excluding Highlands, the rate was almost 2 percentage points higher – 89.7%, the highest rate in decades in California.

Highlands, under new leadership, winnowed its enrollment this year and is seeking to improve its outcomes after the State Auditor blasted it last year for alleged mismanagement.

The state's high school graduates also showed improvements in college and career preparation. According to the dashboard, the percentage of students who completed a career pathway or the A-G classes required for admission to the state's public universities climbed 2.2 percentage points, to 55.2%.

Note: California schools spent nearly 96% of their approximately $1 billion in first-year Proposition 28 arts education funding, but 336 local educational agencies left $34.4 million unspent, highlighting ongoing challenges with staffing shortages and spending requirements.

Exclusive: How Much Have California Schools Spent in Prop. 28 Arts Funds? We Now Have an Answer

Many schools hired new arts educators, while some left millions unspent

By Vani Sanganeria
EdSource
October 15, 2026

California schools spent the vast majority of their roughly $1 billion allocation in Proposition 28 funds for the 2023-2024 school year on hiring new visual arts, music, dance and theater teachers and expanding arts programs, according to data obtained by EdSource.

But while schools spent nearly 96% of their arts education funds, they also left about $34.4 million on the table, meaning they will have those unspent funds deducted and receive smaller allocations of arts education funds for next year.

The expenditure data reported by schools to the California Department of Education gives a snapshot, for the first time, of Prop. 28's rollout in K-12 classrooms. Even as some teacher positions remain unfilled, and administrators try to avoid litigation for breaking spending rules, California schools largely put their annual windfall of Prop. 28 funds to use in their first year.

"These expenditure numbers reflect that extraordinary collective effort, but they also give us a roadmap for what comes next," said Kyle Holmes, director of the California County Superintendents Statewide Arts Initiative, which oversees Prop. 28 implementation and provided the data. "We now have a clearer picture of

where schools need additional support, and an established statewide network ready to help them turn this historic investment into lasting opportunities for students."

Voters overwhelmingly passed Prop. 28 in 2022, which sets aside about $1 billion a year for arts education that is distributed to schools based on enrollment and share of low-income students. In the three years since the law went into effect, school leaders have flagged several issues — missing state-level guidance, confusion around spending rules, a lack of arts administrators, as well as shortages of arts educators, which they say slowed down schools' ability to spend their Prop. 28 dollars.

"With all the confusion and frustration, with very little guidance or direction set forward in the statute, (the 96% expenditure rate) is better than any of us could have expected," Holmes said.

More arts programs for students

According to the data, most California schools and districts — about 85% — spent all of their Prop. 28 funds.

Fresno Unified, for instance, spent all of its $13 million allocation to fund new elementary arts integration and dance programs for nearly 50,000 students, the district said. Fresno Unified also hired 60 new full-time arts instructors, along with 19 elementary arts integration teachers and 13 dance teachers.

"The biggest concern initially was around hiring that many teachers," especially educators credentialed in dance and theater, said Heather McKeithen, arts education manager for Fresno Unified.

The district trained all of its 105 principals to "ensure the money was being spent the way the law intended," and figured out how to make new arts programs work within the limited instructional time available, McKeithen said.

"Everyone was also so used to grant money disappearing after a few years, that we had to think more strategically with an eye towards the long term," McKeithen said of the ongoing Prop. 28 funds.

Fullerton Joint Union High School District in Orange County spent all of its $2 million in first-year Prop. 28 funds to hire 75 arts specialists as well as develop film programs, expand technical theater offerings and provide visual arts instruction. Despite declining enrollment, the district said it has seen an increase in students participating in the arts, with about 225 new instrumental music students and 33 additional vocal music students.

Michael Despars, a visual and performing arts teacher on special assignment at Fullerton, said the district relied on the Orange County Department of Education's arts coordinator to find "creative uses for Prop. 28 funding that reach as many of our students as possible."

Los Angeles Unified, the state's largest district, also reported spending all of its $71 million allocation, followed by San Diego Unified, which spent 99% of its roughly $15 million allocation.

Prop. 28 expenditures alone, however, do not measure whether money was spent correctly or effectively on arts education.

Confusion around the law's "supplement, not supplant" rule — which requires that schools use Prop. 28 funds on new arts instruction — led to some schools allegedly misusing funds for existing salaries or stipends in choir, band, theater and dance programs, for example.

Broad definitions of the arts also enabled some administrators to spend money on programs such as culinary arts or computer science.

In 2025, former Los Angeles Unified superintendent and Prop. 28 author Austin Beutner sued LAUSD, accusing the district of diverting millions in Prop. 28 funding to pay for existing salaries. The case is pending in court.

Holmes said a new law, Assembly Bill 2440, signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in September, will provide more transparency regarding how schools are using Prop. 28 funds.

The new law requires schools to post expenditure plans publicly, and more clearly defines the four arts disciplines — visual arts, music, dance and theater — that are eligible for Prop. 28 spending. It also clears the way for districts to use Prop. 28 funds on arts programs that lost funding.

"We want to make sure that every dollar is spent," Holmes, director of the California County Superintendents Arts Initiative, said, "and we want to make sure that it is spent on improving and providing supplemental, high-quality arts education for our kids."

Millions left on the table

About 336 school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education accounted for the unspent $34.4 million that will be returned to the state's total Prop. 28 budget for next year. Schools had three years to spend their funds, and those that missed this year's June 30 deadline will have the amount of unspent funds deducted from their next Prop. 28 allocation.

Sacramento City Unified, for example, spent about 71% of its $6.2 million allocation, returning more than $1.8 million in arts education funding to the state, according to expenditure data. Yuba City Unified spent only 18% of its allocation and will lose about $1.7 million. Palmdale Elementary School District spent about 55% of its allocation, losing $1.4 million in arts education funds.

Holmes said the California County Superintendents Arts Initiative will reach out to schools who left millions unspent to understand what went wrong and where they can help them invest in the arts.

"Our goal is that as many of our students in California as possible can have more equitable access to arts education, and clearly, that's not happening in some of our districts," Holmes said.

A statewide analysis earlier this year also found that more than $218 million in Prop. 28 funds remained unspent as of March of this year, in part because schools had charged their spending to funds they received for the following two years instead, Holmes said. Fixing the accounting error alone saved schools from losing about $168 million from next year's Prop. 28 allocations, he said.

The California County Superintendents' Art Initiative will use the final expenditure report to advise on strategic arts plans with schools, which will help them tailor Prop. 28 spending to school communities, Holmes said.

"The more years we do this with Prop. 28, the better we'll get at it," Holmes said.

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Jeremy Ward / Alex Belanger

Date: October 23, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 248-7082

Regarding: Fresno Unified Aviation Academy CTE Facility – Project Update and Next Steps

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board with an update on the Fresno Unified Aviation Academy Career Technical Education (CTE) Facility at Fresno Chandler Executive Airport. The District has officially completed the project criteria documents, positioning the project to advance toward procurement through a Design-Build delivery method under a Project Labor Agreement (PLA).

The Aviation Academy will expand student access to hands-on career pathways in pilot training, drone operations, aircraft maintenance, and air traffic control, with opportunities for college credit and practical experience in an active aviation environment. The planned project includes a new North Hangar, parking and circulation improvements, utility infrastructure, and enhanced airport security. The South Hangar and Engagement Center remain dependent on additional funding.

This milestone reflects years of planning and coordination involving education code and legislative efforts, along with state and federal aviation partners, including Caltrans Division of Aeronautics.

Next Steps: Facilities and Procurement will finalize the Design-Build solicitation, engage industry partners, evaluate proposals, and select a qualified Design-Build team. The District will continue coordinating with the City of Fresno to finalize lease terms, airport-use charges, insurance requirements, and maintenance and repair responsibilities. Required FAA, Caltrans, DSA, and City reviews will be advanced as the design progresses.

Project Budget and Funding: The total project budget is $56.7 million. The current planning amount is $49.4 million in ELOP carryover, leaving a $7.3 million funding gap before additional funding is secured. The District will pursue potential State CTE grants, New Markets Tax Credits, and Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant opportunities in coordination with CTE, Fiscal Services, the Foundation, and Facilities Grants. These potential sources are not yet confirmed, and project scope and phasing will be aligned with available funding.

Risk Management has confirmed that the City agreed to remove the requirement for the District to pay a prorated share of the City's fire and extended-coverage insurance. The District will provide its own property insurance.

Completion of the criteria documents marks a significant step toward delivering a distinctive aviation education facility for Fresno Unified students and the community. The District's immediate priorities are to advance procurement, finalize lease arrangements, pursue additional funding, and coordinate required approvals to move the project toward implementation.
If you have any questions about the information included in this communication or require additional information, please contact Jeremy Ward at (559) 248-7082. Thank you.

Cabinet Approval: 
Name and Title: Paul Idsvoog, Chief Operations Officer