531

Strategic Plan

for Educational Success

through 2030

ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STEFAN BEAN, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

From vision to progress: All. Together. Now.

When we introduced OCDE's 5-3-1 Strategic Plan in late 2024, we were setting a clear direction for our work: five key initiatives, three support objectives and one bold 2030 vision for the students OCDE serves directly.

This framework grew from a simple belief: Education is about more than instruction. It is about people opening doors, removing barriers and helping students see what is possible. I know that personally. My own path was shaped by people who saw possibility in me, offered support and helped me keep moving forward.

Since then, our teams have begun putting the ideas in 5-3-1 into practice. We have listened to educators, district leaders and community partners. We have seen what is working, where we need greater focus and where we can build on early progress. And now we are refining the plan to make our priorities more specific and to more sharply define how we will measure progress.

That means setting clear indicators of success, tracking results and being willing to adjust along the way.

As we move from vision to measurable progress, we have also embraced a new theme for this year: "All. Together. Now." The phrase borrows from the title of a Beatles song, but for us it has become something more – a shared call to action.

"All" reminds us that every student, family, educator and community matters. "Together" reflects the shared responsibility behind meaningful progress. Schools, families, districts, community partners and students themselves all bring something essential to the work. And "Now" speaks to the urgency of this moment.

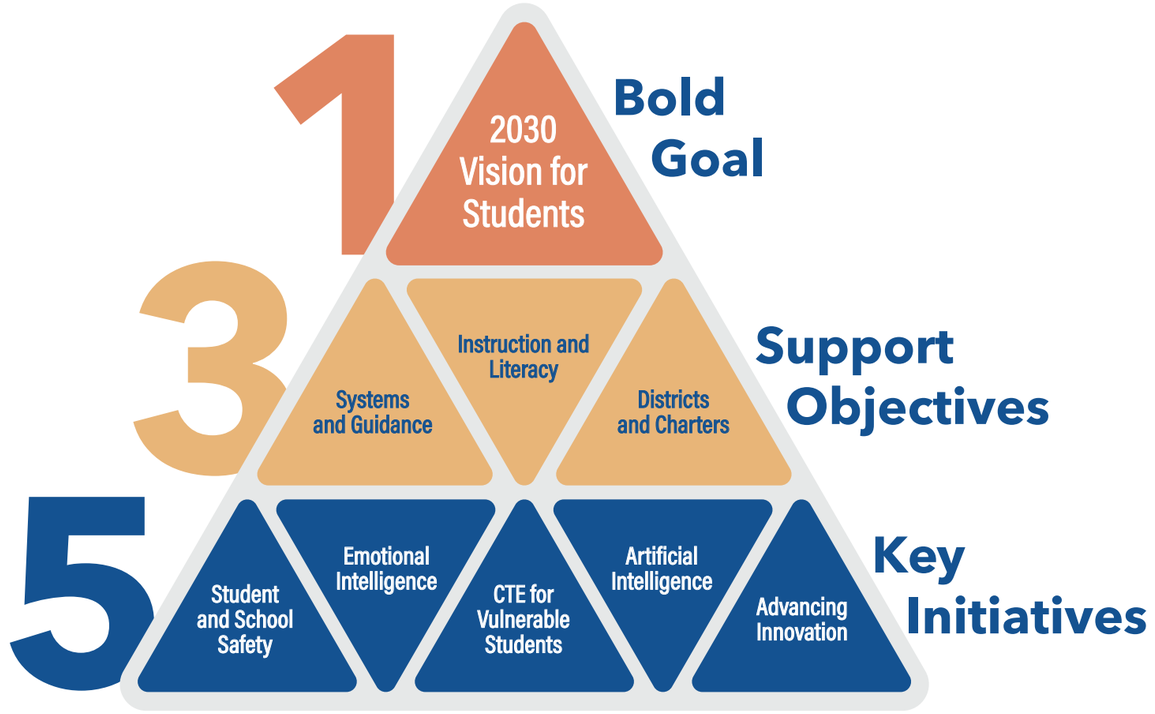
Education is changing quickly, and our responsibility is to move forward thoughtfully, collaboratively and with a clear focus on results. The pages that follow show where this work stands today, where we are headed next and how we will measure progress.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped shape this plan, and I invite you to continue building what comes next with us.



Stefan Bean, Ed.D.

Orange County Superintendent of Schools



How to read the 5-3-1 framework

The 5-3-1 framework shows how OCDE's priorities connect.

The five initiatives move from foundational conditions for students to future readiness and innovation. Safety is a cornerstone because students need to feel secure before they can fully learn and engage. Emotional intelligence builds on that foundation by strengthening relationships and healthy learning environments. Career Technical Education creates pathways to future success, while artificial intelligence helps students and educators prepare for a changing world. Innovation reflects the drive to help promising ideas take root, improve and spread.

The three support objectives provide the infrastructure behind that work. Strong systems and guidance help districts navigate complexity. Instruction and literacy sit at the center because teaching and learning are at the heart of OCDE's mission. Close partnerships with districts and charter schools help turn those supports into action.

At the top is the one bold 2030 vision for the students OCDE serves directly through ACCESS and Connections. Note how everything else in the framework supports that goal.

All together, these initiatives and objectives add up to stronger systems, expanded opportunities and improved outcomes for students.

Student and School Safety

What does school safety mean?

School safety includes both physical and emotional well-being. It means creating environments where students and staff feel safe, supported and connected, while also making sure schools are prepared to respond when emergencies arise.

OCDE works with school districts, law enforcement, mental health professionals and community partners across Orange County to strengthen that shared approach.

How are we helping schools prepare?

Preparedness is a central part of this initiative. OCDE works with external partners to support regular emergency drills, provide access to critical information and offer training in areas such as threat assessment, dangerous situations and safe evacuation procedures.

The goal is to help schools build the knowledge, systems and partnerships they need to identify concerns early and respond effectively when challenges arise.

How are we supporting students before and during a crisis?

Safe schools depend on more than emergency procedures. OCDE works with districts to strengthen screening and referral systems that can help identify students who are experiencing a crisis, or who may be at risk, and connect them with appropriate support. This work also emphasizes strong relationships, inclusive school communities and attention to students' emotional well-being.

When a crisis does occur, OCDE helps coordinate support through its Crisis Response Network (CRN) and partnerships with trained professionals and community agencies.



How will we measure progress?

Progress will include looking at whether districts are strengthening and implementing screening and referral systems, expanding access to coordinated crisis-response support and participating in the training, drills and partnerships that help schools prepare for emergencies.

Over time, the goal is to build stronger local systems for prevention, early identification and response so schools are better equipped to support students and staff before, during and after a crisis.

Point person:

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Emotional Intelligence

Why emotional intelligence?

OCDE is advancing emotional intelligence, or EQ, as a foundational leadership and organizational practice.

The work is designed to strengthen self-awareness, empathy and compassion, communication and decision-making skills, and healthy workplace culture across OCDE and the districts it serves.

What is OCDE doing now?

At the heart of the initiative is a cross-organizational team of EQ Champions representing areas including alternative education, special education, early childhood education, student services and human resources.

These champions help customize and facilitate learning experiences based on the realities of their work and the needs of their colleagues. This shared leadership model helps ensure the initiative is shaped by staff, for staff.

OCDE is also providing evidence-based emotional intelligence training across the organization, with ongoing opportunities for new employees. Monthly communications provide short practices and opportunities for reflection so the learning can continue between training sessions.

Where are we going next?

OCDE is extending this staff-driven work beyond the county office by offering emotional intelligence training to Orange County school districts. This training is designed to help educators and leaders strengthen relationships, communication and leadership skills, as well as organizational culture within their own communities.

Participating districts will also receive ongoing communications to reinforce the learning and support continued use of emotional intelligence strategies.

How will we measure progress?

OCDE will look at both participation and application.

Measures can include staff and district participation in professional learning, feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the training, and whether participants feel prepared to apply emotional intelligence strategies in their work.

The broader goal is to build stronger relationships, more effective communication and healthier organizational cultures across OCDE and its educational partners.

> *"By teaching people to tune in to their emotions with intelligence … we can transform organizations from the inside out."*
>
> **DANIEL GOLEMAN**

Point person:

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CTE for Vulnerable Students

Who are we trying to reach?

OCDE is working with school districts, industry, and community partners to expand access to career-connected learning, especially for students who have not always had equal access to these opportunities. That includes English learners, students with disabilities and other underserved student populations. The goal is to help more students explore careers, build future-ready skills and see clear pathways to success beyond high school.

What are we building?

This initiative is focused on creating a more connected career-readiness system that starts early and continues through high school and beyond. Students may encounter career awareness in the elementary grades, then move into opportunities such as Career Technical Education pathways, dual enrollment, registered apprenticeships, work-based learning and postsecondary transitions.

OCDE works with educators, industry, higher education and community partners to help ensure these opportunities are accessible to all students and connected to their interests and future goals.

How are we helping schools make it happen?

OCDE provides districts and schools with guidance, technical assistance and professional learning that evolves with changing industry needs and local priorities.

The department also works with cross-sector partners to develop coursework that connects rigorous academics with real-world career preparation. Through customized instructional support and evidence-based strategies, OCDE helps educators strengthen career-connected learning and better prepare students for college, careers and other postsecondary opportunities.

How will we measure progress?

Success is not only about whether students have access to career education opportunities. It is also about whether they continue, progress and complete them. Key measures include CTE pathway completion, CTE enrollment, participation in work-based learning and other career-readiness experiences across student populations.

Over time, the goal is to see more students leave high school prepared for postsecondary success, including meaningful employment and careers that align with their interests.



60%

of CTE pathway students from focused populations

- Low-income student
- English learners
- Students with disabilities
- Students experiencing homelessness
- Foster Youth

Point person:

Scott Reindl
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Artificial Intelligence

How are we approaching AI?

Artificial intelligence is changing how people learn, work and interact with the world. OCDE's goal is to help schools make thoughtful use of these tools while keeping trust, safety and educational purpose at the center.

The initiative is guided by three connected priorities: ethical integration, innovation in learning and workforce preparedness. That means protecting student data, expanding equitable access to learning opportunities, preparing students for an AI-influenced workforce and making sure people remain at the center of decisions about how AI is used.

What does this look like in practice?

OCDE provides professional learning, technical assistance and opportunities for educators and school leaders to explore practical uses of AI and learn from one another.

Through OC AI Forward, educators, administrators and community partners come together to build AI literacy, share promising practices and strengthen their ability to use AI responsibly. OCDE also convenes educational and community partners to test ideas, learn from real-world implementation and identify practices that may be useful across schools and districts.

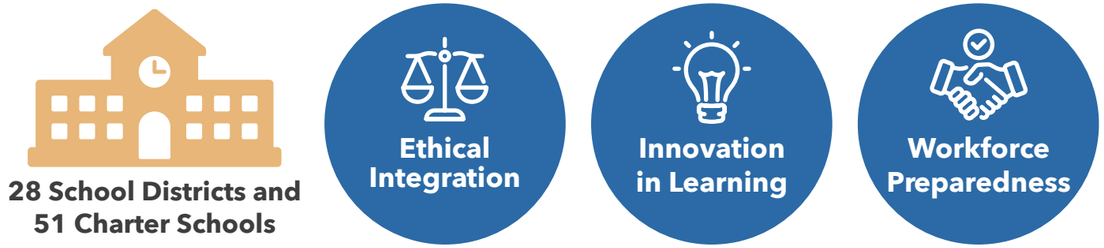
5 KEY INITIATIVES

The aim is not simply to introduce new technology, but to help educational communities make informed decisions about where AI can improve learning and where thoughtful safeguards are needed.

How are students part of the conversation?

Students are experiencing the effects of AI in school, in the workplace and in their communities, so their perspectives are an important part of this work.

OCDE's Student AI Network gives young people opportunities to explore emerging technologies and discuss issues including ethics, workforce readiness and the future of learning. Their experiences and perspectives help inform the broader conversation about how schools can prepare students for a changing world.



How will we measure progress?

Progress will include increased participation in AI professional learning, broader engagement by districts in AI-related initiatives and more opportunities for students to build AI literacy and future-ready skills.

OCDE will also continue looking at how promising practices move from exploration to responsible implementation across Orange County's school communities.

The broader goal is to help students and educators navigate an increasingly AI-enabled world with the knowledge, judgment and skills to use these technologies responsibly and effectively.

Point person:

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Advancing Innovation

What are we investing in?

OCDE's Innovation Funding Initiative helps Orange County school districts turn promising ideas into practical solutions for students.

Through a competitive process, districts can receive up to $525,000 over three years to develop and test new strategies – or new approaches to existing practices – that address unmet educational needs and strengthen student engagement and achievement.

How are we supporting districts?

Funding is only part of the investment. Participating districts also receive coaching, technical assistance and research and evaluation support to strengthen implementation, measure impact and learn from the results. An Innovation Learning Community further provides opportunities to share lessons, promising practices and early results with one another.

What does innovation look like?

The first six funded projects include collaborative math learning labs, student-built tiny homes for families experiencing homelessness, expanded International Baccalaureate and career pathways, new approaches to teacher development and strategies to strengthen student engagement and school climate.

Each project responds to a local need, with the potential to generate ideas that can be sustained, scaled or adapted elsewhere.



How will we measure and share progress?

OCDE will look at how funded projects affect the student outcomes they were designed to improve, what districts learn through implementation and whether promising approaches can be sustained or replicated.

An annual Innovation Summit creates an opportunity for educators across the county to come together to network with other forward-thinking colleagues and learn about promising innovative practices that they can apply in their own contexts.

Point persons:

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Systems and Guidance

Why does this support matter?

School districts make their own local decisions, but they also operate in a complex environment shaped by changing laws, regulations, funding requirements, technology and workforce needs.

OCDE serves as a regional partner, giving districts access to specialized expertise, shared services and strategic guidance that can help them navigate those challenges while staying focused on students.

What guidance does OCDE provide?

OCDE supports districts with legal, legislative and fiscal guidance, along with expertise in information technology, communications, human resources and workforce development.

That support includes training, technical assistance and consultation on both day-to-day operations and emerging issues. The goal is to help districts make informed decisions, meet local, state and federal requirements and strengthen the systems that support teaching and learning.

3 SUPPORT OBJECTIVES

How does a regional approach help?

OCDE also brings districts together through regional coordination, professional learning networks and opportunities to share promising practices. This gives local leaders access to current information, practical solutions and peer learning while building collective expertise across Orange County.



How will we measure progress?

OCDE will use its annual Educational Partner Survey, along with other feedback from district leaders and staff, to assess how well its guidance and services are meeting local needs.

That feedback will help the department understand whether its support is timely, useful and responsive, and where services can be strengthened or adjusted.

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Instruction and Literacy

Why focus on literacy and language?

Language and literacy are foundational to learning in every subject, from English language arts to math and science.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening help students communicate, make sense of complex ideas and participate fully in school and civic life. This work is especially important for students developing English proficiency, including both new and long-term English learners.

What are we building across OCDE?

OCDE is creating a more connected approach to language and literacy across its programs and services.

The work is centered on three priorities: capacity, coherence and commitment. Through professional learning, instructional staff across OCDE are strengthening their knowledge and aligning their work around literacy and language across content areas. Each team is also identifying ways to advance literacy through its support of districts.

The goal is to connect expertise across OCDE, better serve students across different groups and focus support where data shows the greatest need.

What does this look like in practice?

OCDE's inaugural Literacy Fellowship brings together kindergarten through second-grade teachers and instructional coaches to strengthen beginning reading instruction and build coaching capacity.

OCDE is also collaborating on the statewide Lead to Literacy initiative, which focuses on improving literacy for adolescent learners through targeted services and systems planning with district partners.

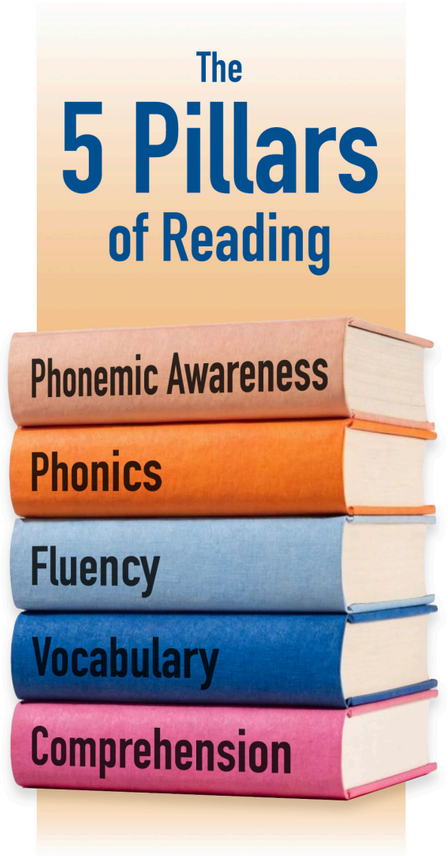
Together, these efforts create a more connected continuum of literacy support, from the early grades through adolescence.

How will we measure progress?

Progress will include looking at how well OCDE builds shared knowledge and practices across its instructional teams, strengthens district capacity and responds to literacy needs identified through data.

OCDE will also review state assessment data and other indicators of student literacy performance to help identify areas of need, track trends and guide where support may have the greatest impact.

The broader goal is to help educators strengthen literacy and language across subjects so more students are prepared to succeed in school, college, careers and beyond.



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Districts and Charters

How are we strengthening partnerships?

OCDE is working more closely with superintendents and other education leaders to understand local priorities and to align county resources, services and expertise with the needs of districts and charter schools.

A key part of that work is making it easier for leaders to identify and access OCDE support, while also adapting services to local goals, circumstances and emerging challenges. The aim is to be more responsive, more useful and easier to navigate.

How are we expanding support?

OCDE continues to build partnerships with higher education, industry, nonprofit and community organizations to connect schools with additional expertise, resources and opportunities.

At the same time, the department is looking at its own systems and processes to better coordinate services, reduce unnecessary administrative burden and make support more accessible and effective. That includes creating clearer pathways to assistance and helping leaders connect more quickly with the right people and resources.

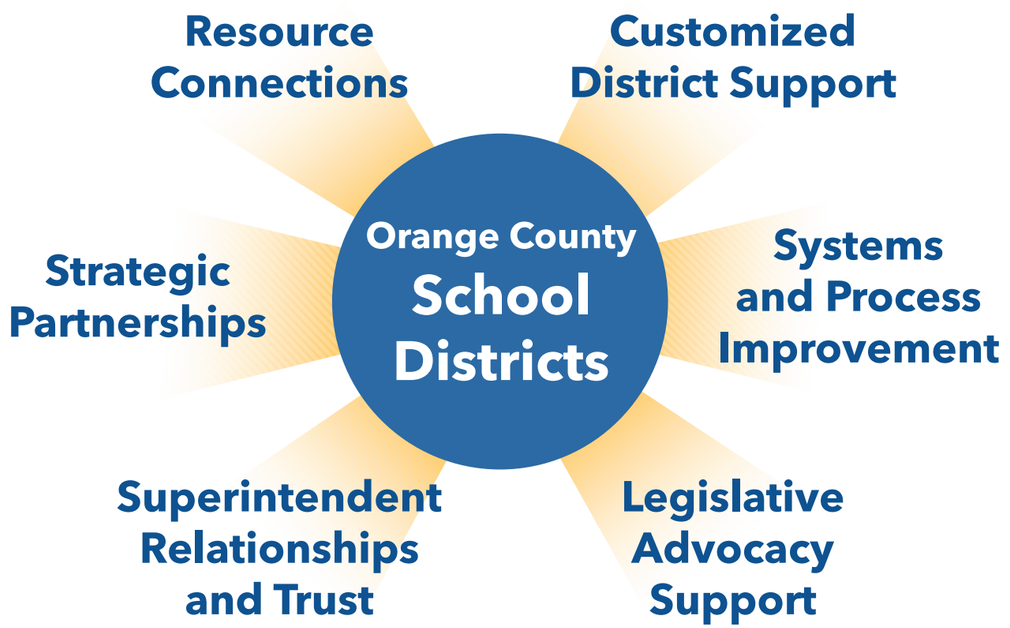
3 SUPPORT OBJECTIVES

How will we know this is working?

Progress will depend on strong two-way communication and regular feedback from district and charter school leaders.

OCDE will use that feedback to assess whether services are meeting local needs, where support can be strengthened and whether leaders are able to access the resources and expertise they need to move local priorities forward.

Over time, success should be reflected in stronger relationships, more coordinated support and a clearer, more responsive experience for districts and charter schools working with OCDE.



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2030 Vision for Students

What is our 2030 vision for students?

Our vision is that by 2030, students served directly by OCDE through its ACCESS and Connections programs will thrive academically, socially and emotionally in safe, inclusive and innovative learning environments.

Through personalized instruction, career pathways and emerging technology, students will build practical skills, resilience and confidence for life beyond school. Working with families and communities, ACCESS and Connections will expand career and technical education, strengthen mental and physical health supports and integrate social-emotional learning to support leadership, financial literacy and cultural awareness.

What does this look like in practice?

OCDE will continue building learning experiences that respond to individual needs while creating stronger connections among academics, career preparation, well-being and life after school.

The goal is to give students more opportunities to see a clear path forward, develop practical skills and leave their programs better prepared for college, careers and life.

Where can we make an immediate difference?

Students are more likely to make progress when they are consistently connected to school, their teachers and the supports available to them. The 2030 vision advances this work through stronger supports for ACCESS and Connections students and a countywide focus on reducing chronic absenteeism. OCDE will strengthen attendance and engagement in its schools while partnering with districts, families and community organizations across Orange County to identify concerns earlier and address barriers to attendance.

This work is about more than attendance alone. It is about helping students stay connected to learning, their schools and the people and opportunities that support their success.

How will we measure progress?

Progress will include looking at attendance and chronic absenteeism, along with indicators tied to academic growth, student engagement, career readiness and well-being.

The broader measure of success is whether more students remain connected to school, make meaningful progress and leave ACCESS and Connections better prepared for what comes next.

ACCESS PRIORITIES

- Career Readiness and CTE Pathways
- Personalized, Rigorous Instruction
- Safety, Engagement and Attendance
- Social Emotional Learning and Resilience
- Practical Life Skills and Financial Literacy

Point persons:

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Orange County Public Education
by the numbers

What We Do

We provide leadership, educational services, operational support, innovation and fiscal oversight to support student success and strengthen our communities.

422,351	584	28	20,767	24,717	$10.4 BILLION
STUDENTS	PUBLIC SCHOOLS INCLUDING 51 CHARTERS	SCHOOL DISTRICTS	TEACHERS	CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES	ANNUAL INVESTMENT

Students We Serve

- 48.9% Hispanic or Latino
- 22.0% White
- 18.7% Asian
- 10.4% Other racial and ethnic groups

- 227,610 Students from low-income households
- 77,765 English learners
- 61,404 Students receiving special education services

Supporting Orange County Schools

OCDE works alongside all 28 public school districts in Orange County, as well as charter schools and educational partners, to strengthen systems, solve problems and support students and schools countywide.

Operational support • Professional learning• Student services
Technology and infrastructure • Fiscal oversight
Instructional leadership • Innovation

Enrollment is Changing

Birth rates are down and fewer students are entering our schools. That trend is projected to continue.

14% decline over the past decade

493,030 (2015-16) → 422,351 (2025-26)

Source: California Department of Education, DataQuest (Enrollment)

OCDE's impact beyond Orange County

A STATE AND REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER

OCDE helps translate statewide education priorities into practical support for schools and educators.

Through partnerships with state agencies, school districts and educational organizations, we develop resources, provide professional learning and help schools put research-based approaches into practice.

Our work extends across California and beyond, connecting statewide priorities with local needs and helping educators turn promising ideas into meaningful opportunities for students.

CALIFORNIA MTSS
Helps schools statewide align academic, behavioral, social-emotional and mental health supports through training, technical assistance and implementation resources.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
Supports statewide efforts to strengthen evidence-based literacy instruction and improve outcomes for multilingual learners.

PROJECT GLAD®
Serves as the National Training Center for an instructional model that strengthens academic language and literacy, particularly for English learners and emergent bilingual students.

WORK-BASED LEARNING AND APPRENTICESHIPS
Connects students with paid work experience, industry credentials and registered apprenticeship opportunities.

TOBACCO-USE PREVENTION
Serves as California's TUPE Capacity Building Provider, supporting county offices of education and educators with professional learning, regional networks and prevention resources.

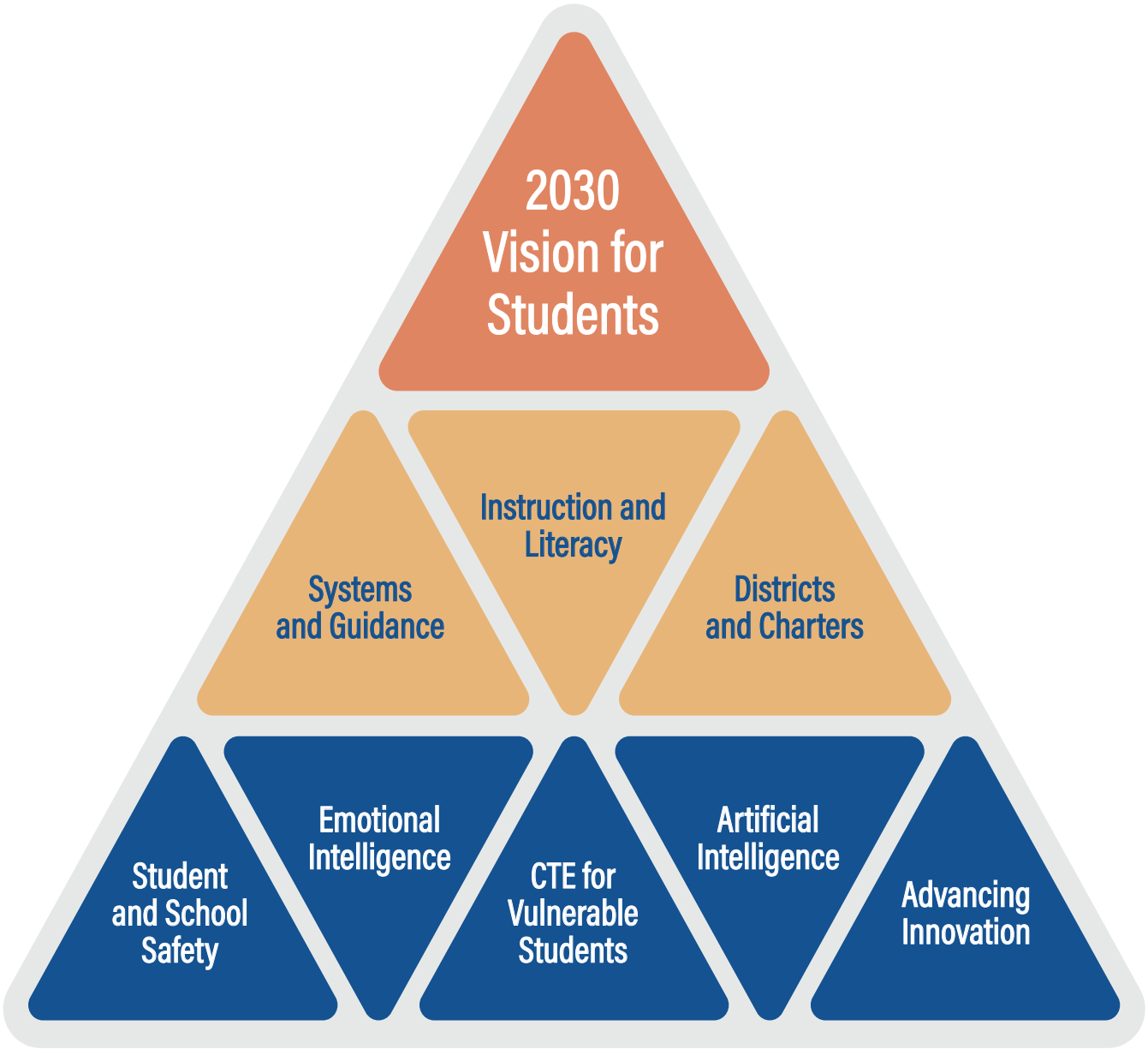
STATEWIDE MODEL CURRICULA
Led California's Cambodian American Studies, Hmong History and Cultural Studies and Vietnamese American Experiences model curricula, with free resources for educators statewide.

COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS
Through OC Pathways, leads partnerships among schools, colleges, universities and employers, supported in part by an $18.1 million state grant.

EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS
Provides regional technical assistance, coaching and professional learning for state- and federally funded after-school and expanded learning programs.

Orange County Department of Education

5-3-1 Strategic Plan



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