



Every School, Every Community:

FUNDING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING



PARTNERSHIP
FOR THE
**FUTURE of
LEARNING**

CALIFORNIA

Fund What Students Need

BY CHRISTINA VO, SENIOR, SILVER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL

My senior year is a lot different than I had planned. I had imagined stepping into my high school alongside my friends, ready to start our classes. I always felt a rush of joy seeing my friends again after summer, being able to talk, and hug them for dear life. I can't feel it this year.

When we first transitioned to distance learning at the start of the pandemic, I felt really overwhelmed. My mother was laid off in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and I had to help take care of my younger brothers who were also now home from school.

I was pretty comfortable with computers so I was surprised at how hard it was to transition to learning online. Not to mention the stress of trying to prepare and take the AP exams online piled on top of my workload. While I have always been a good student, I found myself checking out and not attending my classes. Only one teacher took the time to check up on me. I felt like the rest of them didn't notice whether I attended a class or honestly care about how I was doing.

Things are a bit more structured now that we are back in virtual school, though I'm still worried about the impact of all this change and stress on my classmates. In my high school in San Jose, we are not only low on counselors, but it is incredibly difficult to even access support. I meet with my counselor only once a year, but we always focus on academics, not my needs as a student, and as a person.

I wonder what school will be like for my brothers? I only have one year left in high school, but they are going to bear the brunt of the lasting impact of the pandemic and the recession on our schools. Especially now, students in high school need mental health support, culturally relevant curriculum, and

access to adult role models who foster positive relationships. I'd like to see our schools triple the number of counselors who are available, revisit the curriculum they use and update them to be more inclusive and less Eurocentric. All of these critical things will take money.



Last school year, I joined other students, teachers, and parents from my district to oppose massive cuts—to teacher salaries, for supplies, for technology—from our schools. The pandemic didn't stop us from unifying together again in June to win police-free schools for our district. These wins really matter to me. They reset the expectation for schools to be a place of learning and exploration, rather than one of punishment or austerity.

I believe that every young person—no matter our race, background, or zip code—should have a thriving, well-funded school in our neighborhood where we can create dreams for ourselves and pursue them. That starts by asking what we need, and making sure there is the funding to make it possible.

I'd like to see our schools triple the number of counselors who are available, revisit the curriculum they use and update them to be more inclusive and less Eurocentric. All of these critical things will take money.

Introduction

A GOOD EDUCATION is the foundation for a lifetime of success. Schools are irreplaceable—not just as places of learning, but as community hubs that provide resources and build connections for our youth beyond classroom instruction. California’s success and prosperity depends on the capacity of our public schools to serve as beacons of light and hope that spark opportunity.



Despite a national imperative to make education free and equitable for all, the zip code you live in has long dictated the quality of education you receive. Though California is one of the wealthiest of the United States, we are in the bottom third of the nation in education funding. This insufficient commitment to funding public schools has serious repercussions, especially in communities of color and low-income communities that have borne the brunt of disinvestment.

It should have never been this way. We know that education and opportunity are what make communities safe, healthy, and prosperous. Neighborhoods where the wealthy and well-connected live have excellent public schools, as well as easy access to living wages, healthcare, and freedom from police terror. **So why haven't we made sure that every community has great schools, living-wage jobs, and safe places to live?**

At the end of the day, our budget and policies reflect our values. The story of school funding in California is also a story about racism in our state. At the same time that California began to divest from its public school system in the 70s and 80s, our state also ramped up spending on prisons, police, and immigration detention, creating ripple effects of harm through communities of color as they began to grow and represent a larger part of the population.

Consider this: in 1977, the year before voters approved Proposition 13, California ranked 8th in the country in per-pupil spending based on enrollment. As of 2019, our state dropped to 37th. Over that time, the most significant change to our schools was the changing demographics of California—our public school population became majority youth of color.



In recent years, a new outpouring of leadership from educators, families, and students has started to repair this harmful legacy of disinvestment and inequity in the school system. Solutions like the Local Control Funding Formula are making school funding more equitable and putting the power back in the hands of students, parents, and teachers to determine what their schools need.

Yet, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, students who live in rural areas and low-income communities and students of color still faced the biggest disparities in being able to transition to online learning environments—much less meet their basic needs. We can see clearly in this crisis that schools aren't just about preparing kids for careers, but about the health and wellness of entire communities. In fact, the same students experiencing the greatest barriers to education amid the pandemic live in the communities with the highest infection and unemployment rates.

In *Every School, Every Community: Funding the Future of Learning*, the [California Partnership for the Future of Learning](#) takes a look at the past and present of school funding in California to shine a light on the path forward towards an education system that works for all. The stories, history, and solutions we outline clearly demonstrate that this time of pandemic and uprising are not the time to cut funds for education. In fact, we need to double down on an education system that works for us all by investing fully in schools to be hubs of opportunity and healing.



What if we recognized the potential of our public schools?

BY MICHAEL GRAY, CARE CENTER COUNSELOR/HEALTH SCIENCE TEACHER,
LONG BEACH POLYTECHNIC HIGH SCHOOL

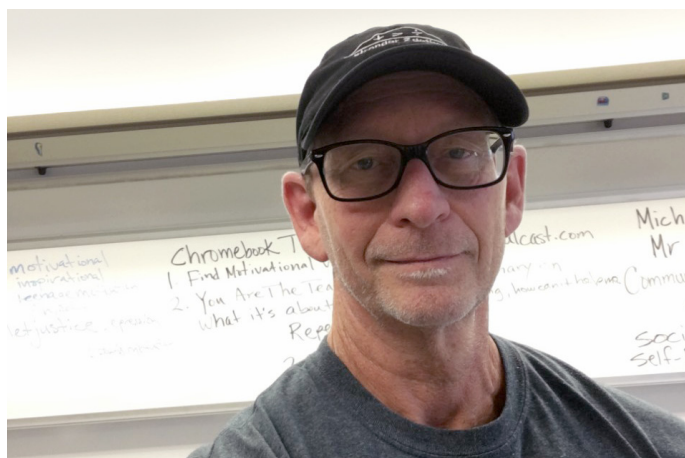
Everything changed when Proposition 13 went into effect. I grew up in Garden Grove, which wasn't a wealthy community and yet during my early years in school it felt like we had everything we needed. I especially loved all the field trips that were part of school—it exposed me to people and things I otherwise would never get to see. That was one of the first things to be cut after California enacted Proposition 13 and immediately saw a 60% reduction in property tax revenues which could be invested back into our schools.

With each passing year we had fewer teachers and more crowded classrooms. As an avid basketball player, I got to travel around Southern California for games and tournaments. Even in middle school we could see the differences—the richer communities had state of the art gyms and homogeneous student populations whereas more diverse schools clearly were struggling for resources.

This isn't a time for status quo or austerity thinking. Instead, this is a time to truly transform how our schools prepare students to not just be successful, but also happy and whole.

One of the greatest legacies of Proposition 13 is the huge teacher shortage we now face. Not only have we made teaching so demanding and difficult that many rule it out as a career path, but we've budgeted our way into a system-wide problem of large classrooms and too few adults on campuses to meet the needs of students.

I feel the impact of that every day now that I've been teaching for 36 years mostly in the Long Beach Unified School District. Being an educator in California means trying to do multiple jobs at



once—not only do I run the CARE Center at Long Beach Polytechnic High School, but I also teach health science and career development classes. I've always believed that the skills we teach students on how to be caring, engaged, and healthy people are just as important as the academic skills they learn.

Now, in the pandemic, it's even more challenging as I try to bring resources and support for wellness and mental health to students and their families virtually. The need to focus on social and emotional learning has never been greater—even before COVID growing numbers of young people were struggling with anxiety and depression.

This isn't a time for status quo or austerity thinking. Instead, this is a time to truly transform how our schools prepare students to not just be successful, but also happy and whole. Every day our public school system has the ability to shape the futures of 57 million kids. Just imagine what would be possible if everyone recognized that opportunity and we began investing to make those futures bright?

School Funding in California: From First to Worst

FOR MANY YEARS, California set the gold standard on education because we invested deeply into a network of great, free, public schools and universities. Between 1920 and 1978, our state recognized that funding high-quality public schools was the best way to ensure our residents grew up educated and ready for the workforce.

Californians who grew up in that time, like Michael Gray, remember their school years fondly. “I grew up in Garden Grove, which wasn’t a wealthy district, but we were doing good. I remember all the field trips. They used to take us everywhere.”

Even though many call this era the Golden Age of Education, it wasn’t golden for all. Segregated neighborhoods meant segregated schools, which meant that your zip code determined the quality of education you could access. Many Mexican families, arriving to work in the citrus groves of Southern California, found their children forced into ‘Mexican schools’ where children were prepared to become laborers, not scholars. In other communities across the state, Black and Asian students also found themselves in separate and unequal schools.

That began to change in 1946 when a group of Mexican American families won the first federal court case ruling that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. There is now a public school in Boyle Heights named for their leadership—Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School. This set the groundwork for the national win in *Brown vs Board of Education* 8 years later.



Additional lawsuits brought by students and families of color such as *Serrano vs Priest* (1971) built on these wins to make our approach to school funding more equitable. Because of *Serrano*, California stopped relying so heavily on local property taxes, which favored wealthy and whiter school districts, and the state took responsibility for making school funding among districts more equal.

In 1977, California ranked 8th in the country in per-pupil spending based on enrollment. But the following year, voters approved Proposition 13. This measure, championed by big corporate interests, passed largely because of fear-mongering and myth-making by the Proposition’s

advocates. Proposition 13 had a devastating impact on school funding by capping residential and commercial property tax rates at 1% of assessed value and setting a 2% annual limit on increases in assessed property value. While the measure holds some benefits for homeowners, big corporations

wreaked the most from this shady deal which means many companies continue to pay zero property taxes despite billions in profits.

The summer right after Proposition 13 passed was the first since the Great Depression that California didn't offer summer school. This ushered in an era of cuts which has persisted through today.

Many point out that the shifting budget priorities in California map onto the shifting

demographics of our state. **At the same moment that our school populations were becoming Blacker and Browner, California started to divest heavily from its public school systems.** Today, California serves the largest population of English learners in the country yet fails to fully fund the programs and teachers needed for these students to succeed.

Arts, music, and field trips were among the first things to be cut. For example, prior to the passage of Prop 13, Los Angeles Unified School District offered a district-wide music program. Any student who wanted one could access a free musical instrument. There was an LAUSD warehouse filled with musical instruments and staffed by a team of people who would mend and repair them.

Once the cuts began, LAUSD cut those musical warehouse positions. Within years, there was no longer a music program in LA. The district didn't want the instruments being used anymore because there would be no one to fix them if they broke.

Similar stories took place in districts around California. Cuts to the arts. Cuts to athletic programs. Elimination of field trips. Getting rid of on-campus nurses, librarians, counselors, and mental health programs. Growing class sizes and a ballooning teacher shortage.

Not all communities were impacted equally. Districts in wealthier communities set up foundations or leveraged their parent teacher associations to fundraise to keep these programs and prevent major cuts.



While many argue that the cuts were a difficult, but necessary choice given budget limitations, other areas of spending actually skyrocketed over the same period, namely police and prisons. With fewer and fewer resources available to students, and heightening criminalization of youth of color, schools in California too often became a pipeline to prison rather than a pathway to prosperity. Now, millions of students in California attend a school with police officers, but no counselor or nurse.

To add insult to injury, community members were rarely, if ever, engaged in school decision-making or the budgeting process.

Schools don't work for too many of us, because our needs and voices have never been centered in decision making.

While politicians, influenced by corporate interests, enacted further budget cuts to education and the safety net, families and students were left out of the conversation.



By 2000, California was serving the most students in the nation, yet had fallen to 48th in its spending per pupil when adjusted for the cost of living. The same year, our State also had the distinction of being last in our teacher to student ratio and employing more underprepared teachers than any other state in the country. Because of the huge inequities in our state, students of color, English-learners, LGBTQ students, rural students, and low-income students bore the brunt of harsh impacts while white and wealthy students often could still access great schools.

You can read more about how these gaps show up in Naudika's story on page 10.

The growing inequality was due, in part, to the ability of middle- and high-income districts to raise additional revenue through local fundraising and parcel taxes and the inability of low-wealth districts to produce revenue using similar strategies. This is reflected in national data that shows a gap of \$1800 per student in local and state funding between school districts that serve mostly students of color and those that serve mostly white families.

The situation for public schools in California became even more dire after the Great Recession of 2008. Massive cuts to education left schools up and down the state with overcrowded classrooms, crumbling facilities, and disappearing resources for students. Many educators and school staff lost their jobs and left the education field altogether. California dropped to dead last in adult to student ratios. And it came as no surprise that education disparities for low-income students of color worsened.

Luckily, in recent years, the leadership of students, educators, and families has begun to turn the tide. Grassroots organizing of students and families propelled the passage of Proposition 30

in November 2012, a tax on upper-income earners that raised some \$8 billion a year for the state. That new revenue stream set the stage for the landmark passage of the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013, which fundamentally changed how public schools and districts across the state are funded, how they are evaluated, and the services and supports school systems provide to allow all students to achieve their greatest potential.

For example, in Christina Vo's city of San Jose, students in East Side Union High School District forged a meaningful partnership with district leaders and parents via the Local Control Accountability Plan Student Advisory Committee (LSAC). They used this model, which ensures diverse student identities are represented, to secure an LSAC at every school within East Side.

Against this backdrop, Californians dedicated to an education system that works for all entered the year 2020 with great optimism. Student, family, and teacher leaders were increasingly included at education decision-making tables, districts were growing more confident at bringing equity into their LCFF processes, and the Schools and Communities First Initiative qualified for the November 2020 ballot with a record number of signatures.

Then, the pandemic hit and schools closed down—meaning millions of families lost access to schools as critical hubs of community resources—and many students found themselves trying to attend school online without the internet access or computers they needed to do so.



Early in the crisis, it was essential to address the digital divide so that all students could have the opportunity to learn from home. But tackling technology and internet access was only one step, because digital learning will never replace the power of a positive school climate.

Schools aren't just about academics—they are also places where young people learn how to be active and engaged members of a community that fosters positive social interactions, emotional resilience, and healthy relationships. COVID-19 has shone a new light on the complicated and overlapping reasons that California public schools have yet to live up to the promise of an equal education for all.

However, the pandemic also gives us a unique opportunity to choose a new path forward. **Real improvement to our education system starts with building equity into everything we do in schools, from assessment of needs to decision-making to instruction.** You can learn more about a few of the most promising solutions for meeting our school funding needs being championed by students, educators, and families in the next section of this brief.

Now, more than ever, we must build a system of public schools that are beacons of light and provide hope, opportunity, and pathways to health and success.

Two Schools - Two Planets: Our Schools are Not Equal

BY NAUDIKA WILLIAMS, ALUMNI, CALIFORNIANS FOR JUSTICE

Though I was born in Oakland, rapidly rising housing costs pushed my family to Pacifica when I was young. Despite being only 25 miles from my hometown, I arrived in a place that felt almost like another planet. My elementary classmates would talk about traveling to Europe on summer break or about the intensive ballet classes their parents paid for. I could tell that my family was different.

Throughout elementary and middle school, my classmates and I were all treated like future college students. There was an assumption that we could—and therefore would—succeed in school and in life. I remember my 6th grade math teacher recognizing that I was ready for a bigger challenge. She pushed me to move into a higher class and is likely the reason I was later able to excel in AP math.

Then, right before my 8th grade year, my mom, sister, and I moved back to Oakland where I started at Westlake Middle School. The first thing I noticed is that way more of my classmates looked like me, which was a relief. But then I also started noticing how much less my peers and I had in our school—a smaller library with fewer books, less access to technology, and almost no field trips.

When I got to high school, I was surprised how few of our teachers even mentioned the subject of college. Some teachers would make assumptions about who was and was not college material, and would teach accordingly rather than approaching each student with respect and recognizing their potential.

In my sophomore physics class, our teacher basically stopped teaching halfway through the year. He began the year lecturing and trying to teach us but got frustrated that a lot of my classmates would get stuck because they didn't have the math foundation they needed to succeed in physics. This teacher



Naudika (center) with fellow student activists advocating for LCFF

blamed the students and told us we didn't care and weren't trying. From then on, he sat at his desk on his computer during class and refused to do much more than hand out a worksheet once in a while.

When I graduated in 2017, sadly many of my peers weren't with me. Because of people like my physics teacher, lots of students blamed themselves if they were struggling in school and gave up. Many of them left for continuation schools or dropped out entirely. I wish it was a part of every school's culture to ask kids what they need and give them the tools they need to succeed.

This November, I'll be voting in my first presidential election. I'm especially excited to have the chance to vote YES on Proposition 15—the Schools and Communities First Initiative that will put billions of dollars back into the hands of communities like mine. After being neglected for so long, communities like mine deserve a boost of investment they desperately need. I'm excited to be part of the campaign to win this important change.

[You can find out how much your school stands to receive if Prop 15 passes using this easy tool.](#)

I wish it was a part of every school's culture to ask kids what they need and give them the tools they need to succeed.

Solutions Towards an Education System for All

AT THE END OF THE DAY, California is a wealthy state with enough money and resources for everything we need. In fact, according to Forbes, we have the 5th largest economy in the world, which has only generated additional wealth during the pandemic. It is about the choices we make on how to distribute those abundant resources. The past four decades does not have to be our destiny. We can choose a new path forward and align our budget with our values by investing in promising solutions outlined here.

PASS SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES FIRST.

In just a few short weeks, California has a historic opportunity to begin solving the challenges facing our schools. Passing Schools and Communities First, aka Proposition 15, will close a corporate tax loophole generating billions of dollars annually.

The largest share of Prop 15 revenue will go to local schools, public charter schools, and community colleges, helping lower class sizes and reducing inequities in education funding. See the [estimated funding](#) your school will receive if prop 15 passes. Learn more at yes15.org.



ADOPT A MASTER PLAN FOR FULLY FUNDING EDUCATION FROM CRADLE TO CAREER OVER THE NEXT 7 YEARS.

While winning Schools and Communities First is the first step, even closing corporate property tax loopholes will only cover some 20% of the funds we need by pre-COVID estimates. Before the

pandemic, an additional \$25.6 billion, or 38% above budgeted dollars, would have been necessary to ensure all students had the opportunity to meet the goals set by the State Board of Education.

We must enact additional equitable revenue-generating measures such as taxes on corporations and millionaires who continue to grow their wealth even during the pandemic. In addition, we must use funds to meet the needs of the whole child, including leveraging federal and state dollars beyond traditional education funding streams (such as MediCal) for critical student needs.

CONTINUE TO DEFUND POLICE AND PRISONS AND INVEST IN SCHOOLS. As this brief outlined, the divestment from our public schools took place during a time of ramped up investment in systems rooted in punishment. Renewed calls for racial justice as part of this summer’s uprising point to the connections between over-funding of police and the lack of resources for what we really need—great schools for all our children.

Many school districts like Oakland Unified, Sacramento City Unified, and Eastside Union High School District in San Jose have already made the smart decision to eliminate their school-based police and reimagine school safety. Now the state must follow suit and every district in California should eliminate their school-based police to reallocate those resources to positive investments that allow students to thrive.

PROTECT LCFF AND EXPAND EQUITABLE FUNDING FORMULAS.

Given the impactful ways that the Local Control Funding Formula has deepened equity across California, we must protect and expand on this equity-approach to all budget decisions. This means prioritizing highest need students for all funding sources (federal, state, local), including any new stimulus investments, and protecting LCFF and other funding for highest needs students and schools during budget reduction decisions.



In addition, we must expand upon LCFF’s framework for shared decision making with students, families and community. Meaningful engagement in developing and monitoring effective plans for how funding is invested is key to improving the educational experience of students.

Reinvesting in and rebuilding public education will take all of us leading together to create a public education system that reflects our communities, aligns our budget to our values, and fully realizes the role of public education in advancing equity and opportunity for all. Now is the time to double down and move our State’s resources so that every student can attend a fully-funded and thriving school.

The Path Forward

BY DAVID GOLDBERG, LAUSD TEACHER AND CALIFORNIA TEACHER'S ASSOCIATION VICE-PRESIDENT

Being an educator is in my DNA; I'm a third generation LAUSD teacher. Like my grandmother, aunt, and mother before me, I'm proud to teach in our public schools and be a member of the teacher's union.

My entire journey in education has been shaped by California's divestment from schools beginning with the passage of Proposition 13 the year I was in Kindergarten. My elementary education took place in overcrowded classrooms with each year bringing more and more cuts to programs and resources like music and field trips.

By the time my daughter was graduating from the same high school I attended, students were sprinting to their next class in the hopes of getting a chair, the building had broken windows and outdated technology, and there were only two working bathrooms for 2400 students.

Years later, after playing professional basketball overseas and then working in an afterschool program in Echo Park, I became credentialed in bilingual education through LAUSD's intern program created to address the teacher shortage. I fell in love with the young people who I was teaching and building connections with the community.

Working at a school rooted in the Ramona Gardens Housing Projects in Boyle Heights, I saw first hand how California shirks its responsibility to provide all our young people with a high-quality and equal

Luckily, California stands on the precipice of change. With solutions like Propositions 15 and 16, local control funding formulas, and centering equity in decision-making, we have a historic opportunity to change the tide.

education. While my students and their schools struggled to access the most basic needs, elsewhere in LA County there are hundreds of healthy, vibrant, and well-resourced schools that are doing an excellent job of tapping into their students' full potential.

Luckily, California stands on the precipice of change. With solutions like Propositions 15 and 16, the local control funding formula, and centering equity in decision-making, we have a historic opportunity to change the tide. Looking at the history and the future of school funding in California provides clarity to the path forward:

Now, more than ever, we must deeply invest in a network of public schools that provide hope, opportunity, and pathways to success for all.



About P4L

The California Partnership for the Future of Learning is a statewide alliance of community organizing and advocacy groups advancing a shared vision of a transformational, racially just education system built for us all. It is led by Advancement Project California, Californians for Justice, PICO California, and Public Advocates, with the support of Community Coalition, InnerCity Struggle, and over a dozen grassroots, research and philanthropic partners.

Learn more at <https://futureforlearning.org/california-partnership/> and follow us online at @CA_Partnership

