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Maggie Johnson, Vice President of Education and University Programs, Google
Prior to Google, Johnson was teaching faculty and Director of Educational Affairs in the Department of Computer Science at Stanford University where she was responsible for the Undergraduate and Masters programs in CS.

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CSBA’s wildfire mitigation bill part of long rebuilding effort

On October 2 of last year, EdSource published the first entries in its series titled “California’s Homeless Students: Undercounted, Underfunded and Growing,” offering a bleak look at the effects of a lack of stable housing on more than 200,000 children in California — a number they report has grown 20 percent since 2014.

On October 8, six days after these reports about the expanding crisis of homelessness were published, the Tubbs Fire started at 9:45 p.m. Seven minutes later came the first sparks of the Atlas Fire. The Nuns Fire began eight minutes after that.

Twenty-two days later, by the time Cal Fire declared the Northern California fires fully contained, 5 percent of the entire housing supply in Santa Rosa, California, was gone. Another 569 homes in Napa, California, were reduced to ash.

“We had a housing problem three weeks ago; now we have a housing problem minus 3,000 more houses,” Santa Rosa Mayor Chris Coursey told the Los Angeles Times in October.

Less than two months later, and with the Golden State’s wounds still raw from watching the North Bay fires smolder, the Thomas Fire, now the largest fire California has ever known, would vanquish more than 1,000 structures in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. More than 100 more homes would be lost in January in the Montecito mudslides, further compounding one of the most inconceivably tragic sequences of disasters in our state’s history.

To those of us watching these events from the relative safety of the Sacramento area and other parts of the state, the immediate feeling was one of almost nauseating helplessness. We watched entire families fleeing for their lives, grasping onto faint threads of hope that their homes would still be there when they returned.

In those moments, one has to believe that matters such as work and school were distant afterthoughts to all those affected — as they will remain for quite some time for those students and families throughout the state who now find themselves suddenly uprooted from the life they once knew.

As so many California public school students and their families work to rebuild, there are two important questions that education leaders must ask:

One, what can school districts and county offices of education do to ensure maximum preparedness for the next natural disaster? Unfortunately, it is not a question of if, but when another will come. Our feature story in this magazine provides local governance teams with first-hand guidance on this critical endeavor, based on lessons learned from some districts in recently affected communities.

Two, how do we ensure that our schools are able
If schools do not have the funding to maintain their staffing levels and their programmatic offerings, then the breadth and quality of the education they are able to provide their students inevitably suffers, and their ability to serve displaced students when they return will likewise suffer.

to fulfill their role as a cornerstone of these communities’ rebuilding efforts by continuing to provide educational opportunities for their students?

To be clear, this is hardly the first time that schools in California have been faced with this disheartening task. I discussed this very point in the spring Executive Director’s Note two years ago, after a series of 2015 fires collectively gutted more than 1,800 residences in Northern California.

As Wendy Gattoni of the Lake County Office of Education said in a September 2017 article about Lake COE’s bustling Healthy Start program, “there are families out there who still do not have a home of their own,” more than two years after the Valley Fire struck the North Bay. The article also went on to say that, although Healthy Start predominantly serves at-risk youth, and many families who may not have been considered “at-risk” before the fire were immediately considered at-risk after it.

In the effort to help schools ravaged by recent disasters, CSBA is sponsoring Assembly Bill 2228, introduced in February. This bill, authored by Sonoma County Assemblymember Jim Wood (D-Healdsburg), will allow school districts within counties where a state of emergency was declared by Governor Jerry Brown to — over the next three fiscal years — claim a level of average daily attendance comparable to what they would have been able to claim had the disasters not occurred.

It may seem somewhat trite to focus on something like ADA calculations in the face of such tragic events, but it is crucial that affected school districts are able to maintain their funding levels during times when their ADA — a core factor in determining school district funding — are suffering sizable downturns.

If schools do not have the funding to maintain their staffing levels and their programmatic offerings, then the breadth and quality of the education they are able to provide their students inevitably suffers, and their ability to serve displaced students when they return will likewise suffer.

In this era of ever-compounding accountability measures for public schools, LEAs statewide have very little latitude if their student performance drops — even if this recent string of disastrous events is the root cause.

As Santa Rosa City Schools board member and CSBA Past President Frank Pugh (who further discusses the North Bay fires and other topics later in this edition of California Schools) has said, “Our wealthy, our working class and low-income neighborhoods were all subject to the same unbiased destruction.”

We know that homelessness can dramatically impact a student’s academic success. Will AB 2228 fully solve this problem? No — nor can CSBA or anyone else solve the state’s housing crisis with any single piece of legislation. AB 2228 is one of the measures of support we can offer to ensure that schools impacted by these recent disasters are ready to support their students, and that they remain a bedrock of learning, strength and pride in their communities.

As the overwhelming response of support we saw within the communities affected by wildfires and mudslides showed, it truly does “take a village,” and we at CSBA are doing our part as members of the village.
How long have you been a school board member?
For almost 30 years, I have served on local school boards. I served on the Robla Elementary School District Board in North Sacramento for 19 years beginning in 1987. When I was elected, I became the first gay person to win an elected office in Sacramento County and one of only a few nationwide. By 2008, I had moved to Roseville. I ran for the Roseville City School District Board and won, becoming the first gay elected official in Placer County. I have been on the Roseville board ever since.

When and how did you first become interested in public school governance?
Public education has been a strong interest for me even before I was elected to a school board. My very first vote, after I turned 21, was for school bonds. I voted ‘yes.’ In 1985, I was reviewing my sample ballot the weekend before the election and noticed candidates running for the Robla school board. None had a ballot statement or campaign literature, as I recall. I called a friend who served on another school board for advice as to who to vote for. That conversation led me to run for the Robla school board in 1987, beating two incumbents.

What inspired you to run for election to become a board member?
While working for Sacramento Employment and Training Agency helping people get into job training programs, I saw why it was so important for people to have as much education as possible. The more education people had, the better jobs they could obtain, with better pay. Though I have no children of my own, I was and continue to be concerned about what kind of leaders we will have after my generation is gone.

List three books that left a lasting impression on you.
I am constantly reading mostly nonfiction such as history, political, religious, etc. I have read so many books which have impressed me and made a difference that it is difficult to narrow it down to three. Here are three of many that certainly have inspired me:
The works by Martin Luther King, Jr., my boyhood hero.
Transparent by Don Lemon, a CNN anchor who is both African-American and gay.
The Faiths of the Founding Fathers by David Holmes.

What advice do you have for new or aspiring board members?
Before deciding to run for school board, attend school board meetings and educate yourself on education issues. It would be good to talk to current school board members from various districts. You will have challenges as a board member, but the rewards are many. You will make a difference in the lives of many children.

What is your major concern as a school board member?
In our society, we say how important education is for children. “These are the future leaders,” many say. However if you “follow the money,” one will see educating our youth is not a priority in our society. The state and federal governments want us to do more with less. Somehow, we need to make public education a high priority in the state and nation.

Read Gary’s full interview at blog.csba.org/gary-miller. Learn more about Gary at rosevillegarymiller.com.

Would you like to participate in an upcoming Member Profile?
Contact us at editor@csba.org.
### Behind the Numbers

The cold, hard facts of California public school funding

- **45th in percentage of taxable income spent on education**
  - Percent of total taxable income spent on education
  - **National Average**: 3.3%
  - **California**: 2.7%
  - California’s rank tied for **45th**
  - Source: Ed Week (2014)

- The state has barely restored the funding levels of schools to what they were before the great recession, yet in nearly all communities these gains are being eroded by increasing costs in health care, pensions, and utility costs that threaten educational programs and challenge school districts and county offices of education to stay financially viable.

- California’s inadequate school funding hurts our students, undermines our communities, threatens our prosperity, and dims the prospects of future generations.

- If we want to prepare our students for an increasingly competitive, technology-driven global economy, we must invest at a level necessary to support student success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>National Average</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41st</td>
<td>45th</td>
<td>48th</td>
<td>in per-pupil funding</td>
<td>$12,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in pupil-teacher ratios</td>
<td>Pupils per teacher</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in pupil-staff ratio</td>
<td>All staff: students per staff member</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the state funded schools at just the national average, that would increase funding by $1,961 per pupil. For a classroom of 25 students, that’s an additional $49,025 for student support services (counselors, social workers, wellness centers), parent and community engagement, support for English learners, intervention programs, instructional support staff, class size reduction, CTE, and expanded offerings in the arts and other extracurriculars.

With an additional $1,961 per student, a school with 500 students would have $980,500 in additional revenue. This would allow the school many options to begin to address inequities:

» **Improve College and Career Counseling** by providing a college and career counselor for every 250 students (recommended by the American School Counselor Association). This will ensure that all students are on track to graduate, meet A-G requirements, and have a robust plan for what to do post high school graduation.

   **Cost: $159,948** for two counselors.¹

» **Engage Parents** by having teachers conduct home visits and having a parent coordinator organize educational classes for parents to learn about how they can best support their children’s education.

   **Cost: $87,474** to provide a stipend for teachers to conduct at least a one-hour home visit per student (assuming a cost of $15 per hour) and a parent coordinator.²

» **Ensure Advanced Placement Success** by placing all students in an Advanced Placement course, paying for test fees, and incorporating student supports, including tutoring, to master and practice the content. Supports can also incorporate AP preparation during summer school (see section on expanding summer learning).

   **Cost: $89,500** to provide each student with one AP test fee ($94) and an average of one hour of tutoring from a certificated teacher ($85).

» **Provide a Well-Rounded Education** by supporting time for arts, physical activity, civic engagement and other topics that provide students with a well-rounded education. Funding will support part-time teachers in these diverse subject areas.

   **Cost: $159,948** for four half-time teachers¹ in the areas of art, music, physical education, and civics.

» **Expand Summer Learning** to ensure that all students are enrolled in a summer program that offers a rigorous curriculum that is centered on a relevant theme, coordinated by an expert teacher, and offers opportunities for hands-on learning that truly immerses students in the subject matter.

   **Cost: $464,425** to provide each student with a five-week summer program ($185.77 per student per week of summer learning⁴).

» **Expand Preschool** to ensure that all students are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program with a qualified teacher that supports the development of cognitive, motor, and other skills that will allow students to be successful once they enter kindergarten.

   **Cost: $690,201** for 81 students to enroll in a full-day, year-round program led by a teacher with a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education ($8,521 per student).⁵ A total of $4.3 million would be required to provide quality preschool to all 500 students.

---

¹. All staff are assumed to have a $79,974 cost to the school. This is based on a $66,645 mid-point salary for certificated staff during the 2015-16 school year, plus an additional 20% in benefits. See http://bit.ly/2i1jYHcw
². See endnote 1
³. See endnote 1
⁵. See estimates at http://bit.ly/2uQwo0j
California has one of the worst teacher-pupil ratios in the nation and some of the lowest overall staffing levels in the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All staff</th>
<th>Officials and admin.</th>
<th>Principals and asst. principals</th>
<th>Instructional aides</th>
<th>Guidance counselors</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>2,141</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>8,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Average</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>1,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1,391</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>6,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional staff to close gap</td>
<td>238,781</td>
<td>5,469</td>
<td>4,695</td>
<td>28,456</td>
<td>5,186</td>
<td>4,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>48th</td>
<td>47th</td>
<td>44th</td>
<td>46th</td>
<td>49th</td>
<td>50th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problems posed by California’s dismal school funding levels are compounded by the high level of student need and the state’s high cost of living: 58% of California’s public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch — above the national average of 52%.

California also has the nation’s highest percentage of English learner students at 23% — more than twice the national average of 9%.

LCFF is a step forward philosophically because it supports equity by directing more money to students with higher need. But redistribution is not a solution when the overall funding pie is much too small. California is a wealthy state with high incomes and a large, healthy economy that has chosen to invest more in other parts of government than it invests in schools.

Funding gaps began when the state took over school funding in the 1970s with the Serrano v. Priest decision and grew steadily post Proposition 13.
The urgency of investment in public schools is only growing as:

» The Proposition 98 guarantee has not kept pace with the needs of public schools for our students and our state to remain competitive.

» Employer pension contribution costs will more than double over the next five years.

» Health care, utility, transportation, and special education costs continue to skyrocket.

» Unfunded mandates are introduced annually.

» The next recession grows closer.

California has consistently underfunded public education while widening its scope, adding new requirements, and raising the standards for what constitutes 21st-century learning. As a result, our schools lack the resources of those in poorer sections of the country as well as the resources needed to meet the state’s goals for students.

Districts and County Offices of Education are doing more with less, but it’s not enough. If California is serious about providing all its children with a high-quality education, we need to get serious about full and fair funding for public schools.
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Dear BoardWise,

I am the superintendent in a northern California school district. We have a strong negotiation team, one that follows the direction and mandates of the board at the bargaining table. Our local teachers union has requested that our board come to the table to negotiate. I would like to get your thoughts on this issue from a good governance perspective.

Luan: Great question! Board Bylaw 9000, The Role of the Board, clearly defines the appropriate functions and responsibilities of the board during the negotiation process, which is “Setting parameters for negotiations with employee organizations and ratifying collective bargaining agreements,” and “monitoring the collective bargaining process.” It is a school board’s responsibility to define the desired outcomes, and it is important that the board clearly articulate what those desired outcomes are as a collective team.

Nowhere in that bylaw is it stated that a board member should actually participate in or observe the bargaining process, and that is for good reason. Having one or more board members participate in negotiations can undermine the process and create conflict — both at the bargaining table and at the board table.

Achieving the desired outcomes, within the parameters set by the board, is the responsibility of the professional staff. Most board members do not have experience with labor negotiations. That’s a special skill set, one that’s best practiced by those with training and experience.

Peggy: A clear understanding of the board role in communication throughout the process is also critical. At the onset, it is important that the board articulate what the board — as a collective voice — wants to achieve through the bargaining process. Alignment between district goals and bargaining agreements is key.

Internal communications are also crucial. Board members and the superintendent need to have a solid understanding of the agreed upon parameters for negotiations, and also how board members will get the answers they need on how agreements might affect budgets and contracts, as well as the overall goals of the board.

Keeping the community and media informed as negotiations progress is additionally important. You may choose to develop a protocol or a joint statement that communicates the values and agreements, or “rules of conduct,” that the district will adhere to throughout the process. It is also helpful to have a communication plan to address different stakeholder groups.

Finally, support the decision of the board. Agree that, at a minimum, all members are expected to refrain from undermining the decision and to keep confidential things confidential.

Deb: A board member’s presence at the bargaining table, even as a silent observer, might have an unintended and undesired impact on the effectiveness of the negotiation process. For me, I think it all comes down to how a board
member observing or participating in the process may be perceived.

For example, other board members might assume the board member sitting at the negotiating table will get additional information that they do not receive in bargaining updates. Because all board members should have equal access to information, if individual board members are present in negotiations, they may have, or be perceived to have, much greater access to information than their colleagues.

Alternatively, the bargaining unit may be watching for a reaction that indicates a position, especially if something unexpected or controversial happens. If a board member has an unintended reaction, this can disrupt the entire process.

Finally, the presence of a board member at the negotiation table may imply a lack of support and trust in the district negotiating team and district staff, which can undermine the entire negotiating process and harm the relationship between the board and the district negotiating team and the staff as a whole.
Protecting students from school employee predatory behavior

Recently, reports of sexual misconduct, harassment and assault committed by powerful and influential players in show business, the corporate world and government have become rampant. Such reports from schools nationwide have become alarming, especially as they occur more and more between teachers and other school personnel and underage students. During this school year alone, there have been reports of such unlawful behavior in California, Oregon, Montana, Michigan, Wisconsin and Texas.

In an article published in the Washington Post on January 20, 2015, Terry Abbott, a former chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of Education and now chairman of a communications firm which tracked news reports of sexual misconduct by educators for more than a year, confirmed this troubling trend. Abbott’s firm ascribed the increase in occurrences to the almost-universal access students have to social media, text messaging and other private and unsupervised modes of communication. School boards and administrators must be vigilant to keep students safe from the reprehensible and criminal behavior of a few bad apples among the teaching corps and other employees to which the students are entrusted. Reasons abound as to why a school board should take steps to protect students from these perpetrators, and the following are just a few.

Why school boards should act

Firstly, as the governing body for the school district, the school board’s foremost responsibility is to educate its students. That responsibility presupposes the provision of an academic program that teaches students the skills, knowledge and abilities to succeed in higher education and/or employment, which can only be achieved within a learning environment where students feel safe physically, socially and emotionally. An asymmetric sexual relationship between an adult in a position of authority — such as a teacher, coach or counselor — and an underage student is an open gateway to confusion and emotional abuse for the student and could adversely affect the student’s learning.

Secondly, any report of unlawful teacher–student relationship generates moral outrage in the school community and casts a pall on the school itself. The negative publicity and the erosion of the community’s trust in school staff create distractions for students and staff and undermine the district’s ability to achieve its educational mission.

Additionally, one of the oversight responsibilities of the school board is to be a good steward of the district’s resources. When an unlawful relationship like this is uncovered, the district’s limited resources are unnecessarily taxed. Typically, investigating an incident involves a significant amount of time as students, school staff and administrators are called to give testimonies, thereby taking away from time available for educational activities or for the achievement of the district’s educational purpose. Such investigations also involve legal costs which must be paid out of limited district resources.

What school boards can do

In an effort to prevent these scandalous occurrences, school boards should consider a number of actions, including the following:

» Training. Educating the school community about the issue and how to address it will help. The school board must be willing to provide its staff with training that
includes how to recognize suspicious behavior and the process for reporting it, as well as the role of technologies such as electronic messaging systems in fostering these unwelcome relationships. Such trainings could be anchored to the sexual harassment training for supervisors, which is required of districts that have 50 or more employees, pursuant to Government Code section 12950.1. Though this requirement applies only to some districts, CSBA recommends that all school districts, regardless of the size of their workforce, train all of their employees, and that school boards — as elected officials with the authority to hire, transfer, suspend and discipline employees — receive the training. With this training, school board members could get up to speed on new laws and/or measures that could be beneficial to them in carrying out their responsibilities.

» Hiring and supervision policies, practices and processes. Establishing a hiring process with a robust background screening component is key to minimizing, if not eliminating, the possibility of hiring would-be child abusers. In addition, the adoption of a policy that provides direction for the supervision of employees, especially employees who have substantial interactions with students, would be helpful in limiting the opportunities for the occurrence of abuse or other inappropriate behavior. If the district allows employees to use social media to interact with students, it may need to establish reasonable restrictions that would be effective in protecting children, such as requiring an employee who is sending an electronic communication to a student to copy the message to the student’s parents. Districts must check to ensure proper and effective supervision of their employees, as failure to do so could result in legal liability for the district. In C.A. v. William S. Hart Union High School District (2012), the California Supreme Court ruled that, because a student is compelled by law to attend school and be subjected to the comprehensive control exercised by school employees, a school district could be held liable for a student who was abused, if it negligently hired a known child abuser and then allowed the person to interact closely with students without proper supervision.

» Information and notification. If vulnerable students are to be protected from inappropriate behavior, they and their parents must know when inappropriate conduct is happening so that they can report it. This was the rationale for the enactment of Assembly Bill 500 (Ch. 580, Statutes of 2017) which added new Education Code section 44050, effective Jan. 1, 2018. According to the new law, any school district that has adopted an employee code of conduct that includes a section that addresses employees’ interactions with students must post that section on its website. In addition, effective July 1, 2018, that district must also provide a written copy of the section to parents. Though this provision only applies to some districts by the letter of the law, CSBA recommends that all districts comply with the requirement.

Though no one measure will completely prevent unlawful sexual behavior by school employees, school boards must continue to find ways to effectively deter such behavior if they are to succeed in protecting their students from harm. CSBA has updated related sample policies and continues to work with districts and others to address issues of student safety and security.

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“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”
John Dewey

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Is your district engaging?

Four years ago, in a particularly long board meeting, I recall reviewing the first draft of our first Local Control and Accountability Plan, and thinking: “We’re supposed to engage our stakeholders with this?” If I wasn’t excited to read (what would turn out to be) a “svelte” 50-page document chock-full of acronyms and education-eze, I knew parents and employees wouldn’t be either.

I also recall the sting of our recently failed bond measure, and the nagging feeling that the few-month outreach effort to convince the community to invest in better schools was too little, too late.

I focused my frustration on a solution: the original LCAP Infographic. I donated it to my district and soon had superintendents around the state asking if I could help them with their own version of this tool, which helped better communicate LCAP goals and progress to the community. Fast forward to today, and we’ve helped close to 100 school districts and county offices of education across California better engage their constituents with hundreds of LCAP Infographics. This work, which requires deep distillation and familiarity with each LCAP, has given us a unique perspective on district LCAP content, and perhaps more importantly, LCAP engagement.

Ask any good teacher about effective learning and they will tell you it begins with good engagement. Similarly at the district level, desired outcomes such as increased performance, higher satisfaction and strengthened collaboration all begin with the same good engagement. But how do you know how well your district is engaging? And what can districts do to improve engagement?

To measure existing engagement efforts, consider the quantity and quality of specific LCAP-engagement activities. Are you revealing your LCAP only at board meetings, or are they freely distributed at school sites and proactively emailed to parents? How often do you have LCAP meetings? Are these meetings held only when it’s time for approval, or regularly throughout the year? Where are the meetings? Only at the district office, or out in the community and at schools? Do you provide meeting incentives like free food and childcare? Is LCAP interaction simply one-way? Or is it two-way, inclusionary, with probing need analysis? Do you make stakeholders read your lengthy LCAP document, or do you provide summarizing and engaging infographics and videos? Is the resulting stakeholder interest level passive and non-responsive, or active and enthusiastic? Do you acknowledge LCAP feedback and communicate implementation and progress? (See the Engagement Spectrum in the Stakeholder Engagement Imperative Infographic at www.goboinfo.com/stakeholder-engagement-imperative/.)

To improve engagement levels, consider two real world examples from districts that have embraced high levels of engagement and reaped the rewards. “One of our explicit district goals is to engage students, parents, employees and community members in districtwide and community-specific decisions,” Capistrano Unified School District Superintendent Kirsten Vital said. “The LCAP stakeholder engagement process is one of the ways our district can accomplish this goal. Sharing data, progress and student outcomes has helped parents, staff and students better understand our areas of focus, strategies and actions. We
are fortunate because we have actively involved parents, employees and students [and] lots of task forces, such as the Parent-PTA Council, a Teachers Council, English learner and special education groups, a facilities forum and an Associated Student Body Executive Council where high school students meet with the superintendent. It is really a kind of culture to support this engagement."

Since reviewing and understanding the 70-page LCAP document can be a challenge, Vital added that infographic tools are very helpful.

Capistrano USD also draws an astute distinction between engagement and “meaningful engagement,” focusing on the depth and quality of the effort, not just the breadth. “Each stakeholder has their own ideas on how to improve programs,” said Vital. “And it is important to allow each person the opportunity to give input on what they feel the district is doing well, on what can be improved and on what is meaningful to them personally.”

A focused outreach effort has helped Antelope Valley Union High School District increase its stakeholder engagement by almost 10 times, from a few thousand in 2015–16 to more than 31,000 in 2016–17.

“We have three big seasons where we get a ton of feedback from our stakeholders,” said Joe Kelly, Ph.D., Antelope Valley UHSD’s director of school improvement. “In the fall, we conduct the Healthy Kids Survey and get feedback from students, parents and staff about the culture and conditions of our schools. In the winter, we conduct community forums. This year, we’ve actually added a second Back to School Night. We view this as an opportunity to get feedback from the community halfway through the year to make sure we are delivering on our promises. Finally, in the early spring we conduct a final survey with staff, students and leadership to triangulate the feedback.”

Like Capistrano USD, Antelope Valley UHSD focuses on meaningful engagement and finds that visualization tools help communicate a complicated LCAP to the community. “We use several visual tools when communicating with our stakeholders,” said Kelly. “These tools include — but aren’t limited to — our website, our app, videos and infographics. Our stakeholders continue to give us high grades in regards to our methods of communication so we continue to use them. The best feedback we get is that these tools communicate information that is important to them in a simple and meaningful way.”

The impact of Antelope Valley’s robust engagement is significant. “Our academics are better than they have ever been. Our California Dashboard indicators have increased and our graduation rate and EL progress are green,” said Kelly. “And when you take into consideration the thoughts, opinions and desires of our community, people feel like they are being heard, and it avoids problems down the line.”

Antelope Valley UHSD Superintendent David Vierra, Ph.D., is also committed to incorporating community feedback into the LCAP. “Engaging stakeholders is probably the single most effective way to impact student achievement and to nurture a positive culture at our schools,” he said. “The LCFF [Local Control Funding Formula] has a minimum threshold for us in terms of engaging our stakeholders, but we try to go above and beyond each year in making sure that our stakeholders know that their feedback is important and makes an impact on how we do business.”

California’s groundbreaking LCFF and resulting LCAP is unique in that it requires all local educational agencies to actually consider stakeholder input, plan how to spend resources and then regularly report on the progress made. This mandated process is really just a cleverly disguised opportunity to do what any high-performing organization already knows is vital: engage stakeholders. The support of these parents, students, teachers and community stakeholders is critical to our schools’, and ultimately to our students’, success. A well-engaged educational community is the foundation upon which a strong society stands.

This importance, along with my direct experience and observation of district engagement across the state, has pushed me to label this opportunity as the “Stakeholder Engagement Imperative,” and even go so far as to suggest LEAs must “engage or perish.” Perhaps this is too dramatic. But perhaps not when you consider all the challenges that threaten public education, including inconsistent and inadequate funding, vouchers, privatization and deficient online academies.

Who ultimately controls the resources that support public education? Your stakeholders. Engage them or perish. CS

Randall Putz is a former Bear Valley Unified School District trustee and currently serves as Mayor Pro Tem for the City of Big Bear Lake. He is the founder of Gobo LLC, which provides planning and engagement tools for education, government and nonprofit organizations. To learn more, visit www.goboinfo.com.
Talking tech with Code.org CEO
Hadi Partovi

Tech entrepreneur and investor Hadi Partovi is the founder and CEO of Code.org, a nonprofit working to bring computer science into the lives of millions of students through curriculum resources, teacher professional development, the global Hour of Code annual event and more.

California Schools sat down with him to hear more about how to better prepare students for success in the 21st century.

What is the mission of Code.org?
The mission of Code.org is for every school to offer high-quality computer science classes and to increase participation in the subject, especially among women and underrepresented minorities. When most people think about the value of teaching computer science, they think about jobs and technology, especially in California with the massive opportunity in terms of careers in technology, but what really drives Code.org is the fact that computer science is foundational for all jobs. Today, 70 percent of all current jobs in the U.S. are somewhat digital in some fashion and that’s only increasing.

How is Code.org increasing diversity in the computer science field?
We do a lot of things to increase diversity. There’s no one button to press or one lever to pull. There are a multitude of things — we help break stereotypes through participation, and it is a big part of the Hour of Code campaign that we run that reaches tens of millions of students. Many of those students are trying it for the first time. We have measured that participating in just one hour of code causes girls and underrepresented minorities to change their attitude towards computer science. They may decide that, “I liked this more than I thought I would.” or “I’m better at it than I thought I would be.” In fact, high school girls show the greatest increase [in interest] from just doing one hour. That’s just one way.

Everything about our curriculum and our training programs for teachers are all designed with equity and inclusivity in mind. For example, the project focus and the creativity focus of our curriculum is designed to broaden participation. The casts you see in the videos that we produce show a diversity of role models in computer science, and the training we provide to teachers to prepare them to teach these classes often gives them the tools they need to increase inclusivity and equity in their classrooms.

Partovi will be a speaker at CSBA’s Leadership Institute, which takes place July 13–14 in San Francisco.

Code.org offers resources for students as young as four years old. Why should students start computer science instruction as young as kindergarten?
What they’re learning in kindergarten isn’t really JavaScript and building HTML pages. What they’re learning is giving a really simple command in really simple logic. It’s more like learning basic problem solving at the level of learning for grades K-3. These kids aren’t learning to code the way you would think of somebody who’s preparing for a job interview. They’re more learning about ideas like looping and debugging. It’s more like learning to write a recipe in a cookbook than something complicated. The reason to teach them young is to have the founda-
Why do you think that computer science instruction at the K-12 level is important for both students who will and students who won’t end up in a computer science career?

For the ones who will end up in a career, that’s an obvious answer, but the best way to think about it is the diversity problem. Careers in computing are dominated by white and Asian males; women, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native-Americans are all being left behind in the field. Getting them exposed younger in the K-12 system will help them realize that they have a passion or interest for this field and it leads to the best careers in the world. That said, our motivation isn’t to focus on the kids who want to get jobs in tech. It’s that every single student is going to be graduating into a society dominated by technological change. If you’re in the dark about how the technology works, you’re going to feel left behind.

If you think about the impact that social networking is having on things as basic as our election, if you think about the impact that artificial intelligence is going to have on the workforce, the impact that automated driving is going to have on transportation, there are so many different things that are changing the world around us. If you want to become a doctor, you’re going to need to learn about gene sequencing and the methods that are being used for personalized medicine. If you want to become a farmer, you’re going to need to learn about how drones can be used for monitoring your crops or how self-driving tractors are going to manage your field. This goes on and on for every type of work there is. There is no career in the 21st century that is going to be completely devoid of some sort of technology, and so it is a foundation that is just as useful as learning biology or chemistry or algebra.

Why is it important to have computer science instruction within public school classrooms during the day and not just as an after-school program or extracurricular class?

If you look at who takes computer science in after-school clubs, it tends to be the same types of students that are being driven by the stereotypes — white and Asian boys. They’re the ones that have been encouraged by their parents that, “You’re good at computer science,” and that, “This is for you.” Whereas, if you teach computer science as part of a school day, you reach a much larger and more diverse audience. In Code.org’s classrooms, 45 percent of the students are girls. Forty-nine percent of them are underrepresented minorities. That’s because it’s integrated into a school day, so we are reaching a much more balanced population than when you put it in after school.

What do you see as the biggest roadblock in the fight to close the opportunity gap and to provide computer science instruction to all students?

There are two obstacles and both of them are easy [to overcome], but it’ll take a little time. The first is the mindset of the adult. The adults in education think that computer science is this new and scary field that they never learned. “Who’s going to want to learn it?” “How are we going to teach this?” Their own mindsets put computer science behind all the other things that they’re more familiar with such as math, English, science, history, foreign languages and all the other things in the school system. If these adults ask the kids, the students are most interested in technology, and they are also plenty aware that if they want to think about what career they’re going to get, it’s among the most important things they can learn. They’re just much more at home with the technology. So getting the adults in education, especially school administrators, to recognize this mindset shift is important.

The second obstacle is the shortage of teachers who have the skills to teach computer science, and this is a much bigger problem. The core work of Code.org is to offer professional training and professional development workshops that can basically help an existing teacher, begin teaching computer science. So whether you’re an English teacher, social studies teacher, math teacher, science teacher, a tech teacher or a librarian in a third-grade classroom, we have workshops that enable you to begin teaching computer science at your school, even if that’s a 10- or 20-hour module that is part of the library hours in an elementary school or a year-long AP [Advanced Placement] course. We’ve now shown successfully to hundreds and soon thousands of teachers that English teachers and social studies teachers can successfully teach AP computer science, and their students will pass the exam thanks to the quality of our professional development workshop and the quality of our curriculum.

What advice do you have for school board members who want to increase computer science instruction in their districts?

My first piece of advice is to just do it. You have to get over inhibitions and to recognize that this is a global movement that is happening in education. If you don’t do it, your school is already falling behind. My second piece of advice would be to look at the Code.org professional learning programs because our professional learning workshops and our network of partners throughout California will, at no cost to your school, train your existing teaching staff to be able to teach computer science. Many schools have done this without any new budget being spent because Code.org is effectively giving them professional learning for free so they can get their existing teachers to teach computer science. Our professional learning isn’t going to be free forever. It’s one of those things where it’s better to act on this now while it’s still free of charge for the school system.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.
School inclusion program decreases bullying, increases student success

To walk onto the Standard Middle School campus at lunchtime is to walk into a true circle of friends. At this sixth- through eighth-grade Bakersfield school, special education students called “friends” and general education students called “peer friends” are paired together through the Circle of Friends school inclusion program to help foster friendship, provide students with examples of appropriate social behavior, spread disability awareness, encourage tolerance and decrease bullying.

Inspired by the peer role model partnering system of Link Crew programs, Standard Middle School’s Circle of Friends was started by language arts teacher Kayla Coronado and special education teacher Brittaney Lewis. “Peer friends” are trained to model appropriate social behavior and around 70 students join together once a week to eat lunch, play games, tell each other jokes and just have fun. The program has also led field trips and other activities.

“Everybody now knows the students with special needs, and it’s not like ‘they’re different from us.’ It’s like, ‘They’re a part of us. They’re one of us,’” said Coronado, who is a program coordinator with Lewis. “The inclusive nature of our campus is drastically different than it was three years ago.”

The seemingly simple program has yielded big results. Most notably, the norms of the schoolyard have shifted. General education students who demonstrate leadership and are involved in their school community are nominated by teachers to join the Circle of Friends program. In Coronado’s words, these “cool kids” having lunch with students with special needs has collapsed traditional boundaries for the entire student body and significantly decreased bullying.

In addition to helping general education students hone their leadership skills, Circle of Friends has been an incubator of success for students with special needs. For instance, one student with autism who started the program in sixth grade as a “friend” grew in the program not only to the point of becoming a “peer friend,” but he later became one of three students to give a speech at his eighth-grade graduation ceremony.

“Circle of Friends helped him pick up the social cues that sometimes these kids need to be successful in life,” said Lewis. “Oftentimes that will hold them back more than any academic disability that they might have.”

Lewis added that special education students now spend around 60 percent of their day in general education classes, and that transition has been, for the most part, seamless. “You can walk into quite a few inclusion classes on any given day and not be able to identify where the general ed kids are sitting in the class versus the students with special needs because they’re just so integrated into the fabric of the class,” said Coronado.

The program at Standard Middle School has been so popular that now three other elementary schools in Standard School District have started their own Circle of Friends programs. To learn more about the program, visit http://goo.gl/yKk3Vj.

— Corrie Jacobs
At 3 a.m. on the morning of Oct. 8, Santa Rosa City Schools board president Jenni Klose awoke to the smell of thick smoke that stung her eyes. Alarmingly, she made sure her house wasn’t on fire then walked to her second-floor porch to see what was going on. From that vantage point, she could see a raging fire about two-and-a-half miles away. Given the scope and proximity of the flames, she knew this was not a simple brush fire. Klose turned on the radio to gather information, then texted her fellow school board members and the district superintendent.
An emergency alert had awakened Santa Rosa City Schools Superintendent Diann Kitamura that morning. She was racing home from an out-of-town trip when she received Klose’s text. The messages all shared the same information — multiple wildfires had broken out across Sonoma County and were rapidly spreading under windy, dry conditions.

Driving north on Highway 101 through Marin County and Petaluma, Kitamura passed heavy traffic fleeing south and smelled smoke in the air. As she approached Santa Rosa, flames from wildfires charred nearby hillsides. Already she had contacted her staff, board members and law enforcement.

Meanwhile, Klose had evacuated her own home and went to her parents’ house a few miles west of Santa Rosa. Working together via cell phones and group text, Klose and her fellow board members made the immediate call to close the district’s schools. Kitamura also designated two schools she thought would be furthest from the flames as emergency shelters. District principals were told to reach out to staff and students at each school. The district robocaller also contacted families, a crucial element given that cellular service was down in many locations. Fortunately, the district office retained its cell service and electricity and became Kitamura’s command center for emergency operations.

Klose’s job as school board president quickly became a full-time position for the next two weeks. She worked closely with Kitamura on critical decisions and attended fire, sheriff and Pacific Gas & Electric briefings. Klose provided district updates for local media, responded to constituent concerns, wrote letters to potential landlords for displaced district employees and drafted communications for students. She also held meetings with other trustees to pass emergency resolutions and discuss the disaster response. In between, she oversaw a laptop drive to provide computers for staff who lost their homes, and a free voucher program sponsored by local laundromats.

Kitamura also directed a wide-ranging response to the disaster, coordinating constantly shifting demands, from organizing shelters to soliciting donations of food and gift cards from community partners, to mobilizing health resources for traumatized students and families, to social media updates.

Soon after the wine country fires in Napa, Mendocino and Sonoma counties, Southern California had natural disasters of its own. The Thomas Fire — the largest wildfire in modern California history — began on Dec. 4 in Ventura County and spread quickly with the help of strong Santa Ana winds.

In both Southern and Northern California, these wildfires caused widespread school closures and cancellation of sports and other outdoor activities due to air quality health concerns. An EdSource analysis determined that some 570 schools in Northern California, from Butte County to the coast, closed at some point due to the October fires. More than 256,000 students missed school.

”THE DEADLY AND DEVASTATING NATURAL DISASTERS REINFORCED A LESSON WE ALREADY KNOW: OUR SCHOOLS ARE THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY AND PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT ANCHOR IN THE LIVES OF THE FAMILIES WE SERVE.”

– Laura Capps, Board Member, Santa Barbara Unified School District

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KLOSE’S JOB AS SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT QUICKLY BECAME A FULL-TIME POSITION FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. SHE WORKED CLOSELY WITH KITAMURA ON CRITICAL DECISIONS AND ATTENDED FIRE, SHERIFF AND PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC BRIEFINGS. KLOSE PROVIDED DISTRICT UPDATES FOR LOCAL MEDIA, RESPONDED TO CONSTITUENT CONCERNS, WROTE LETTERS TO POTENTIAL LANDLORDS FOR DISPLACED DISTRICT EMPLOYEES AND DRAFTED COMMUNICATIONS FOR STUDENTS.

In Southern California, the December fires and later related mudslides closed schools in districts stretching from the Los Angeles Unified School District to Santa Barbara County. As schools and communities continue to recover from these twin disasters, California Schools looks at the impact of these natural disasters, and how school leaders can best respond.
LONG-TERM COSTS

“The fiscal impact has been huge and we are still waiting for insurance and FEMA reimbursement,” Santa Rosa Superintendent Kitamura said, adding that reopening Santa Rosa schools required a costly cleanup of more than two million square feet of campuses and the replacement of more than 3,000 air filters. The district lost one satellite elementary campus and the district farm, both of which burned to the ground.

Compounding these costs, Santa Rosa City Schools and other impacted districts face loss of funding from attendance-based revenue under the Local Control Funding Formula. In Santa Rosa, for instance, roughly 300 students are still homeless from the wildfires, and while they are still enrolled — many staying with relatives and friends — their future enrollment is uncertain. In Sonoma County, staff are surveying shelters and communicating with families through email and social media to better understand which students are likely to return to their original campus. The federal McKinney-Vento Act allows homeless students to stay in their original school regardless of address and requires districts to provide transportation to school for displaced students.

“Our enrollment is down about 2 percent,” Klose said. “A little more than a third of the students who lost their homes have not returned.” Two board members also lost their homes.

In Santa Barbara County, schools were shuttered for three weeks due to the wildfires, poor air quality and winter break — the longest school year closure since a flu pandemic 100 years ago.

“We were fortunate that none of our schools were damaged or destroyed by the fire, and that there was not a widespread loss of residential homes in Santa Barbara due to the fire that would physically impact families,” said Jacqueline Reid, Santa Barbara Unified School District board president. While the limited property damage did help curtail the number of students displaced, the extended school closures as a result of dangerous air quality conditions combined with power outages, road closures and evacuations led to a loss of learning time in the classroom. To support students and teachers with the loss of the required 180 instructional days, the board requested, and was granted, a waiver from the California Department of Education — its fourth request for a natural

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS CONCERNED ABOUT WILDFIRES AND OTHER EMERGENCIES IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES, THERE ARE SEVERAL RECOMMEND STEPS TO HELP PREPARE.

» Stockpile food, water, batteries, extra phone batteries and generators to maintain operations for three days without outside assistance.

» Prepare an emergency readiness plan.

» Conduct disaster preparedness drills.

» Determine what kinds of informal expertise might exist at your school or in your district. For example, are there parents with special skills that could be useful in an emergency?

» Develop a communications plan to keep staff and students informed.

» Ensure communications and updates are available in languages commonly spoken by district students and families.

» Have a landline.

» Be prepared to offer refuge to nonstudents and serve as a community shelter.

» Prepare for donations.

» Plan for transportation, especially for students and staff with disabilities.

» Help find care and activities for children when schools are closed.

» Record planning and costs before and after an emergency to help with getting reimbursements or payment for supplies and damages.
disaster waiver in the past 15 years.

**ADDRESSING THE COSTS**

Existing state law also allows local educational agencies to waive loss of attendance-based funding because of a wildfire or other natural disaster. But that waiver only applies to the next academic year, with impacted schools allowed to use the same attendance figures from one year to the next year only.

With this in mind, the California School Boards Association is sponsoring legislation with Assemblymember Jim Wood (D-Healdsburg) to extend that window to three years for LEAs affected by the October and December fires. Under the three-year time frame — which is based on the amount of time it took Lake County school attendance to stabilize after recent fires — the idea is to give schools and communities more time for recovery.

“This three-year window would give more of a cushion to rebuild schools and housing stock.” Teri Burns, CSBA legislative advocate, said. “Experience has shown that loss of students and related funding at a school can cause enrollment to keep dropping and keep people from moving back to a devastated neighborhood. This legislation aims to change that cycle. Keeping funding constant will help the district recover and protect the programs that encourage families to rebuild and move back.”

For facilities support, CDE’s Facilities and Transportation Services division helps LEAs in need of portable classrooms, but assistance for restoration and cleanup is obtained through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. At the end of January, Gov. Jerry Brown joined

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governors from other states recently hit by natural disasters in asking FEMA to accelerate the release of funds.

In February of this year, Congress proposed spending $2.7 billion to aid school systems hard hit by the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires. That money could be spent on textbooks, classroom equipment and resources for displaced students. The U.S. Department of Education would oversee dispersing the money on a per-student basis in affected schools.

Beyond finances, the fires also continue to take a toll on the health of students and staff. “Even now, the smell of smoke or the sound of fire alarms can be traumatic for students,” Kitamura said. “When schools reopened, we intensified counseling at schools for students, staff and families. Fifteen area school districts and agencies sent counselors, providing 120 psychologists and therapists, and we are continuing to provide support services.”

Reid added that Santa Barbara’s back-to-back disasters of the wildfire and deadly January mudslides remain the district’s greatest ongoing challenge that threaten the economic and emotional health of families and schools, as well as their sense of security. “We have activated compassion centers, staffed by trained trauma response counselors on multiple school campuses for families and employees who faced grief and needed to make sense of the natural disasters,” she said. “These back-to-back natural disasters created significant emotional and physical exhaustion for district leadership as well — our board is mindful of the ongoing support needed for our school community and for our leaders.”

The CDE has also received federal School Emergency Response to Violence grants for the October fires and applied for grants for the December fires and January mudslides. Known as Project SERV, these grants fund crisis counseling services, as well as overtime for school staff, law enforcement, student transportation and substitute teachers. The grants can also be used for some reconstruction costs.

“The fires came with a multitude of challenges, and there was not a set playbook given the circumstances. It’s good to have emergency plans, but every crisis is unique and building strong relationships in advance is one of the most important things, especially with city officials, law enforcement officials and other community-based organizations.”

— Diann Kitamura, Superintendent, Santa Rosa City Schools

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– Jacqueline Reid, Board President, Santa Barbara Unified SchoolDistrict

LOOKING AHEAD

While the smoke has cleared for school leaders across the state, there are ongoing concerns. Experts consider the 2017 wild-fires the new normal as the fire season has moved from roughly two months a year to a year-round phenomenon. At the same time, cycles of drought, heavy rain and other extreme weather patterns due to a warming climate create conditions for such fires. This is in addition to other natural disasters common to California including earthquakes, flooding and even tsunamis along the northern coast.

The state currently mandates that LEAs submit annual emergency preparedness plans to help plan for crisis and recovery. After the recent events, school leaders also have their own takeaways from the disasters.

“The fires came with a multitude of challenges, and there was not a set playbook given the circumstances,” Kitamura said. “It’s good to have emergency plans, but every crisis is unique and building strong relationships in advance is one of the most important things, especially with city officials law enforcement officials, and other community-based organizations.”

This network enabled law enforcement authorities to reach out to Kitamura right away for information on the school shelters and also to pass along information on areas being evacuated. The school district then provided daily updates on their website and through robocalls and emails to students and staff.

“The superintendent and I agreed early on that more communication was better even if it restated the same status or restated uncertainty about opening times,” Klose said, stressing the importance of good relations on the board and with the district to ensure smooth dialogue.

She also encourages school boards to develop their own emergency plans in addition to the school district plan, assigning responsibilities and phone contacts in advance. At its meetings after the fire, the board also had free food available for members of the community and made the first agenda item a public comment period for people to share how they had been affected.

Kitamura also stressed the importance of approving emergency-related resolutions before an emergency occurs. The Santa Rosa City Schools Board of Trustees passed two resolutions once the initial danger had passed. One gives the superintendent power to act without board approval in an emergency situation, and the other gives the board president authority to act unilaterally on behalf of the board in an emergency situation without its explicit approval.

Santa Barbara USD Board Trustee Laura Capps also emphasized the need for clear communication from the district.

“Reopening schools as expeditiously as possible and offering accommodations to our neighboring schools was essential to restore the healthy routine of learning that our students need,” she said. “Ongoing communication and updates as to the status of the fires, debris flow and school closures was critical as it provided transparency to the process for the parents and students in our district ... the deadly and devastating natural disasters reinforced a lesson we already know: our schools are the heart of our community and perhaps the most important anchor in the lives of the families we serve.”

Hugh Biggar (hbigar@csba.org) is a staff writer for California Schools.

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Measuring Accountability

EQUITY AND THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DASHBOARD

At the Natomas Unified School District’s January board meeting, trustees listened intently as the district’s principals reported their school’s performance and progress according to the California School Dashboard. Each presenter then shared actions the school will take to improve student outcomes. Natomas USD is a good example of how districts can apply the data provided in the state’s new accountability system to assess and improve efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps for vulnerable student groups.

BY KIMBERLY SELLERY
“It was really valuable to have each principal take ownership of their school’s data,” said Natomas USD trustee and California School Boards Association Legislative Advocate Teri Burns. “It is essential that the district board review the different data points in order to assist schools in targeting interventions — the Dashboard provides an entryway for districts into that work.”

The California School Dashboard is part of an overhaul of public education in the state that aims to consider the whole child and better prepare students for life in an increasingly technological and global society. This accountability system aims to identify student subgroups that need extra help closing opportunity and achievement gaps, and paired with the Local Control Funding Formula, target designated funds to support groups such as low-income students, foster youth and English learners. The state says this system is “the next step in a series of major shifts in California K-12 schools, changes that have raised the bar for student learning, transformed testing and placed the focus on equity for all students.”

Advocacy groups agree that the Dashboard is an improvement over the previous Academic Performance Index, which relied heavily upon standardized test results to assign each school a single numerical ranking. However, as the Dashboard rolls out, organizations such as CSBA, Education Trust–West and Children Now are advocating for ways the Dashboard can be adjusted to emphasize greater transparency and shine a brighter light on student subgroups that are experiencing opportunity and achievement gaps.

CSBA CEO & Executive Director Vernon M. Billy and Education Trust–West Executive Director Ryan J. Smith explained some of these issues in an op-ed for education reporting outlet Edsource in January. “Using multiple measures to communicate not just academic performance, but a host of other important factors that shape a child’s education is a step in the right direction. But the Dashboard must go further in providing transparency, particularly in highlighting the achievement gaps of student subgroups.”

**Color coding accountability**

The California School Dashboard is an interactive website that displays local educational agency and school performance on several measures aligned with California’s educational priorities under the Local Control Funding Formula. The Dashboard displays an LEA’s or school’s most recent reported performance in

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### LOCAL INDICATORS AND DATA SOURCES FOR DASHBOARD

| BASIC CONDITIONS (LCFF PRIORITY 1) | Measures the availability of textbooks, adequate facilities and correctly assigned teachers. |
| IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS (LCFF PRIORITY 2) | Indicates the current level of implementation based on local data (including data from the Student Accountability Report Card), using the narrative summary option or the self-reflection tool provided by the CDE. |
| PARENT ENGAGEMENT (LCFF PRIORITY 3) | The narrative summary of the LEA’s progress in seeking input from parents/guardians in school/LEA decision-making and promoting parental participation in programs can be developed using information collected through a survey of at least one grade span served by the LEA or other local measures. |
| SCHOOL CLIMATE (LCFF PRIORITY 6) | LEAs will provide a narrative summary of the local administration and analysis of a climate survey that addresses student perceptions of school safety and connectedness in at least one grade within each grade span served by the LEA. |
| COORDINATION OF SERVICES FOR EXPELLED STUDENTS AND FOSTER YOUTH (LCFF PRIORITIES 9 AND 10, COUNTY OFFICES OF EDUCATION ONLY) | Annual survey that measures progress in coordinating services. |
these areas, and tracks changes over time. Current performance statistics coupled with performance growth or decline is used to calculate an overall performance-level for several indicators. The Dashboard uses five colors to represent an LEA’s or school’s performance level, which range from high to low as follows: blue, green, yellow, orange and red (see Figure 2). A status and change report for each indicator is calculated using a 5x5 performance grid (see Figure 1), which shows whether an LEA or school has improved, stayed the same or declined in performance.

Red ratings in any two categories triggers state assistance for the underperforming subgroups. For the data in the fall 2017 Dashboard release, 228 districts will be flagged for assistance from their county offices of education because at least one student group rated red or orange in more than one indicator. According to an EdSource analysis, 561 districts have at least one student group that was rated orange or red for performance on the academic indicators but will not receive county assistance. However, each district that has student groups with a red or orange rating must recognize the low performance in its Local Control and Accountability Plan and designate strategies to improve those student outcomes.

The yellow color rating has raised alarms for several of the education advocacy organizations. “A poor performing district can languish in the yellow designation, which is so broad that it includes schools where the average student is several years below grade level and schools where the average student is above grade level,” explained CSBA’s Billy. “If a school continues to perform at the same low level, they will never be flagged for assistance.”

“A school shouldn’t be yellow or higher if significant groups of students are below grade-level standards,” said Education Trust–West’s Smith. “We can’t continue to claim the mantle of progressivism in California if we are hiding schools that are failing low-income students and students of color year after year.”

Local indicators

The indicators are divided between those statistics that are provided by the state, and those that must be provided by LEAs. The full 2017 Dashboard release included the following state indicators:

- Smarter Balanced Assessments in English language arts and math
- English learner progress as measured by CELDT and reclassification data
- Graduation rates
- Chronic absenteeism rates
- Suspension rates
- College & Career Readiness (grades 9-12)

The current release of the Dashboard only includes one year of data for the chronic absenteeism and college and career readiness indicators, so these have not yet received color rankings.

The local indicator data uploaded to the Dashboard by LEAs include the following LCFF priority areas: basic conditions at school, school climate, implementation of academic standards and parent engagement. County offices will report on two additional priorities related to services for foster youth and expelled students. LEAs and schools upload reports about whether each indicator’s standards were “met,” “not met for one year,” or “not met for two or more years.” Meeting or not meeting the standard on local indicators is not related to LEA performance in those areas, but indicates only that they have completed the following required activities: 1) Measuring progress using local indicators; 2) Reporting the results at a regularly scheduled public school board meeting; and 3) Uploading...
“The first step in addressing achievement gaps is a clear indication on the Dashboard of whether the school or district has been flagged for assistance from the state. The state could also consider providing more information about which student groups prompted the flag for state assistance through this designation.”

— Education Trust–West Executive Director Ryan J. Smith

and reporting the results to the Dashboard by December 1 each year.

The education advocacy group Children Now sees room for improvement in the reporting of these indicators. “We need to strengthen the local indicators,” said Children Now Senior Managing Director of Education Policy Samantha Tran. “We think some more energy needs to be put into guidance about these indicators and to providing tools and resources to support local communities to provide evidence and engage multiple stakeholders — their teachers, their parents, their students — in meaningful ways around this information.”

The Equity Report

Another component of the Dashboard is the Equity Report, which appears on the first page of an LEA’s Dashboard data. This indicator is followed by three categories: All Students’ Performance, Total Student Groups and Student Groups in Red or Orange.

It is in the Equity Report that advocacy groups see the most cause for alarm. While a district or school’s overall rating could place it in the yellow or even green area, a look at the breakdown by student subgroup can reveal a very different story.

For example, the first page of the Equity Report for San Francisco Unified School District shows a yellow ranking for English Language Arts and Mathematics. When broken down by student group, the data reveals four subgroups in the orange category and two in the red. Without drilling down into the report, the data would seem to indicate that the students in the school are performing on an average level. “What are we communicating if we are saying this is not a serious issue that should be flagged for additional support?” asked Tran.

Another area of discussion is how LEAs and schools are identified for support; there is nowhere on the current Dashboard that communicates that information. “The first step in addressing achievement gaps is a clear indication on the Dashboard of whether the school or district has been flagged for assistance from the state,” said Smith of Education Trust–West. “The state could also consider providing more information about which student groups prompted the flag for state assistance through this designation. Local stakeholders — from

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Continued on page 38
parents and students to educators and administrators — all have a role to play in the continuous improvement of a school or district. Not providing an easy way to see if their school or district is receiving assistance keeps the very community members who fought for LCFF in the dark.”

CSBA’s Teri Burns explained that the State Board has heard these concerns and is working to make the gap information more readily available. “We want to be able to see right upfront which schools aren’t serving specific student subgroups,” she said. “The local district piece is the need to set more aggressive and differential targets. The State Board will need to call upon districts to do that, and display that in their LCAPs or in their budgets in a way that is easily accessible to the public.”

In an op-ed for EdSource, State Board President Michael Kirst and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson acknowledged that, while there is still some work to be done to improve the Dashboard design, “with the detailed information in the Dashboard, we have a rare opportunity to turn data into direct action. … Knowing our system’s strengths and weaknesses, and tapping into our state’s incredible network of experts, will help us accelerate this work so every student has the opportunity to succeed in college, the workplace and life.”

**Improving the Dashboard**

One recent point of contention between education advocacy groups and the State Board was the adjustment of “cut points” in the academic indicator in the fall 2017 Dashboard release. According to summary documents presented at the State Board of Education meeting, the new cut points took into account “the central premise of California’s Accountability and Continuous Improvement System, [which] is the consideration of necessary changes or improvements based on newly available data, recent research and/or stakeholder feedback.”

The documents cite the availability of only two years of “change” data as the reason for the changes to the cut points: “When the performance standards were set for the Academic Indicator, only two years of Smarter Balanced Assessment data were available (2015 and 2016), producing one year of Change data. The distributions used to set the standards were positively skewed, ... over 80 percent of LEAs experienced a positive change.” When the 2017 scores did not show nearly as much positive change, the current cut scores produced dramatic downward swings and were therefore adjusted to minimize the volatility of the swings. In fact, the changes added more districts and student groups to the orange category than the prior formula.

Smith at Education Trust–West questions the methods used by the SBE in changing these cut points. “There may occasionally be reasons to make technical adjustments to the Dashboard,” he said. “But this needs to be done through a transparent process and should be about improving the system, not watering down standards. We shouldn’t be sugar-coating schools’ performance to avoid providing state support for the educators doing the hard work on the ground.”

Education advocacy groups have flagged other areas of the Dashboard that are of concern. Both Children Now and Education Trust–West Executive Director Ryan J. Smith

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**Figure 1: Sample 5x5 Performance Grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Declined Significantly (Change)</th>
<th>Declined (Change)</th>
<th>Maintained (Change)</th>
<th>Increased (Change)</th>
<th>Increased Significantly (Change)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High (Status)</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (Status)</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (Status)</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (Status)</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low (Status)</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: California Department of Education
Measuring accountability: Equity and the California School Dashboard, continued from page 40

“We want the vision of LCFF and the Dashboard to become reality: to improve outcomes by directing more resources to high-need students and using a multiple-measure accountability system to support local decision-making. Now is the time to make these adjustments to the Dashboard.”

— Vernon M. Billy

Trust–West emphasized the importance of including students in alternative education settings now, while the Dashboard is still evolving. “It is critical that we include alternative education students now in the district-level data, as well as figuring out the school-level alternative accountability system,” said Tran. “If you break it out, one out of every five senior students in California is in an alternative education setting — and only one-third of those students graduate.” The State Board will be considering options for including alternative school ratings in the Dashboard this spring.

Another top-line item that advocacy groups would like to see in the Dashboard is related to tracking student growth. Whereas the current Dashboard tracks change between cohorts of students — for example, this year’s third-graders compared to last year’s third-graders — tracking growth would follow the trajectory of each student year by year.

“How is every child in that school making those yearly transitions?” asked Tran. “Ideally, if we are going to close gaps, are we seeing more than a year’s worth of growth in a year’s time? Tracking growth is one of the best predictors of the impact that schools can have on learning outcomes for students because it is really about the individual student. The CDE has committed to working on this, but we have not seen any analytical models on that yet that we can dive into.”

**Using the Dashboard to support equity**

While work remains to be done on improving the Dashboard, the current version can support school district and county office board members in their plans to close persistent achievement gaps. Though all of the equity information is not presented up front, clicking through the different tabs of the Equity Report will reveal subgroups that need extra help.

“District and school teams can use the Dashboard, along with other local data, to identify areas in which the district is struggling and which student groups it must better serve,” said Smith. “Working together with [stakeholder] groups and using the Dashboard to identify gaps and needs can help districts create a solid action plan that is then integrated into LCAPs and other local planning documents.

Lastly, it is crucial that the district communicate their plan to address inequities to the broad range of stakeholders in the district.”

Added CSBA’s Billy, “We want the vision of LCFF and the Dashboard to become reality: to improve outcomes by directing more resources to high-need students and using a multiple-measure accountability system to support local decision-making. Now is the time to make these adjustments to the Dashboard.”

Kimberly Sellery (ksellery@csba.org) is managing editor for California Schools.
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On a cold Sunday this past February, more than 150 Filipina-American college and K-12 educators, their students, families and community converged at Balboa High School in San Francisco. Fondly known as “Bal,” this San Francisco landmark is recognizable for its Spanish Colonial Revival architecture and its former student Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead. But on this windy weekend, the Filipino community is here to support up-and-coming musical talent Ruby Ibarra. With her face gracing three billboards in New York City’s Madison Square Garden, Ibarra is a MasterCard-sponsored artist for the “Diversity in Stories” campaign. She appeals to a younger generation, and is someone whom young Filipinas look up to. A Bay Area native, she’s an alumna of the University of California, Davis, and a scientist during her regular work day. The community support is not just for her music. All the women and girls here want to see what’s possible when you have a community behind you, an education and fierce talent. They are here to see that yes, you can be anything you want. Immigrant from the Philippines? Check. Scientist? Check. Nationally known lyricist? Check.

INTEGRATING HISTORY
BUILDING SUCCESSFUL ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAMS

BY GAYLE ROMASANTA
One of the organizers getting these groups and the Filipino Bay Area community to support Ibarra and her musical storytelling is Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Ph.D., a San Francisco State University professor. She is the founder of Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) and helped create the curriculum for San Francisco Unified School District’s ethnic studies program.

“We had to go step by step, piecing everything together. We had to create the curriculum because there wasn’t any at that time,” Tintiangco-Cubales said of the early days. “Pretty soon word got out that we were providing services that developed students’ identities, academically challenged them and engaged their participation within their communities.”

Tintiangco-Cubales created PEP in 2001, and it has now grown into a respected teacher-training pipeline that spans kindergarten to doctoral studies, and not only serves the Filipino-American population, but also teachers and students from varied backgrounds.

“PEP was born out of the needs of Filipina/o-American teachers and students in the Excelsior neighborhood of San Francisco,” said Tintiangco-Cubales. As a professor at SFSU, Tintiangco-Cubales’s courses on community development and Filipina/o-American literature emphasize community service learning, and she recruited her students to volunteer in PEP. She explained further in an article for the Asian American Pacific Islander Nexus Journal:

“In 2001, the lunch-time youth mentorship program had 11 undergraduate and graduate student mentors from SFSU working with 25 students at Balboa High School ... PEP initially emphasized addressing the issues facing the Filipino community ... and the lack of Filipina/o-American content in the curriculum.” The program has since “grown its own” educators and provides after-school and lunch-time services at five public schools with over 40 teacher apprentices. Eighteen years later, it is a widely known as a supportive and collaborative teacher pipeline that is active on many levels of the Asian-American community.

The success of the PEP program also served as a foundation for the development and expansion of ethnic studies in San Francisco USD. After 10 years of the PEP mentorship program serving several San Francisco USD school sites, the ethnic studies pilot program launched at five high schools, with Tintiangco-Cubales as the curriculum consultant. Under her guidance, the district and the five teachers at the pilot program schools created an ethnic studies course that targeted incoming freshmen who were at risk of not graduating — students who had a history of poor attendance and grade point average issues in the prior year. The district partnered with Stanford University, and the findings of the pilot program were summarized in the report, “The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum,” by Thomas Dee, Ph.D. and Emily Penner, Ph.D. The report found that assignment to the district’s pilot ethnic studies course “increased ninth-grade student attendance by 21 percent, GPA by 1.4 grade points and credits earned by 23.” The report concluded that “the course reduced drop-out rates and suggests that culturally relevant teaching, when implemented in a supportive, high-fidelity context can provide effective support for at-risk students.”

In 2014, based on the data and discussion with the Stanford University partnership, the San Francisco USD school board unanimously approved the resolution to institutionalize ethnic studies as a graduation requirement at all of the district’s 19 high schools.

TEACHER SUPPORT IS COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Artnelson Concordia, a teacher on special assignment in the district, currently supports San Francisco USD’s high school ethnic studies teachers. Working from the district office and conducting site visits, he coordinates the roll out and the implementation of ethnic studies classes. Not all ethnic programs at the school sites are the same. Some high schools choose to do wall-to-wall ethnic studies, where all ninth-graders take the ethnic studies course. Other sites have chosen to also create an honors section to make the courses more grade specific and rigorous.

He remembers the beginning of the ethnic studies pilot program, when he was a social studies teacher at Balboa High School working with Tintiangco-Cubales. He recalls how the social studies teachers from the five pilots high schools worked tirelessly developing unit plans that took into account students’ social-emotional learning. “We would meet after school, weekends and release days,” Concordia said. “After going over learning theories, we realized at the beginning of planning that professional development is essential for a social studies-turned-ethnic studies teacher. An ethnic studies program is only as effective as its teacher. We’ve been lucky that our teachers have been moved by the curriculum. They’re relearning too.”

ETHNIC STUDIES LEGISLATION

PEP has been instrumental in partnering with SFSU and San Francisco USD to become the main pipeline for Bay Area Filipino-American teacher training. The nonprofit is a fierce advocate for ethnic studies and was also a vocal supporter of Assembly Bill 123, written by Assemblymember Rob Bonta (D-Alameda), the first Filipino-American California State Legislator. Signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown in 2013, AB 123 requires that the State Board of Education ensures that state curriculum and framework “include instruction in the role of immigrants, including Filipino-Americans in the farm labor movement.”

According to Stephanie Gregson, Ed.D., director of the California Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks & Instructional Resources Division and executive director of the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), “One of the 10 instructional programs that were approved by the SBE [in July 2017] for K-8 history and social sciences was ‘expanded coverage of the farm continued on page 48
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labor movement that includes not only Cesar Chavez, but also the role of Filipinos and Filipino civil rights leader Larry Itliong.”

Assemblymember Bonta authored AB 123 due to the lack of instructional material on Itliong, who co-founded the United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez, and the erasure of the Filipino-American contribution to the farm labor movement. A history major before attending Yale Law School, Bonta believes in communities seeing themselves in their history books. “It’s really important to see your community’s successes reflected in complete accuracy and truth in the history books that you read,” said Bonta. “That creates that inspiration for the next generation, that confidence, that self-esteem, that belief, the ability to make change, to drive us forward to make progress.”

In 2016, AB 2016 (Alejo, D-Salinas), which mandates that the Instructional Quality Commission create an ethnic studies model curriculum, was passed. The commission will submit the ethnic studies model curriculum to the SBE to adopt on or before March 31, 2020. Districts are encouraged to “offer a standards-based ethnic studies curriculum” based on the model curriculum for grades 9-12.

With two years before the model curriculum is approved, school districts should ideally begin partnering with community stakeholders, colleges and universities, and teachers to get buy-in support for an ethnic studies program now. San Francisco USD board member Shamann Walton, has advice for districts just beginning their ethnic studies journey.

“The culture and the climate of support has to exist at all levels and buy-in is important. I believe bringing together school leaders, central office leaders as well as families and community is important in providing context for everyone to understand education about all cultures is important,” Walton said. “Ethnic studies does not take away from any aspects of learning, nor does it decrease the value of learning traditional subjects, but it, in fact, enhances learning for everyone.”

Jose Lara, school board member at El Rancho Unified School District and coordinator for the advocacy group Ethnic Studies Now encourages districts to pass resolutions to begin the work of creating ethnic studies courses. “Pass resolutions to make this happen. Form a committee of teachers and create a unique model that includes the interest and education needs of the community,” Lara said. He was recently appointed to the IQC committee working on the ethnic studies model curriculum.

El Rancho USD, located in Los Angeles County, was the first district in California to adopt ethnic studies as a high school graduation requirement. Currently, El Rancho USD students have the option of taking high school courses such as Multicultural Literature, Mexican American Heritage, Examining Cultural Diversity and Gender in Literature and Film, and Chicano Mural Art. The district also provides tours for schools and districts interested in learning more about their ethnic studies program.

IQC’s Executive Director Gregson agrees that districts should start considering ethnic studies curriculum now. “Districts that are interested in offering ethnic studies courses can begin the process of proposing ethnic studies courses, submitting them for A-G approval, identifying textbooks, encouraging collaboration with ethnic studies teachers at local UCs and CSUs, and creating professional development opportunities for prospective ethnic studies teachers,” she said. “The model curriculum also aims to provide resources to support teachers and administrators.”

For school districts addressing AB 123, they can begin “working to ensure that their textbook offerings are in alignment with the legislation,” explained Gregson. “AB 123 calls for the State Board of Education to ensure the state curriculum, framework and state criteria for selecting textbooks include the contributions of Filipino-Americans in the farm labor movement.”

**COMMUNITYWIDE CRITICAL THINKING**

Dawn Mabalon, Ph.D., a Stanford-trained historian and an SFSU professor, provides history workshops for PEP and believes ethnic studies supports critical-thinking skills in high school and beyond.

“When students see themselves in their curriculum, they engage because the instructional materials are resonating with them,” said Mabalon. “Critical-thinking, problem-solving, reading, writing about these histories carries with them through the rest of their lives. People think you’re revising history to make students feel good. But we’re not. We are history. Ethnic studies is history. If you’re teaching California history, it is a story of indigenous culture, survival, and immigrants providing labor and a story of dreamers of all generations.”

This collective history is evidenced at Ruby Ibarra’s video shoot on that Sunday afternoon in February. While the more than 150 educators, students, families and community members were there for a rock star in their midst, they were also there to reaffirm their worth and relevance. Older students took...
“Describe a great boss. Someone for whom you have worked. Someone who inspired you to set and reach stretch goals.” This is a thought that I often present to governance teams when I have been asked to guide their self-evaluation, and the subsequent evaluation of the superintendent.

My colleagues at F3 Law and I have facilitated these conversations in districts throughout the state, from small and rural districts with one or two schools to major-market districts with thousands of employees and students.

Here are some of the most common responses from board members:

- **Trustworthy** – Does not use information to hurt people or build divides
- **Frank** – Direct, yet compassionate
- **Gives clear direction** – Sets goals and expectations, then gets out of the way so I can do my job
- **Uses evaluations effectively** – They are used to reflect, grow and drive positive change, and they are never a “surprise” or “gotcha”
- **Accepts mistakes and missteps with grace** – Understands that trying something new might cause failures
- **Eager to learn** – From successes, failures and from others
- **Great listener** – Patient and active listener, might not give you everything you want or ask for, but you know you have been heard
- **Leads with questions rather than directives**
  - “How might we do this?”
  - “Is the goal clear?”
  - “Is the reason for the goal clear?”
  - “Do you have what you need to achieve this goal?”
  - “What do you need from me?”
- **Appreciative**

Those who are quick to give direction and/or point out weaknesses should be equally quick to offer sincere praise.

After hearing the board members share their thoughts — they typically agree with one another and expand on each other’s thoughts — I remind them that they, as a body, are the superintendent’s boss. Then I ask, “Is this board a great boss? What role have you, the boss, played in the superintendent’s success and challenges?”

Consistently, I find that trustees appreciate this discussion, and they reflect openly, honestly and with integrity. Essentially, they practice what they preach, meaning, if they want their superintendent to take an honest look at her/his leadership style and effectiveness, then the board must be willing to take an honest look at theirs, too.

What makes the work of a board member most challenging, in my opinion, is that the public, including many district employees, do not understand the role of the board of education. They believe members, as individuals, can make things happen. Yes, you can — indeed should — ask questions, and you can share information. You are obligated to bring the voice of the people into discussions and the decision-making processes. But alone, a trustee does not have the authority to give direction. Legally, all authority rests with the full board.

So, if the board as a whole is the boss, then the question to each board in the 1,000-plus districts in California and the boards in our county offices of education is, “Are you a great boss?”

Beginning the evaluation process with this reflective question can help your board grow stronger and more focused. As a result, you will give clear(er) direction to the superintendent, the board’s only employee and the person whom you empower to marshal all resources, and focus talent and energy to drive the necessary changes to ensure success for all students.

On a personal note, I want to thank trustees and superintendents for dedicating yourselves to serve our public schools, and kids. Your work is complex, emotional, demanding, and appreciated; thank you.
turns reading their own poetry to the group, while elementary and middle school students sang songs from the Broadway play *Hamilton*. They waited patiently to be featured as a strong Pinay, Tagalog for a girl or woman of Filipino descent, in Ibarra’s music video. Some wore traditional Filipino cultural Spanish-style or tribal dresses. A camera woman recorded women and girls answering the question, “What makes you a strong Pinay?”

Tintiangco–Cubales, who has been supporting this ethnic studies work for almost 20 years, understands these are teaching moments for students, educators and for communities who haven’t historically been taught the worth of their culture or culturally relevant pedagogy.

“PEP has been a place where students and teachers learn to find their purpose and learn how to be educators that matter. It’s become a strong and developed community where not only students are learning about ethnic studies, we’re developing teachers responsive to students.”

When students begin to learn their history, they are also taught that they can be active, positive contributors to their community. “Students are not just finding out who they are and their history, but they’re learning how to make positive change in their communities, so our young people and their families have a better chance at sustaining themselves,” Tintiangco-Cubales said. “With ethnic studies, populations of students that were traditionally marginalized can feel like they are finally learning who they are. They are finally at the center of the story, contributors to society, part of history and sometimes, like a rock star at their own video shoot. Teachers also feel like they can engage their students with successful results. When a group of people are interested in being critical educators, it’s magical.”

Gayle Romasanta is a freelance writer. Her work can be found at www.bridgedelta.com.
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As a Santa Rosa City Schools board member for the past 28 years, a member of the CSBA leadership team for more than 20 years, and a counselor and applied technology instructor at Santa Rosa Junior College, Frank Pugh is no stranger to public education advocacy.

Tell us a little bit about your background.

I was educated in public schools in Chula Vista, Calif. I put myself through college by working summers in a shipyard as an electrician’s assistant and got my degrees at San Diego State University in Industrial Studies. In 1978, Ann and I got married and we were both planning to begin our teaching careers in San Diego when Prop. 13 passed and changed the funding mechanism for schools. So, we left our hometown and both took jobs at Porterville Unified School District where Ann taught kindergarten and I taught industrial arts at Porterville High School. A year later, we relocated to Santa Rosa where I am in my 39th year at Santa Rosa Junior College. I have taught electronics and applied mathematics, and now I am a full-time academic advisor and counselor. My whole career has been under the shadow of Prop. 13 and the tremendous negative impact that it’s had on the ability for schools to get themselves fully and fairly funded.

Early on in my career at the college, I got involved with our faculty senate and served as their president for six years. During that time, I would negotiate salary enhancements, fringe benefits and so forth, and I got really interested in the whole governance process working with the college board and administration representing the faculty. Whether it’s on a board or committee or in an institution, it’s vitally important how you structure your conversations, and through that process you can create good governance that benefits everyone.

After my time serving as faculty president, a mid-cycle vacancy opened up on the school board for Santa Rosa City Schools, so I applied. It was a large pool of candidates, maybe 12 or so, and we were all interviewed. It got down to myself and another person, and unfortunately they selected the other guy. In the next election, I ran against that person and won. I’ve been on my board since 1990 and I am the longest serving board member in the history of our district.

It didn’t take me long to get introduced to CSBA through their trainings and I eventually became more and more involved. I served as president of CSBA in 2010. After that, I became a director for the Pacific Region, which is a territory established by the National School Boards Association. And now I am preparing to serve as NSBA’s president. One thing always leads to another in education, and that’s true with board governance as well.

And, one more thing about my background. Ann and I will be celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary this year. We have two daughters and two sons-in-law and two grandchildren and one more on the way. My family is changing — going from my kids growing up to now they are having their own children, so that’s really kind of exciting!
After so many years, what motivates you to continue your advocacy work?

Seeing progress. If you continue to identify what you’re trying to accomplish, you get a great sense of satisfaction seeing things come to fruition. For instance, a lot of construction has taken place in my school district since I’ve been on the board. We’ve passed a number of bonds, and we’ve done some tremendous buildings — we built two high schools and established a workplace elementary school (worksite school) for one of our local tech firms. We have several dependent charter schools, including a French-American charter school (French immersion school) and a charter arts school. You get a great sense of satisfaction seeing these physical changes because in education things change so slowly.

I truly continue to enjoy my work as a school board member. In spite of the chronic challenges and the ever-changing landscape of public education, I find it to be one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done. You have to look at what we can do as board members to improve our communities with the resources that are given to us. It requires constant reinvention and constant review, and I like that part of governance. It’s very rewarding to create new programs out of virtually nothing and promote the talents that we have in our districts among our teachers and administrators to benefit our kids.

How do you plan to bring a “California perspective” to the national level in your role as NSBA President?

CSBA provides training and services to our membership so we can be on point, organized and useful in getting our message across to our constituents. And the National School Boards Association promotes the same goals and also includes state association leadership training. California has around six million students. Nationally, you’re talking about 51 million students. Another difference between the two associations is that California is much more diversified and progressive from what I’ve seen. You find that a lot of school districts in California celebrate diversity and perhaps I can share our experience here in a positive way for everyone. I feel that we are very much ahead of the game when it comes to equity in our classrooms, and given our funding formula [LCFF] we are seeing real improvements in student progress. NSBA is actively addressing this issue as well.

As president of the organization, I’ll be doing what all board members do with their boards — we listen carefully to other perspectives, we listen carefully to other states and their experiences, and we try to incorporate those best practices and productive ideas. We, as a national organization, provide legal resources for school districts, advocacy, and we do a lot of federal lobbying. Many states can’t really afford to adequately provide the kind of lobbying effort that NSBA can do for them. One of the amazing things about school boards is that nationally we are the largest body of elected officials in the nation. We have over 90,000 school board members which is, by any measure, an enormous population of like-minded people working for the benefit of kids.

Your community in Santa Rosa recently experienced devastating wildfires in October 2017. How is your community doing today?

Our community is struggling right now. What we’ve been through has been quite devastating. I think Santa Rosa lost over 5,000 homes. For Santa Rosa City Schools, we actually were fortunate to lose only one elementary school. We also lost the use of our farm and equipment, which included a vineyard.

I think we figured out that about 900 of our students were in the burn zone and therefore became homeless. Our enrollment thus far has dropped by about 300 full time equivalent, and so we’re seeing a migration away right now. It’s a strong financial challenge to our district, but we’re doing all we can. The fire, known as the Tubbs Fire, was one of the most destructive fires in California’s history — it was like nothing we’ve ever seen. Two of my board members lost their homes. A couple of them were evacuated out and a couple of us had our cars packed, backed up into the drive-

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- Frank Pugh

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CSBA’s Education Legal Alliance initiates and supports legal efforts in areas of statewide significance to all California schools. Working with school attorneys throughout the state, the ELA is a powerful force in the courts, and has proven highly effective in both saving and gaining schools millions of dollars and protecting the governance role of local governing boards.
way, ready to go. They closed two of our three hospitals. It was really serious.

With the help of CSBA, we are working with our state legislators and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction on recovering funds, and we hope to see some progress made in that area. The fire had a huge emotional impact on our district. We have about 12 elementary schools, five middle schools, six high schools — all of which were closed for three weeks. They all needed to be cleaned and scrubbed safe. We replaced ventilation filters and checked and rechecked the air quality in the classrooms before reopening them. And, of course, we had teachers and staff who lost their homes. A lot of our students saw and experienced terror, which unfortunately will have lasting effects, so we are continuing to provide counseling services in our schools for those who need it. Our city was turned upside down by this unimaginable event and we are slowly getting back on our feet, but we have a lot of healing yet to do.

What have you found to be the greatest challenge of your career as a school board member?

You can imagine that in my 28 years on my school board I’ve had quite a few difficult tests. But, three major challenges come to mind for me, the first being the fire.

Another one would be in 1996, concerning the filming of the movie Scream in my district. Check out the credits at the end of the movie and you’ll see, “No thanks whatsoever to the Santa Rosa City School District Governing Board.” What happened there was Miramax wanted to use one of our high schools to shoot a movie and the board being cautious and skeptical requested to see a copy of the script. While the producers described it as being a comedy spoof, the script showed it was something quite different, and so we denied them use of our facilities. That created a big controversy in Santa Rosa which went on for many weeks. Movie director Wes Craven was involved and had promised all kinds of things to entice us, but it just wasn’t a good fit for our community.

Then in 2010, during my CSBA presidency year, our state organization experienced a problem with the leadership of CSBA. We had to make a change in the executive director, but we worked through it. We came out of it a much stronger and better organization. There’s a real benefit for leadership training in successfully tackling these hard issues. There are always challenges in front of school board members, but collectively we can figure them out.

Do you have any final words of wisdom for board members going forward, especially new or aspiring board members?

For new school board members, my best advice is that they need to realize that they don’t have all the answers and they need to be comfortable in knowing that they never will. They really need to participate in the ongoing professional development that CSBA provides. In doing so, they will become a better spokesperson for their board and a better advocate for education. And, all of this benefits our kids. I hope that new board members realize that these trainings are a prerequisite to being a successful board member.

I have advice for old seasoned board members as well, and that is: Don’t give up! We need to really encourage the senior board members to continue on because we need their expertise, we need their guidance and we need their wisdom.
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