

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release: 39 Education and Community Organizations Endorse Plan for Restorative Restart of California Public Schools in Wake of COVID-19

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A wide-ranging coalition of research, education, and community organizations from across California today introduced and endorsed a new framework based on research and lived experiences in schools outlining a restorative restart for public schools in California as students return to campus in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reimagine and Rebuild: Restarting School with Equity at the Center outlines steps school districts and schools can take to rebuild and recover to meet and support the social-emotional and academic needs of students and lay the groundwork for long-term systemic transformation.

The framework development was led by [Californians for Justice](#), [The Education Trust–West](#), and [Policy Analysis for California Education](#) in collaboration with California-based family and student engagement organizations, as well as those representing educators and system leaders, research institutes, and civil rights and equity organizations. The plan is endorsed by 39 organizations including the [California Teachers Association](#), [California School Boards Association](#), [California State PTA](#), [Association of California School Administrators](#), and [California Partnership for the Future of Learning](#), along with statewide and local groups representing parents, educators, teachers, and students.

The recommendations draw from evidence collected from a variety of focus groups, polls, and surveys of educators, parents, and students; a deep review of the literature; and original research conducted on COVID-19's impact on schools and students.

"Students, parents, and educators are longing to return to school and some sense of normalcy. But the truth is, the old 'normal' was for too long underserving California's most vulnerable children and youth," said Heather Hough, executive director of Policy Analysis for California Education. "As difficult as it has been, the pandemic has opened the door to new possibilities. We are very excited to see so many education interests come together around a research-based set of ideas that we believe can help schools rebuild and recover by nurturing the well-being of students and educators to support academic progress."

Collectively, these groups are calling for a "restorative restart" when students return to schools this fall. The brief highlights a set of restorative practices ranging from centering relationships among students, families, and educators to addressing the comprehensive needs of children; strengthening staffing and partnerships; making teaching and learning rigorous and relevant; and empowering teams to reimagine and rebuild systems. The brief includes specific strategies for implementation of these practices.

“Students are the experts on what they need to feel safe and supported returning to school. This restorative restart plan was created with their help and reflects what students need and want,” said Taryn Ishida, executive director of Californians for Justice. “As we move from crisis mode to building a new normal, we need to ensure the voices of youth are heard and that young people play a central role in reimagining the future—a place with not just better classrooms but racially just and stronger communities.”

As they move forward in implementation of restorative practices, the framework strongly urges school districts to focus on equity.

“For students of color and students from lower income households, the pandemic has only deepened the impact of already devastating inequities,” said Christopher J. Nellum, interim executive director, The Education Trust—West. “Going back to school as it was before would mean resurrecting inequitable education systems. The restorative restart plan is about taking advantage of a unique opportunity to transform our schools and advance racial equity.”

“There has never been a more important time for us to focus on relationships and racial equity than in this moment,” adds Jill Baker, superintendent of Long Beach Unified School District. “Our students are depending on us to walk with them and to help them have hope for the future.”

To lay the groundwork for this restorative work, the [brief](#) outlines steps districts and schools should undertake now as they plan for the full return of students to in-person school. These include the support of district budgeting and how to take advantage of new policies designed to support districts in recovering from the pandemic. The brief also addresses recruitment and hiring of staff to provide needed services such as high-dosage tutoring and community engagement; investment in staff skills, knowledge, and capacity; and planning for the purchase of technology, supplies, and materials to support student-centered assessment, teaching, and learning. The framework also recommends creation of new partnerships with community-based service providers and behavioral health providers.

“As students return to classrooms, educators need to have time and take time for building strong relationships because it will make learning so much better in the long term. Our students are living through a pandemic and are going to need social and emotional supports,” said Shelly Gupton, a teacher in Elk Grove Unified School District and a member of the board of directors of the California Teachers Association. “If teachers are pressured to focus on standardized testing, I worry relationships and social-emotional learning will suffer. We need principals, the school board, and the state to help teachers make this a priority.”

“I want to be going back to school and feel safe and comfortable,” adds Isaiah Vega, a junior in Fresno Unified School District. “I want to see my district and other schools address mental health supports and stigmas, and encourage young people to open up about how they’re feeling and dealing with the trauma of the pandemic and their loss.”

This transformative work within schools and districts will be supported through an unprecedented state and federal investment in education. K–12 schools in California will receive roughly \$28.6 billion in federal funds between spring 2020 and spring 2021 to address pandemic response and learning loss; the state is providing \$7.1 billion in state funds to support learning recovery. While these funds don’t solve California’s long-term school funding issues, the state and federal investments are critical and offer a welcome and much needed boost.

[Reimagine and Rebuild: Restarting School with Equity at the Center](#) was researched and organized by Californians for Justice, The Education Trust—West, and Policy Analysis for California Education. The framework is endorsed by 39 total organizations. The full brief and list of supporting organizations is available online at reimaginecaschools.org.





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