

Californians for Justice



June 14, 2012

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

**The Campaign for
Quality Education**

quality-education.org

RE: Support for Weighted Pupil Formula that Protects Local Control/Parent Engagement and Provides Critical Assurances for High-Need Students

Dear Governor Brown,



As advocates on behalf of California’s low-income students and students of color, we have long called for a more equitable school finance system that would provide funding based on student need. We believe that weighted student formula has the potential to not only simplify California’s school finance system, but correct profound inequities in the way our state funds districts and schools. We have applauded your efforts to implement a weighted pupil formula (WPF) model, believing that such an approach has the chance to transform schools in our highest need communities. We call on the Legislature to pass WPF in this session given its potential benefits for the low-income students and students of color who are the vast majority of California’s student population.



However, we also believe your twin goals of increasing local school control of education funding and funding students based on need cannot be achieved without a series of changes to your proposed WPF model. These changes fall into two categories: assurances for high-need students and local control/parental engagement, and would address issues raised by critics of WPF.



PICO California

First and foremost, we believe that the state must ensure that dollars intended for high-need students are used for their benefit and not directed to other school district purposes. To this end, we were encouraged that the Administration included language within May Revise intended to provide assurances that low-income and English Learner students benefit from the additional weights funded in WPF. We were similarly encouraged by the Administration’s willingness to base the continued implementation of WPF on the development and passage of a new state accountability system.



However, your administration also diminished the strength of its model by reducing the weights for high-need students and increasing the timeline of implementation. In the current proposal, the assurances would only apply to the weighted portion of the 5% of funds allocated through WPF in the first year of implementation. In practice, this means that less than 1% of state education funds in 2012-13 would be covered by this assurance. At the same time, targeted funding for high-need students such as Economic Impact Aid (EIA) would be



The Education Trust—West

completely flexed, allowing districts to use this significant funding for any purpose. These funds would also be flexed regardless of the passage of a new accountability system.

We believe that this approach will result in school districts further shortchanging supports for high-need students. Without a broader set of assurances, disadvantaged students could lose all categorical targeting now and, absent further legislative action, could receive no new funding or accountability in return. The Administration has pressed for flexibility on the basis that school systems should be judged on student results. But in the absence of a robust state accountability system that would judge systems based on their results, the state should continue to require that funding such as EIA is spent on behalf of low-income students and English Learners. It should also require districts to account for WPF and EIA funding separately. When a new state accountability system is implemented; important financial transparency and reporting mechanisms for WPF are in place; and a greater percentage of state funds are allocated under WPF, these assurances should no longer be necessary.

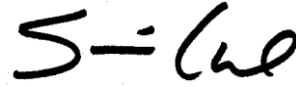
Second, we strongly believe that the state should maintain longstanding mechanisms for local, school-level parental input and oversight, including school site councils and English Learner Advisory Committees. The current proposal would eliminate categorical funding and the consolidated application that is the basis for school site councils. Given the permissiveness of federal law, this important mechanism for parent input would no longer be required and is likely to disappear in many communities. Because of the increased financial flexibility offered to districts through WPF, school site councils and parent advisory committees will be more necessary than ever. We believe that these important mechanisms for parent input should be required as a precondition for receiving the supplementary and concentration funding under a WPF model.

Once again, we applaud your leadership in proposing WPF and call on the Legislature to pass WPF reform in this session. However, the effort to pass WPF should not sacrifice longstanding civil rights protections for English learners and low-income students or existing mechanisms for parent input at the school level. As we transition to new funding and accountability structures, we ask you to ensure that all funding for high-need students is used for their benefit. We further urge you to maintain requirements for school site councils and parent committees that in many communities are the only true mechanisms for parent involvement and decision-making in their children's schools. As you engage the Legislature in an effort to press forward with WPF we hope you will incorporate these proposals. With these important issues addressed, we stand ready to register our continued support for your leadership on Weighted Pupil Formula.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Lahoud
Executive Director
Californians for Justice



Sergio Cuellar
Statewide Coordinator
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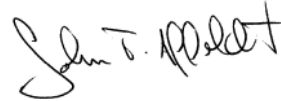
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