

# Marin County School Districts Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC) Annual Priorities 2012

## Marin County

Marin County serves over 37,000 K-14 public school students and claims the highest level of academic achievement among the seven San Francisco Bay Area counties. According to Forbes Magazine (2007), Marin County offers the best public education for the dollar, nationwide.

Marin school districts are small to mid-size, rural and suburban; they serve diverse communities with a growing English Language Learners student population.

## Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (JLAC)

JLAC is a countywide committee of elected school board members and superintendents with a seventeen-year history created to advocate on behalf of public education in Marin County. We discuss common educational challenges and review legislative activity that affects education. Annually we travel to Sacramento to engage legislators, legislative staff and relevant interest groups about JLAC's priorities and to learn what the legislative year portends for education in California.

## Our Priorities Require Legislative Support

### Increase Flexibility and Local Control

Locally elected school boards are best placed to effectively allocate scarce financial resources, paying attention to State Standards and to the needs of their communities. Oftentimes regulatory limits prevent this. These constraints on locally elected boards frequently defy reason, ignore the role and value of elected school boards, and introduce inefficiencies into the school budgeting process.

- **Return flexibility to the Districts.** Allow **full and permanent** flexibility in the use of categorical funds including local determination on textbook adoptions; the use of online texts in lieu of physical books; and the use of the Instructional Materials restricted budget to procure instructional technology items.
- **Parcel taxes are a critical local source of funding for school districts, one that increases school funding.** Reduce the 2/3 super-majority threshold for school district parcel taxes, statewide. Alternatively, enable counties or special districts to determine the threshold for parcel tax approval at the ballot box.
- **Support success where it has been demonstrated.** Reduce/Eliminate Categorical Program Monitoring (CPM) requirements for high performing schools.
- **Assure that Open Enrollment legislation does not create unintended consequences.**
- **Allow Districts to improve overall performance.** Provide a minimum three (3) year "At Will" probationary period for teachers to allow for sufficient assessment and a more efficient hiring process.

## Predictable Funding starts in Sacramento

The current erratic budget cycle, with a budget often finalized in the summer/fall, causes schools significant pain in planning and spending.

- **Give Districts more consistency in funding.** School districts must complete staff planning by March 15. Without a clear idea of future funding, a school district may give layoff notices to staff in March that are often rescinded in the fall. The chronic uncertainty is disruptive to the operations of schools and the education of our students.
- **Reap the benefits of predictability.** Without predictable funding, schools are hesitant to invest in valuable programs and student support programs like counseling services. By the time funding is assured, it is often too late to implement programs effectively. Establishing and dismantling programs is an inefficient use of the resources.

## Adequate Funding Means Better Use of What We Have

California's public schools do not have revenue to completely cover all required programs and services. The State lacks flexibility to fund specific programs given state constitutional constraints, federal mandates and court actions.

- **Find additional funding solutions for special education and mental health.** Mandated special education programs consume a larger portion of the local education pie as the size of the general fund diminishes. Mental health requirements are being added to school mandates; state funding for mental health needs to be restored so schools can be relieved of this burden.
- **Reduce redundant reporting and testing requirements.** Simplify reporting and review of programs; use existing data sources where possible. Re-purpose funds for classroom instruction.

## In Closing

The public school children of California depend on their elected leaders to provide the educational preparation that will enable them to compete in an expanding and uncertain global environment. ***They*** will become the entrepreneurs who will drive our economy, the thinkers who will rearrange our universe, and the explorers who will blaze new trails. As we address the prioritization of limited public funds, we must meet our responsibility to this and all future generations of students and make predictable, adequate educational funding, and local control and flexibility our top priorities. Thank you for your commitment to our children!

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