

## WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION TEAM

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## EXPANDING ACCESS TO LEARNING AND SUPPORT

Expanding access to education, learning and support produces extensive benefits for society and its people. Investments in education pay dividends in securing the nation's economic and social progress, including productivity and creativity. The Greater Sacramento region stands to benefit from ongoing and sustained resources that reinforce a solid foundation of high-quality education and support a globally competitive workforce. Creating inclusive career pipelines is crucial in providing every child and adult with the opportunity to achieve their full potential and make meaningful contributions to the nation's economy and community life. Because workforce development, preK-12 education, and higher education are interconnected and complementary, leaders representing each of these areas across the Sacramento region urge Members of Congress to adopt thoughtful legislation that sustains and enhances the success of every student from cradle to career, including the ongoing training for adult learners for competitiveness, with the following actions:

### Requested Actions

- Pass the JOBS Act, expand student eligibility for federal student aid, and include high-quality, short-term certificate programs
- Reauthorize Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Grant a waiver for California to adopt higher income thresholds for working families to be eligible for Head Start
- Fully fund and expand funding for Title 1 and IDEA, and reauthorize Child Nutrition (CNR)
- Provide focused funding and incentivize expanding mental and behavioral health services for all students, including reducing barriers to the integration of education and health care services

### Brief Background

Pass the JOBS Act, expand student eligibility for federal student aid, and include high-quality, short-term certificate programs.

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Passage of the JOBS Act will extend the Pell grant to high-quality, short-term workforce certificate programs moving workers more rapidly into the skilled labor force to meet the needs of industry. Additionally, these short term, quality trainings shorten the mostly unpaid upskilling journey, expanding access to quality jobs to more diverse populations. Federal student aid needs to be expanded to include DACA recipients or Dreamers. Expanding eligibility to the young individuals who call the United States home will provide an opportunity to achieve their educational and career goals and contribute to the region's economy. These ready workers will help fill the significant labor and talent gap needed to meet the demands of our vital industries. Finally, the amount of federal student aid available needs to be tied to a market index to ensure it keeps pace with educational and living costs.

## Reauthorize Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Secure bipartisan action to pass legislation that provides a path to citizenship to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) participants and other Dreamers. Among working-age Californians, foreign-born residents account for 70% of those without a high school diploma and only 32% of those with at least a bachelor's degree (1). Expanding federal aid eligibility to DACA recipients (approximately 183,000 in California) would provide benefits for the individuals, the state, and the nation. According to the Center for American Progress, California DACA recipients are parents to 73,000 American-born children. Their households pay \$2.1 billion in federal taxes and \$1 billion in state and local taxes and contribute over \$11.6 billion to the California economy each year. There are approximately 250,000 undocumented children enrolled in California public schools with approximately 40,000 currently enrolled in a California institution of higher learning. Additionally, about 10,000 teachers and other school personnel are DACA recipients. All students, regardless of citizenship status, have a constitutionally protected right to attend a public school (*Plyler vs. Doe*). These students and their parents are vital members and contributors to the fabric of our economy and community life.

## Grant a waiver to California to adopt higher income thresholds for working families to be eligible for Head Start.

California's minimum wage is \$15.50/hour as of 2023, making nearly all working families ineligible for Head Start. For example, one full-time parent making minimum wage with one child is \$17,910 over the eligibility limit for Head Start Services. One full-time parent making minimum wage and one unemployed parent with two children is \$2,250 over the income eligibility limit. By raising the Head Start income threshold by \$5,000, 15,000 additional children will qualify, and an additional 20,000 children would qualify if the income threshold was increased by \$10,000. Research has shown that Head Start has a positive and significant impact on school readiness of preschool children, particularly those at the bottom of the achievement distribution and Spanish speakers (2). In

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addition to providing gains for preschoolers, Head Start creates opportunities for low-income working families to alleviate the cost of full-time child care.

## Fully fund/expand funding for Title 1 and IDEA and reauthorize Child Nutrition (CNR).

The Title I program for disadvantaged schools has not kept pace with the needs of low-income students, dropping 8% when adjusted for inflation and student population growth. The \$20 billion increase proposed by the current administration in the coming year is critical to more adequately address the achievement gap facing low-income students, preparing them to meet the academic standards needed to thrive in an increasingly more complex world and workplace. Additionally, since the initial implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal government has not met commitments to provide 40% of the cost of special education services provided by local education agencies. In 2017/18, the federal contributions to special education covered only 8% of the total cost to serve California's special needs students, while state and local contributions covered the remaining 92%. In California, the average annual cost to educate a special education student is well over \$19,000 per pupil. This amount continues to grow as the number of students with severe cognitive and developmental disabilities rises. We also strongly urge Congress to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Program through the Department of Agriculture to reduce childhood hunger and provide critical summer meals.

## Focus funding and incentives to expand mental and behavioral health services for students.

COVID-19 exacerbated an already complex environment of change generating greater levels of stress and pressure on today's students. There is a greater burden on institutions to support students in coping with stress and encourage a state of well-being through a prevention and early intervention approach. When health and mental health services are provided on school campuses, students are much more likely to receive them.(3) Additionally, access to mental and behavioral health services, including support programs that enhance a student's ability to cope with stress and pressure in a manner that builds protective factors and skills, have a direct effect on improving school safety. One consideration is to expand or duplicate the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to address the additional needs of foster and other high-risk youth. The additional funds and stipulations of McKinney-Vento provide needed support to homeless students, including guaranteed transportation, tutors and academic support, specialized training, and professional development for teachers and school staff, and basic school supplies. In this model, schools or districts must designate a coordinator who provides navigation assistance to receive these and other supports to our highest risk students. This level of support is needed for high-risk populations including foster youth and justice involved. Further requested is to reduce barriers to the integration of education and health care services including a streamlined and more efficient School-Based Medicaid Administrative Activities (MAA) program reimbursement process to enable school districts greater access to providing these needed supports.

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1. Public Policy Institute of California
2. Head Start Programs Have Significant Benefits for Children at the Bottom of the Skill Distribution, Bitler
3. California School Based Health Alliance - <https://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/resources/student-impact/behavioral-health/>

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