

## All public school students should receive equal state funding



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**OPINION** – Prior to the pandemic there was a clearer delineation between traditional schools and more flexible “nonclassroom-based public charter schools.” The old-line educational world looked down on teaching that did not involve 100% in-person instruction. But the pandemic changed the point of view of many teachers, parents, and students and realigned the education world around recognizing the value and benefits of more innovative, flexible, and personalized learning models that have demonstrated a track record of success with diverse populations of students for decades.

[APLUS+ member schools](#) serve a diverse student population that is 45% Hispanic, 57% socio-economically disadvantaged, and 15% students with disabilities. In the 2023-24

school year, a high percentage of students who newly enrolled in APLUS+ member schools were significantly below grade level standards in their previous schools. Many of these students came to our schools for academic recovery as they experienced learning loss and mental health challenges in a traditional classroom model during and after the pandemic.

As state leaders look to close a deficit between \$40 to \$70 billion, it is essential that all public school students are funded equally. APLUS+ member schools develop a tailored and customized education plan for each student. This is the crux of flex-based education, but it is very costly regardless of whether the education is delivered online, in-person, or a combination of multiple, hybrid delivery modes.

Any proposals to create an inequitable funding formula based on how students learn will have far-reaching and harmful implications that will impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of public school students throughout the state. Funding policies that discriminate against students who learn best in nontraditional settings are fundamentally flawed and hurt students who are already disadvantaged. Instead of reducing funding for a certain subset of students, the state should enact policies that strengthen accountability.

While we strongly oppose funding mechanisms and state policies that pick winners and losers among California's public school students, there is a need to address variances in the quality of internal controls within the independent study sector at both public charter schools and traditional district independent study programs. This includes increasing charter school authorizer accountability, strengthening accountability of both teachers and schools, and improving the auditing process. Shoring up these areas will help ensure that all public schools are held to high standards rooted in prioritizing educational value for students and are operating as good stewards of public funds.

There have been a series of recommendations about the funding process for nonclassroom-based instruction outlined in a [report](#) by the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) and the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) as well as other suggestions for improving accountability in a [report](#) released by the California Charter Authorizing Professionals (CCAP). Those recommendations should be seriously considered in an open and transparent process and not buried in a budget bill or part of the sneaky gut and amend process.

We support several of the findings and recommendations in these reports that provide additional guardrails and strengthen oversight of public funds such as increasing the minimum requirements for authorizers and requiring additional review of data submitted to the California Department of Education. However, we oppose several of the recommendations that will target funding discrimination against students, harm good quality schools, or restrict district or county office authorizers with a proven track record of successful and accountable oversight.

The Legislature and Administration should provide a transparent and intentional process to pass reforms that involve thoughtful input from broad-based expertise within the charter school and traditional independent study sectors. Such transparency fosters more thorough discussions and more common-sense outcomes in a policy committee setting and avoids the political expediency of enacting one-sided and potential harmful changes to the education system through the budget process.

Policymakers must reject outright policies that establish different funding levels for students based on the type of public school they are attending. The consequences of such actions will inflict further harm against students who have already been marginalized and disadvantaged in their prior education experience and severely undermine their ability to find alternative education delivery models that will lead to their success. The public has always placed education as the highest state priority, and we must ensure that the funding and policies are fair and equitable for every public school student. The top priority is, and always should be, what is best for students.

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