



# Reimagine and Rebuild: A Vision for Racially Just Schools



PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
**FUTURE of  
LEARNING**  
CALIFORNIA

**SCHOOLS ARE IRREPLACEABLE**—not just as places of learning, but as resource hubs that provide connections and opportunities for youth and families beyond classroom instruction. When schools across California closed their doors and went online in response to the spread of COVID-19, many students and their families lost access to this critical resource.

Now, districts in California are beginning the long process of getting students and educators back to in-person school. Without careful attention to equity and a focus on relationships, mental health, wellness, and healing, the return to school risks further failing to deliver on the promise of an equal education for all, especially for students of color, English-learners, LGBTQ students, rural students, students with special needs, and students in low-income communities.

**This isn't a time to return to a pre-pandemic status quo where your zip code determines the quality of your education. It should have never been that way.**

With the record amount of state and federal funding flowing to school districts and local governments, we have a critical window of opportunity to transform our schools once and for all into nurturing communities committed to equity, diversity, and anti-racism. That begins by taking a restorative, whole-child approach that centers the leadership of students, families, and educators to reimagine California as a place where every student goes to an amazing, equitable school.



**“We can’t go back to normal. Normal wasn’t working for a lot of people, especially students of color. We must work together with decision-makers to create a school where we are comfortable and can succeed. I don’t want to go back to a classroom, I want to go back to a community.”**

**- MELISA, HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN, OAKLAND**

The California Partnership for the Future of Learning believes that investing in racially-just and relationship-centered community schools where every student, educator, and family thrives will allow everyone to heal from the pandemic and transform the future of California. **To take advantage of this generational opportunity we must:**

## 1. CENTER RELATIONSHIPS.

What our students need after this year is time to reconnect and to heal. Centering relationships among students, teachers, staff, and families creates the conditions where learning is possible.

“Relationships between students and teachers are the key to the complex solutions that we need. Building a relationship takes time and good intention. But having support and feeling heard makes me want to learn and stay engaged. California has the funds and resources to respond to the needs of students and should make the investment in what we really need—creating space for trusting relationships and being able to heal from all we’ve been through.”

- ISABEL, HIGH SCHOOL SOPHOMORE, FRESNO



## 2. ADDRESS WHOLE-CHILD NEEDS.

One size fits all approaches didn’t work for our youth before the pandemic and they won’t work now. Schools must identify and develop plans to address the unique social, emotional, mental health, language, cultural, and academic needs of every student.



“We can’t just come back to school and act as if school is the only thing in students’ lives. During distance learning, many of us have taken on new roles like being the caretakers for siblings and relatives, working, or being active in their communities. We need a restorative approach where teachers learn about different students’ experiences and adapt to our situations so that we feel seen and valued.”

- ELIANA, HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR, LONG BEACH

Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages.

### 3. STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT DIVERSE STAFFING & PARTNERSHIPS.

We've seen clearly in this crisis that schools aren't just about preparing kids for college and careers but about the health and prosperity of entire communities. We need to invest in an education workforce that reflects the racial and cultural diversity of our communities, can address the full range of needs from academics to wellness, and has the skills to create deep, authentic, culturally-responsive relationships with students and families.



"In schools, if you aren't listening to families, you aren't listening to children. We need our schools to really engage and listen to the community. That began during the pandemic, but needs to continue as we go back. We need to have talented education and enrichment professionals, and programs both during and after school that address what our kids and families need."

- MYEISHA, PARENT LEADER & ECE TEACHER, OAKLAND

### 4. MAKE TEACHING & LEARNING RELEVANT & RIGOROUS.

Schools don't work for too many of us, because our voices haven't been centered in conversations about what our schools and communities need and want to learn. Moving forward, we must support educators in designing and engaging students in lessons that center their experiences and needs and affirm their culture, race, language and other diverse identities. To meet the moment, educators also need to spark deeper learning through project-based learning, community service, internships, and mentoring programs.

"For a long time, parents have relied on the school system to support our children's learning. What would it look like for the education system to think of parents and teachers as partners in supporting our kids? And to have young people at the table—they know what they need. We need teachers who can provide culturally accessible learning so that all students feel reflected and included. It is also really important to have mental health professionals in our schools. The only way we can break cycles of trauma and poverty is by investing in our youth."

- AMY, PARENT LEADER AND KGA ORGANIZER, LONG BEACH



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## 5. EMPOWER TEAMS TO REBUILD & REIMAGINE SYSTEMS.

Though transformation doesn't happen overnight, we have an unique opportunity to build the infrastructure of districts and schools to begin to think differently. If we invest funds strategically now, we can grow the capacity of districts to co-create community schools with educators, students and families of color, and community partners.

*“As a third generation educator, I've seen the cycles of disinvestment from our schools as a student, a parent, an educator, and as a leader in the teacher's union. Our schools aren't equal. How we take care of our schools, our students, and our educators is fundamentally an issue of equality and racial justice.”*

- DAVID GOLDBERG, LAUSD TEACHER AND CTA VICE PRESIDENT



After this difficult year, educators, families and policymakers alike want to rebuild students' skills and knowledge as well as close widening achievement gaps. This will only be possible if we make an upfront investment in relationships and student, family, and educator well-being—and if we make teaching and learning relevant and engaging. To learn more about specific actions and policies schools and districts can enact in response to each of our demands, visit <https://reimaginecaschools.org/>.

# About the California Partnership for the Future of Learning

The California Partnership for the Future of Learning is a statewide alliance of community organizing and advocacy groups advancing a shared vision of a transformational, racially just education system built for us all. It is led by Advancement Project California, Californians for Justice, PICO California, and Public Advocates, with the support of Community Coalition, InnerCity Struggle, and over a dozen grassroots, research and philanthropic partners.

Learn more at <https://futureforlearning.org/california-partnership/>  
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