



EVERY SCHOOL. EVERY COMMUNITY. BEYOND COVID-19.

This crisis has made clear what many of us know to be true: **our success and prosperity — throughout California and the United States — depend on our public schools' capacity to serve as beacons of light and hope that spark opportunity.** As schools across the state closed down in response to COVID-19, students and families lost access to schools as critical hubs of connection, community resources and learning.

The California Partnership for the Future of Learning conducted a needs assessment based on feedback from more than 20 grassroots education and racial justice organizations who heard from over **600 students and families from low-income communities of color in more than 20 school districts.** The following top concerns emerged:

1

NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT, BELONGING & RELATIONSHIPS

Students and families struggling with stress, anxiety and isolation need mental health supports. Schools and districts must prioritize cultivating students' sense of belonging, relationships and connection in addition to academics. Students and parents report:

"I'm concerned about food, jobs, money, my education. Racism towards Asian Pacific Islander folks is a big concern for us too. I miss being around my friends and I'm feeling really really depressed, but I can't really tell my family."

-- Oakland Student

- Anxiety and fear for themselves, family and community because of far-reaching impact of COVID-19 on income, physical and mental health.
- Feelings of isolation, depression and disengagement as a result of quarantine.
- Stress for youth living in toxic home environments with no respite.
- Harm to Asian Pacific Islander students and families from COVID-related racism and xenophobia.
- Insufficient access to social emotional support and mental health resources for students and families under more stress during school closures and beyond.

"There are a lot of at-risk students who don't have an adult in the home who cares or is not capable of being there for their kids. For some kids, school was the safe harbor. Home is not a safe place. What is happening with those children and young people?"

-- Organizer from Del Norte County

“Students with overlapping and intersecting needs need special attention. In doing wellness checks with families, I’m discovering foster youth and English learners with IEPs haven’t heard from resource teachers yet. Many caregivers need bilingual support. A general education teacher alone won’t be able to support these distinct needs.”

-- District Staff

2 ACCESS TO EQUITABLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Students have limited and unequal access to quality home-based learning opportunities with responsive and supportive teaching that meet their educational needs:

- Broad variation in what districts, schools and staff are doing to communicate and support learning from home; differing levels of preparation and capacity for distance learning with respect to teaching, curriculum, and family partnership.
- Uneven access to technology, infrastructure, supplies or conducive space to support online and home-based learning.
- Need for specific support and capacity building for families to partner in students’ learning, including attention to language access barriers due to insufficient support in languages other than English.
- Not every student and family has received 1-to-1 check-in from the school or district to assess their well-being and readiness to learn in this changed landscape.
- Growing opportunity and achievement gaps for students with specific needs, including below grade level or credit-deficient students, students with dis/abilities and IEPs, English language learners, system-involved youth, foster youth and unhoused students.

“Because school enrollment is closed, system-involved youth exiting secure care are being funneled into court and alternative schools that do not provide the same educational opportunities.” -- Foster Youth Advocate

3 UNCERTAINTY FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS & JUNIORS

High School Seniors and Juniors are struggling with uncertainty and fears about:

- Not being able to graduate due to disrupted schooling or lack of credits.
- Impact on college applications and transition, including scholarships, FAFSA, AP and SAT exams, and grades.
- Sense of loss and anxiety as they miss important rites of passage they have worked so hard for and critical college preparation.

“We need support for seniors now. The lack of stability in the family during this time may push high school and college students to choose between school or getting a job to support their family.” -- Oakland Student

4

ENGAGING STUDENTS & FAMILIES AS PARTNERS IN KEY DECISIONS NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE

As districts determine their COVID-19 response plans and press forward with school and district plans and budgets, impacted students, families and communities must be partners in finding solutions that meet their needs. **Shared decision making around funding and education in partnership with students and families was already challenging before this crisis. But the crisis deepens the need for communication and engagement as the following problems worsen:**

“Many community based organizations have invested for decades in building trust and relationships with families and are ready to partner with schools and districts in meaningful ways to support family and student engagement.”
-- Inland Empire Organizer

- Unequal access to information, capacity, technology and infrastructure needed to engage, including translation.
- Inadequate funding despite ever growing need. Many districts were already making drastic budget cuts to programs before COVID-19 hit and it's unclear whether additional burdens on districts will be met with increased investment.
- Inequitable funding with resources reaching students and families who need them most, particularly given the lack of a statewide response to ensure that all students are receiving a quality education.
- Not enough collaboration with community organizations as trusted partners who can reach students and families.

“As a young leader, who will inherit the world post coronavirus, I want to make sure decision makers hear my voice, and know our community's collective vision for the future. A future that invests in youth, schools, and communities.” -- Long Beach Student

5

INTERSECTIONAL NEEDS OF FAMILIES & STUDENTS

Schools are more than just places of learning. With schools shut down, millions of families are cut off from their community and safety net. Families are struggling alone with:

- Housing and food insecurity.
- Unemployment and underemployment.
- Lack of access to healthcare, childcare, transportation, and other essential services.
- All families are struggling, but undocumented/mixed status households and low-income families in rural communities are experiencing unique hardships due to limitations created by their immigration status and/or geographic isolation.

“Rural communities are challenged to access technology -- both physical (computers) and connectivity (internet access). They have to figure out transportation to get services, even to access the meals that schools are providing. Community health clinics are the only option, which means sick family members might not get the care they need.” -- Central Valley Organizer

“With markets not having enough food or necessities on the shelves, and young people having limited buying power and access to these things, it puts our physical health in jeopardy. Our families not being able to pay their bills creates anxiety and fear that we young people often have to carry.” -- Long Beach Student

Where relationship centered schools, community schools, and strong cultures of family engagement are in place, we see stronger practices of communication, partnership and mutual support to meet students’ needs.

BRIGHT SPOTS

By speaking with kids and their parents, East Oakland teachers have been able to provide critical social emotional and academic support.

“My son's teacher showed her love for students and families facing the current crisis. She learned my son hurt his hand and couldn't do his homework. She reached out to ask how he was doing emotionally and so he could dictate assignments to her.”

-- Oakland Mother

“Our community is big on unity and pitching in. We are rallying together to be of help and support to each other - especially in relaying information to the community, whether it be from our local school district or from resources that are available to them.”

-- Coachella Valley Organizer



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<http://futureforlearning.org/california-partnership>

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.

This needs assessment is based on interviews and surveys of students and families of color, community organizers and allies conducted between March 16 and April 3, 2020.