



May 8, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
California Surgeon General
California Health and Human Services
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
State Board President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Darling-Hammond,

Students throughout California drafted and signed the attached letter – a powerful outcry for mental health supports. They highlight the results of our state-wide survey on the impact of the pandemic on students. The students are overwhelmed, anxious, and stressed. Students are feeling uncertainty and trauma. This reality propelled them to seek you out as the leaders to address their mental health needs now and to effectively plan out their future with their mental health in mind.

They raised several issues and priorities to ensure student success and wellbeing, including:

- Support commencement ceremonies and consider delivering a virtual commencement address to the Class of 2020 to provide encouragement and assurance.
- Invest in virtual tutors and other supports, including sufficient resources for the summer months to provide school meals and to address the significant learning loss;
- Issue a letter supporting Student Mental Health Week and acknowledge access to school-based mental health a civil rights issue;
- Host a town hall on student mental wellness, with students at the forefront.
- Issue a directive calling on districts to stop spending LCAP funds intended for high-needs students on law enforcement. The funding should go towards school-based mental health and counselors, not cops.

We urge you to hear their voices, powerfully expressed in their letter, and:

- be the strong leaders and provide the state leadership and guidance they crave;
- be a zealous advocate, fight to create the supportive and nurturing environment they request, and prioritize their mental health by providing more counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists.

We appreciate your thoughtful attention and immediate reply to their request.

Most Sincerely,

Sylvia Torres-Guillén
Director of Education Equity
ACLU of Southern California

Loretta Whitson
Executive Director
California Association of School Counselors

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Dear Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Darling-Hammond,

We applaud your leadership during COVID-19 and all that you do for us fellow Californians. We understand you are receiving these letters daily and that you too could be experiencing struggles with your mental well-being. We therefore took the liberty to include some emojis to brighten your day. 😊

We are the Youth Liberty Squad, a group of High School aged youth founded by the ACLU of Southern California. We are taking part in California's first "Student Mental Health Week" (SMHW) with thousands of students and educators. We are working with the California Association of School Counselors to make this happen. This is long overdue, yet it comes at a most critical time. In anticipation of this day, we mobilized over 640 students to complete a survey to share the impact of COVID-19 on our mental wellbeing. The survey reached students across 60 schools and 40 districts and is one of the most significant projects to check-in on how students are feeling conducted by any organization in California. We reached back out to students and have the sign-on support of our peers at over 100 schools for this letter (see attachment). We also have the support of 33 organizations. We are reaching out to you because you are the leaders who have the most influence on the educational policy impacting us six million public school students, and we hope and expect a response.

This crisis is [impacting us students](#) in unprecedented ways. Health disparities are being magnified by the crisis and our leaders must take a proactive role to support the most vulnerable youth. Students of color make up nearly 80% of California's students. The Youth Liberty Squad is made up entirely of students of color, and we also have intersectional identities that make us especially vulnerable (LGBTQ, undocumented, etc.). Mental health support was already very inadequate before the crisis. California is 48th in the nation when it comes to access to school counselors. There are nearly [400,000 California students](#) in schools that lack a counselor but have a police officer. It is shameful that our state has twice as many school police than school social workers. In addition, there are more security guards in schools than there are nurses. All of this is unacceptable for a post-crisis world. Although COVID19 symptoms are physical, Americans are actually [more worried](#) about their mental health than physical health. Polls show at least [half](#) of citizens may be suffering from mental health issues during this crisis.

- Invest the federal stimulus funding provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act are spent on more mental health resources such as school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and school social workers.
- Protect and support investments to ensure school environments are ready to support and prioritize children’s physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being.
- Send a directive to school districts to revisit the intensity of their distance learning programs and to allow for more individualized flexibility.
- Issue guidance to school districts to protect the rights of students with disabilities.
- Support holistic education and wellness by funding the arts. In our survey, students reported music, dance, and media as three of the most supportive and healing activities during the pandemic. Arts education is also a civil right and is another area where [California is significantly behind](#) the rest of the country.
- Support students and families (regardless of immigration status) experiencing issues with food security, housing, and healthcare that have long existed. Support and encourage districts to do the same.
- Support emergency funding to ensure that school environments are trauma-informed and responsive to the mental health needs of students.
- Declare your support for the Schools and Communities First ballot initiative and tax reform to remove California from the lower end of per-pupil funding.
- Support the release of as many incarcerated youth as possible. We are all on lockdown. Cages do not work.
- “Funds to provide training to teachers and school staff on recognizing and responding to trauma, to implement evidence-based practices for creating trauma-informed school environments and building wellness and resilience, or to support access to mental health screenings and connections /referrals for individualized mental health services while students navigate transitions back to school.” ([NCYL](#)).
- Support prevention and early intervention in schools. Support trauma screenings and trauma-informed care.
- Additional recommendations from our survey results are attached in the responses we received from 640+ students. We have also included student essays, poetry, and art from our “School-Based Mental Health is a Civil Right” contest.

Given the many ways in which this pandemic has added stress and anxiety to our lives, students have increased mental health needs that are currently not being met. We understand that cuts are inevitable because of the economic impact but we are the economic future of the state and our wellbeing cannot be diminished if we want California to have a prosperous future. The mental health of students cannot be left out of any plan for California’s post-pandemic future. Our supplemental document also includes powerful student essays from our “School-Based Mental Health is a Civil Right” contest that further highlight our struggles. Schools are community lifelines and provide a safe environment and other supports for students. We acknowledge that despite the many limitations that these institutions currently face they have continued to provide many of these resources. For that, we would like to thank officials for allowing them to continue to serve the community and supporting them. We look forward to hearing back directly from you and wish you and your families the best.



Youth Liberty Squad of ACLU SoCal
 Undersigned Organizations, Students, and Educators

CC: First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom
 Senator Connie Leyva, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
 Assembly member Patrick O’Donnell, Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
 Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, State Board of Education

LIST OF YOUTH LIBERY SQUAD MEMBERS

STUDENT NAME	SCHOOL
• Valeria Gonzalez	Alliance Collins Family College Ready High School
• Catherine Estrada	Alliance Collins Family College Ready Highschool
• Emily Chamale	Animo Pat Brown Charter High School
• Ashley Ruano	Apex Academy
• Jessica Sumuano	ArTES Magnet CCLA
• Dulce Torres	Centennial High School
• Jackie Valdez	Cesar E. Chavez Learning Academies
• Geena Morgan Welcome	Foshay Learning Center
• Zuly Hernandez	Foshay Learning Center
• Gino Meza	Foshay Learning Center
• Zaid Diaz-Arias	Granada Hills Charter High School
• Anthony Flores-Alvarez	Manual Arts High School
• Marley Saldivar-Lozano	Reseda Charter High School
• Viviana Cervantes	San Fernando High School
• Jose Sanchez	School of Social Justice at Linda Marquez High school
• Alyssa Arellano	South Gate High School
• Grecia Lara	South Gate High School
• Jennifer Meneses	USC Hybrid High College Prep
• Nadera Powell	Venice High School
• Ryan Pongo	Culver Park High Alum

Additional student supporters listed below.

LOGOS OF SUPPORTERS



Children
Now



FRESNO BARRIOS UNIDOS
Advocacy • Education • Wellness





LIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNATORIES

- Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network
- California Association of School Counselors
- California Association of School Psychologists
- California Association of School Social Workers
- California Association of Student Councils
- California School Nurses Organization
- Center for Juvenile Law and Policy
- Children Now
- Children's Defense Fund-CA
- Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth
- Collegecash! - Comcast UN Media Subsidiary
- Community Coalition
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
- Dolores Huerta Foundation
- East Bay Community Law Center
- Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
- Fresno Barrios Unidos
- GENup
- John Burton Advocates for Youth
- Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
- Lawyers's Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area
- Legal Services for Children
- Mid-City CAN (Community Advocacy Network)
- National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
- National Center for Youth Law
- Public Advocates
- Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance
- Resilience OC
- SBX Youth and Family Services
- The Unity Council
- West Valley Resistance
- Youth Forward
- Youth Justice Education Clinic, Center for Juvenile Law and Policy, Loyola Law School

LIST OF STUDENT SIGNATORIES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL	STUDENT NAME
• ArTES Magnet	Ashley Olvera
• Bishop Montgomery High School	Diana Jimenez
• Bright Star Secondary Charter Academy	Norma A. Garcia Galvan
• Bright Star Secondary Charter Academy	Andrea Jerez
• Butterfield Charter High School	Dustin Calcotte
• Butterfield Charter High School	Krissta Kunze
• Butterfield Charter High School	Carlos Rodriguez
• California Military Institute	Stephanie Rosales Sosa
• California Military Institute	Camila Arevalo
• California Military Institute	Several Students
• Central City Value High School	Melissa Hernandez
• Central City Value High School	Chanel Williams
• Cesar E. Chavez Learning Academy	Jacqueline Valdez
• Coachella Valley High School	Several Students
• diego hill central	Israel gulle
• Downtown Magnets High School	Stephanie
• Downtown Magnets Highschool	Jennifer Rodriguez
• Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Prep	Lena Ho
• Etiwanda High School	Alana Okonkwo
• Fontana Highschool	Kevin Ayala
• Foshay Learning Center	Alysha Boone
• Foshay Learning Center	Emely Gramajo
• Gahr high school	Aimen Ahmed
• Girls Academics Leadership Academy	Kahlila Williams
• High Tech High International	Deborah Flores Drosos
• International studies learning center	Nelid Rios
• John Burroughs High School	Marilyn Leiva
• Jurupa Hills High School	Edgar Medina C.
• Liberty Middle	Elliot Wagoner
• Lincoln High School	Hana Uhler
• Linda Marquez	Valerie Valdez
• Luther Burbank High School	Several Students
• Malibu High School	Elle Baker
• Marston Middle School	Anne Flesher
• Montclair High School	Luisa Vazquez
• Montclair High School	Sam Rheuark
• Pacific Trails Middle School	Samara Doudar
• Pleasant Grove High School	Amandeep Kaur
• Polytechnic School	Elia Min
• Quarry Lane School	Kunal Khaware
• Ramon C Cortines Sch of vapa	Abraham Flores
• Rialto High School	Several Students
• Rio Americano High School	Beth Solomon Kalab
• Riverside Polytechnic High School	Erin Ortega
• San Gabriel High School	Ivy Ho
• San Lorenzo High School	Gracy Mora
• San Luis Obispo High School	Kai Matson
• San Luis Obispo High school	Isabella

• Sierra Canyon School	Several Students
• Sierra Pacific High School	Several Students
• Sierra Pacific High School	Subreen K. Nahal
• Sierra Pacific High School	yolanda purser
• Sierra Pacific High School	Rylee Ochoa
• SLOHS	Several Students
• South East High School	Penelope Carrillo
• South Pasadena HS	Nikita Mankad
• University High, San Francisco	Several Students
• University of California Los Angeles	Iris Hinh
• Warren High	Citlaly Corrales
• Youth Advocacy Institute	Marisela

LIST OF EDUCATOR SIGNATORIES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL	EDUCATOR/PPS STAFF
• ABLE Charter Schools	Crystal Beltran
• Bellarmine College Preparatory	Rick Ruddell
• CSU Long Beach	Joe Nino
• Canyon Crest Academy	Sarah Aguilar
• Chaffey High School	Christine D. Jeffrey
• Coachella Valley High School	Perla Penalber
• College of the Redwoods Del Norte	Manuel Saavedra
• Culver City Middle School	Dee Montealvo
• Easterbrook Discovery School	Melissa Mabe
• Fremont Unified School District	Fabiola
• Fullerton School District	Elizabeth Diaz
• Hanford West High School	Kirsten Barnes
• Henry J. Kaiser High School	Jane Goetting
• Highland Elementary School	Shannon Airhart
• Hoover High School	Tawnya W. Pringle
• Konocti Unified school district	Michelle Young
• LACOE	Marina Scates
• MacArthur Fundamental	Laurie Tristan
• Miller Elementary School	Monica Rodela
• Mira Costa High School	Sina Evans
• MOORPARK Unified	Homero M. Magaña
• Natomas Teachers Association	Brenda Borge
• Rialto High School	Gia Darby
• Rio Hondo Community College	Julius B Thomas
• Riverview Middle School	Lesley Amor Harris
• Roosevelt Elem.	Jeff Barrios
• San Dimas High	Marianne Brennecke
• San Jacinto Unified	Deannr M. Dean, LPCC, PPS
• Sequoia Middle School	Jessica Gonzales
• South Tahoe Unified School District	Fred Buttrick
• SVUSD	Dr. Loren Dittmar
• Thompson Junior High	Jennifer Neil
• Vista Unified - Monte Vista Elem.	Heidi Saupe
• Washington Middle School	Ruby Gonzalez
• Woodland Park Middle School	Lezya Weglarz