April 2020

Mr. Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Honorable Superintendent Thurmond,

We hope this letter finds you and your family healthy and safe in these uncertain times.

We felt it important to take a moment, on behalf of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the 80 school districts we represent and the two million students we serve, to express our deepest gratitude for your advocacy, guidance, trust and leadership in light of the numerous challenges that have been thrust upon our educational system.

As district superintendents in the nation’s largest and most diverse county, we understand the daily challenges and pressure to make decisions that help ensure the safety and growth of every student entrusted to us, while providing our staff and communities with the necessary tools to support student learning. We recognize the magnitude of the challenges you must manage at the state level.

We communicate among our districts in Los Angeles County on a daily basis. All of us appreciate your work to help secure corporate partnerships that will support distance learning. Your ability to help facilitate waivers regarding federal meal distribution has helped ensure that our most vulnerable students, some of whom are unable to leave their homes, continue to be fed. In addition, your collaboration with Institutes of Higher Education and the flexibility in grading have been crucial in quelling the anxiety of our seniors who never imagined their hard work would culminate this way.

We know you and your team continue to advocate on our behalf. We want you to know we are here to support your efforts. As we continue to push forward, your guidance and leadership in the following areas would be greatly appreciated:

- Suspension of LCAP requirements due to the inability to properly engage stakeholders and meet budgetary timelines; flexibility with regard to resources for
distance learning while allowing districts to use current-year goals, actions and services for the 2020-21 school year; postponement of the reporting requirement for current-year actions and expenditures to January 2021.

- Future budgetary concerns have many of our districts worried that a zero or negative COLA could force them into qualified or negative budgets in the out years. We urge that the Prop. 98 minimum funding guarantee not be the only measure through which public education is funded, and that it be treated as a floor rather than a ceiling.

- Provide districts with the necessary resources to make online learning a viable option for students, not only in preparation for future states of emergency, but also as an opportunity to provide an alternative means of education relative to student and family needs.

- E-Rate flexibility to include devices and wifi connectivity as a Priority 1 covered item so that these devices would receive the same discount rate as the district’s discount rate.

- Suspend the incremental increases to the employer’s contribution for both CalSTRS and CalPERS for the next two years.

Given the diverse needs of our 80 districts, it is rare when we speak to you with one voice. Together, with our collective resolve and persistence to do what is right for our students, we will get through this crisis. With your leadership, our public education system in California and Los Angeles County will be models for others to follow.

Sincerely,

Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent