

SSDA Priority Advocacy Issues for 2027

Recommendations to the SSDA Executive Board

(DRAFT)

1. Public Records Act reform

Problem: CPRA request volume and complexity keep rising, and small districts have no dedicated records staff. Current law allows recovery of direct duplication costs only and requires a determination within 10 calendar days. This year's AB 1821 (Pacheco), if signed, would change that to business days, but more relief is clearly needed. AB 1821 also tried to add cost recovery for commercially motivated requests and a "malicious intent" standard, but those provisions were stripped in June after First Amendment Coalition opposition, and the version on the Governor's desk only converts response timelines to business days. SSDA is watching.

Recommendation: Co-sponsor legislation in 2027 with ACSA and California County Superintendents on a school-focused CPRA bill. We will need to carefully engage with journalism and civil rights advocacy organizations. We think framing it under the approach of something like "The Protect Public Records Requests Act," keeping the original intent of the law functional, while shutting or tamping down on AI driven, harassment, and financially motivated requests.

2. Extension Relief for Small Districts in the Facility Hardship Program

Problem: A district that receives a Facility Hardship Design Grant must submit an approved Full-Adjusted Grant application within 18 months. That filing requires both CDE and DSA approvals, and those timelines are outside the district's control. A small district with few fiscal and facilities staff can lose the design grant and restart the process despite continuous progress. In August, the State Allocation Board adopted regulations that provide a one-time, one-year extension for qualifying Small School District Program preliminary apportionments. Nothing equivalent exists in Facility Hardship. Mountain Empire USD is facing this currently: Large geography (660 square miles), they lost several fiscal and facilities staff, had difficulty getting inspectors and bidders in rural area on a high school replacement project with an October filing deadline, and DSA/CDE approvals not expected in time. Consideration of the district's appeal has been deferred until after its November 3 bond election. Capitol Advisors is assisting MEUSD on a one-off basis, but broader solution is needed for others.

Recommendation: Ask the SAB to direct OPSC to draft a parallel amendment to state regulations creating a one-time, one-year extension for qualifying small districts that demonstrate meaningful project progress, modeled on the new regulation for small districts. This is a regulatory fix first, not a bill. We run legislation only if the SAB declines.

3. Funding and Priority for Schools Without Safe Drinking Water

Problem: Many small rural districts operate their own wells and are effectively the water utility for their community. Last year, SSDA's working group on this issue identified many member districts with failed well casings after flooding, nitrate contamination requiring weekly testing, undersized tanks after wildfire, repeated State Water Board funding denials and removal from the Board's funding list, FEMA paperwork small districts cannot staff, and replacement wells costing over \$1 million from the general fund. Some districts have relied on bottled water for years. Mariposa's \$1.9 million well took 13 years to fund and could have been drilled for about \$150,000 years earlier. Districts keep paying for monthly testing on systems they cannot use. Permitting for these projects runs through several agencies with no single point of contact. Total bureaucracy cluster.

Recommendation: Working from SSDA's position that every school in California must have access to clean drinking water, seek help from next Governor's Administration on short-term and long-term solutions that include:

- 1) a dedicated state funding stream for emergency repair, replacement and compliance upgrades to school water systems, with priority for schools currently without drinkable water
- 2) an ongoing apportionment for operations and maintenance of district-owned systems

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- 3) a coordinated state framework and single point of contact across the State Water Board, CDPH and CDE

4. Fix paid Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL) Funding

Problem: California requires districts, COEs, charters and JPAs to provide up to 14 weeks of paid pregnancy disability leave to certificated and classified employees starting January 1, 2027. The state funded it with a 1.44% LCFF augmentation (about \$906 million) on top of the 2.87% statutory COLA, and statute directs LEAs incurring PDL costs to use those funds to reimburse those costs. For small districts the structure fails because funding bears no relationship to actual cost (one or two leaves in a 200-ADA district can exceed the district's entire share of the augmentation), the 4.31% combined figure is being treated at the bargaining table as available for salary, and basic aid districts and Necessary Small School sites get the mandate with no new money.

Recommendation: See state budget fix to convert PDL funding to an actual-cost reimbursement program within Prop 98, separate from LCFF, while keeping the 1.44% augmentation in the LCFF base. Reimbursement covers documented salary and benefit costs for substitutes of leave actually taken that is tied to the PDL, and all LEA types.

5. Shorten the LCAP and Eliminate Duplicative Reporting

Problem: Building on what SSDA members already know, WestEd's forthcoming report finds that over ten years the LCAP instructions and template grew 463%, major requirements rose from 11 to 48, resource codes in the accounting manual went from 62 to 116 (the manual is now 630 pages), non-LCFF programs grew from 13 to 43, and 900 surveyed LEA administrators strongly agreed the LCAP has become unmanageably big while slightly disagreeing that it influences student outcomes. SSDA's 2026 sponsored bill with ACSA, CSBA and CASBO was AB 2008 (Patel), which introduced a four-year auto-repeal of new reporting requirements and requires a CDE grant-reporting template. This would build upon those efforts to right-size effective accountability.

Recommendation: Use the WestEd data to work with the next Governor's administration and State Board of Education and/or sponsor 2027 legislation that:

- 1) Restructures the LCAP and the template toward the short, resource-focused document – potentially including one for smalls
- 2) Repeals the SARC in favor of the Dashboard once CDE's duplication report is complete

We also think there will be an opportunity to tie the effort to the Education Commissioner's governance consolidation review (interim report June 30, 2027, final October 1, 2027).

6. Funding for AI and Digital leadership in Schools

Problem: California's 2026-27 budget reached a record, driven largely by tax revenue from the AI stock boom, but school districts received nothing dedicated to building their own capacity to integrate and lead on AI and digital tools. The state's response so far has been guidance: working group issued CDE and a model policy. Small school districts have no instructional technology leader, often no IT director. Teachers and students are already using AI, districts are being asked to adopt policies, vet vendors, protect student data and train staff with no resources or expertise. The digital infrastructure is also at risk with the FCC's 2026 rulemaking on federal E-Rate.

Recommendation: Seek a dedicated state investment in AI and digital leadership built for all LEAs, but with special attention to small districts. We could explore co-sponsorships in this work for 2027.

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