

Legislative Interview Kit 2022-2023

****Legislative Interview Reports Due February 27, 2023****



Introduction

Every year, the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) encourages local League members to interview their state legislators or staff. Legislative interviews are a powerful tool - increasing League visibility, gathering information, and raising awareness among California's state representatives about our interest in policies they are considering. This year they are even more important because there are so many [new legislators](#) joining the ranks.

Legislative interviews are an opportunity for legislators to share their priorities with local Leagues and develop an understanding of League positions and priorities. Local Leagues discover plans for state legislation that may impact their communities. Furthermore, the state League learns more about legislators and the interests of local Leagues, gaining information useful in planning statewide advocacy and education.

Use interviews to become better acquainted with your legislators and their staff. It's a chance to emphasize that while the League never supports or opposes candidates or

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parties, we are a political organization, and after thorough study and consensus we take positions on issues.

While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, many will opt for online meetings. Although this isn't the same as face-to-face interviews, our hope is that using an online platform will give you more flexibility and make the process easier for all involved, including by simplifying scheduling, note taking, and sharing of resources.

Making Democracy Work: An Equity Lens

The League of Women Voters of California applies an “equity lens” by analyzing what we do from the perspective of how it impacts underrepresented individuals and communities. Legislative interviews offer an excellent opportunity to develop representative League leadership and add rich, diverse perspectives to your work.

In that spirit, we encourage you to front end diversity, equity and inclusion in legislative interviews by proactively reaching out and including League members and and potential members who are young, Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, have disabilities, are in the LGBTQI+ community, or otherwise underrepresented.

Legislative Interview Questions (short versions)

The following are short versions of the questions to be posed to your legislator. The full versions of the questions and background information for Questions 1 through 3 may be found starting on [page 9](#).

Question 1: Shrinking California's Voter Participation Gap

California has a problem. Despite the fact that we are a state where underrepresented groups are a majority of the population, and that we have recently passed laws designed to remove impediments and promote access to voting, there are significant disparities in participation among youth and voters of color compared to our older, non-Hispanic white population. This means that decisions about critical issues of local and statewide importance are being made by a predominantly older, white, and profoundly unrepresentative electorate.

There is also [evidence](#) that public awareness of new opportunities to participate in democracy is lacking and that many do not know how to access basic information like where to vote in-person. In addition, a reduction of in-person voting locations (a feature of Voter's Choice Act counties) has [discouraged turnout of Black and Latino Californians](#).

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- Do you believe that targeted voter outreach and education would help to shrink California's participation gap?
- Would you support funding to the Secretary of State, county elections offices, and/or community-based organizations to address the problem?

Question 2: Equitable Funding for California's School Facilities Program

Construction or modernization of school facilities is normally financed by issuing general obligation bonds at the state and local levels. Repayment of state bonds issued is financed from General Fund revenue. Local bond measures are financed by property tax increases during the lifetime of the bonds issued. California's School Facility Program provides grants to local school districts to help fund new construction and modernization.

Dependence on property taxes means that to fund school construction/modernization, taxpayers in districts with low property value per student must pay a far higher property tax rate than those in wealthier districts to raise the same amount of money per student. Would you advocate for changes to the School Facilities Program to reduce this inequity? One way to do this would be to have the School Facilities Program structured so that the required match percentage from a school district is reduced for low-wealth districts.

Question 3: Sustainable and Equitable Water Resource Management

Climate unpredictability and drought are making it clear that the ways we are accustomed to managing water in California—for cities, for agriculture, and for the environment—are neither sustainable nor equitable. In the case of agriculture, which is the largest user of water, increasing temperatures, uncertainties about surface water supply, groundwater overdraft, food production costs, and market fluctuations lead to cropping choices that may adversely affect food supply and food prices.

How would you propose to transform management of California's water resources in response to changing conditions to minimize impact on food production and its associated jobs without adversely affecting food security and other users and uses of water?

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator

What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2023? What are your personal priorities? Please make sure to ask this question. It provides us with very valuable insight about your legislator. Optional

Question 5: Local Issues

Local League Question(s) related to issues of particular local concern. This is entirely optional, but you are welcome to include a question related to local issues.

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The Legislative Interview Process

Advance work by League interview team members is essential to success. This is a short-term project that includes preparation, the interview, and wrap-up. It's advisable to hold a few organizing meetings for your team, especially if it includes people who are new to the process.

1. **Schedule the interview.** This can take time so start early!

- While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, it's fine to conduct these interviews through Zoom or some other online platform.
- If a legislative district encompasses **multiple League districts** please coordinate your visit among the relevant local Leagues. The [Local League Legislative Directory](#) lists all of the local Leagues in each district. ***Please note - this list reflects the uncertainty of election outcomes and will be updated soon after December 9, the deadline for counties to send official results to the Secretary of State.*** If you wish to schedule separate interviews because you have different issues to discuss with a particular legislator, feel free to do so.

It is critical that you keep all other Leagues in the district informed if you choose to schedule a separate interview.

- While it is important to try to get an appointment with the legislator, it may be difficult to schedule. Cultivating a relationship with the district director or other staff involved in the legislation (as opposed to constituent services) can also be very valuable. If a meeting with the legislator is not possible then ask to meet with staff who have a substantive role in legislation.

2. **Assemble your interview team.** Teams of three to five members are ideal.

- Coordinators should try to include at least one person with a long-term League background, someone with a history of working with the legislator, someone well versed in the relevant issues, new and young members, and people from underrepresented groups to develop representative League leadership and add diverse perspectives.
- Check [the FAQs](#) for recommended meeting roles and responsibilities.

3. **Prepare the team.** Hold advance meetings to go over interview roles and the questions and topics to be covered.

4. **Prepare materials.** There are a number of substantive materials we offer associated with each question and [general resources](#) provided for your team's use. You can also develop a set of materials to [send to the legislator's office](#) either ahead of time or afterward.

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5. **The interview.** Read over [interview etiquette tips](#) and the [FAQs](#) for detailed recommendations.
6. **Wrap-up and report back**
 - Review reports to be sent to the LWVC and presented to your membership. This should happen as soon as possible after the interview.
 - Please fill out the online [Legislative Interview Report Form by February 27, 2023](#). This makes it easier for us to compile and analyze your responses effectively. Please let us know if you need help using the online report form by emailing Julissa Rodriguez at jrodriguez@lwvc.org.

Interview Etiquette Tips

- ★ Be prepared. Study the background materials and the substance of the topics covered in the interview questions.
- ★ Follow your assigned role on the interview team and make space for underrepresented voices among your teammates.
- ★ Opinions expressed should be only those of the League, not of individuals.
- ★ Do not overstay your welcome - stick to the time allotted for the meeting.
- ★ **Secure the legislator's permission and specific conditions under which you may print any part of the interview in a VOTER or other newsletter. If you plan on recording the meeting, make sure you get the legislator's permission to do so.**

FAQs for the Legislative Interview Process

Should we send the questions we plan to ask beforehand?

Our recommendation is **not to share the actual interview questions with your legislator in advance**. We believe there's a clear benefit in legislators' unrehearsed responses. The purposes of an in-person interview are to look the representative or their staff in the eye, hear their tone of voice, and get a sense of their interest in an issue. In addition, this gives the legislator an opportunity to interact with our local League members and develop or further an ongoing relationship. A preformed statement of positions that could simply be mailed to us fails to accomplish these goals.

Please feel free to share the issue areas (the voter participation gap and underrepresentation, education, and water) with the representative in advance so that they may broadly prepare themselves for your questions. Tell them that the specific questions asked by your interview committee will come from those issue areas.

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How do we divide up roles?

Here are some ideas about roles and responsibilities derived from prior experience.

Team Leader

- **Make the appointment.** Contact the legislator's local district office. Be persistent. **Ask for an hour but accept less if necessary.** If you cannot get a meeting with the legislator, ask to meet with the district director. They are often extremely well versed about everything going on in a district and in the legislature. At the very least, make sure that your visit is scheduled with someone involved in legislation and not solely in constituent services. Your visit will still be noted and remembered.
- **Confirm.** Send the legislator and staff a message confirming the appointment, mentioning the topics you will discuss. (**Do not send a copy of the “Questions,” “Background,” or the “Legislative Interview Report Form” sections of this kit.**)
- **Set a team prep meeting.** Brief the members of the team on interview etiquette, determine the role each member will take, and discuss each participant's responsibilities as an interview team member. If your team includes members of historically underrepresented communities, please ensure that other members step back to provide an opportunity for that voice and perspective to be heard.
- **Make introductions.** Lead off the introductions at the start of the interview and invite League members to introduce themselves.
- **Watch the clock.** Pace the interview and tactfully keep everyone (including the legislator) on the subject. You will know in advance how much time the legislator has agreed to spend with you, and allot an appropriate amount of time to each question.
- **Send a thank you.** Write a follow-up thank you after the interview. A thank you note gives you an opportunity to underscore points made at the interview, answer any questions you were not sure about, or send a League publication you may have referred to during the course of the interview.

Researcher

- **Background.** Brief the other members of the interview team on the legislator's relationship with the League and his/her voting record. What are his/her committee assignments and/or leadership positions in the legislature?
- **Check legislator's League membership.** Is the legislator a member of your League or another League in the district? If they aren't a member, then the interview team should ask the legislator to join the League.
- **Check bill history.** Check the [LWVC Bill Status Reports](#) for the past few cycles for information about bill(s) your legislator authored and the League either supported or opposed. You can dig even deeper by checking the legislator's history using [California's legislative information site](#). You may want to take a moment to express the League's appreciation or disappointment about a particular bill on

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which the state League took a position, and briefly state the League's position.

- **Keep a digital research file.** The information you develop should become part of an ongoing file about each legislator.

Background Briefer

- **Team briefing.** Inform team members as to League positions and history on the interview question topics.
- **Team discussion.** Lead a discussion with team members about the background information on question topics and the substance of the interview questions.
- **Legislator briefing.** If your legislator is new or does not know the League well, plan to spend some time talking about the mission of the League and briefly explain the difference between the League's advocacy and education roles. Describe how we [take positions](#) on issues.

Recorder

- **Document.**
 - ✓ Have the interview questions in front of you.
 - ✓ Make note of bills or policy objectives mentioned by the legislator.
 - ✓ Make note of requests for information or League materials from the legislator.
 - ✓ Write up the material from your notes promptly.
- **Debrief.** Conduct a debriefing with team members shortly after the interview.
- **Report.** Complete the [online report form](#) by **February 27, 2023**. Responses received by this date will be the most useful for action on League priorities.

What materials should I provide?

Before or after your interview we recommend sending an email attaching or linking to materials.

- **Membership information** from each local League represented. Ask the legislator and staff members present to join!
- **League publications.** Send links to publications that are appropriate and relevant. You can send the League's [Action Positions and Policies](#) as a way to help elucidate the areas in which we work. And you might include publications like a local Facts for Voters and copies of local League newsletters.

Are there resources to help our team prepare?

You'll find resources related to the substance of the questions linked to throughout the "Background" sections associated with each question and sometimes a few more listed at the end. Here are some general resources.

[District maps](#) from the California Citizens Redistricting Commission

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Find your [State Legislators](#)

Local League Legislative Directory. Please let us know if you find any problems with this cross-referenced list of districts and local Leagues. Legislators' names will be updated after December 9, the deadline for counties to send certified results to the Secretary of State. Final certification will be done by December 16. Check [here](#) for unofficial election results.

League Leader Contacts. Please contact [Julissa Rodriguez <jrodriguez@lwvc.org>](mailto:jrodriguez@lwvc.org) if you need the password.

LWVC Bill Status Reports. Information about bills on which the LWVC has taken a position and recommends action.

LWVC 2022 Advocacy Wrap-Up. Highlights of our year in advocacy.

LWVC Advocacy Resource Directory. A comprehensive set of resources organized by issue area and type of organization with a short description of the nature of each resource.

LegInfo. California's comprehensive online site for legislation and law. Scroll down the homepage to click through to "other resources" for more useful information.

California Legislative Analyst's Office. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has provided fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature for 75 years. It is known for its fiscal and programmatic expertise and nonpartisan analyses of the state budget. In addition, the office estimates the fiscal effect on the state and local government of all proposed initiatives (prior to circulation) and prepares analyses of all measures that qualify for the statewide ballot.

Legislative Scorecards. While other organizations' scorecards may not align with League positions and priorities, they do offer good insight and substantive information about legislators and their voting history. Some are [collated by Ballotpedia](#). Here are links to a few we recommend checking.

- ★ [Courage Campaign](#)
- ★ [ACLU](#)
- ★ [Sierra Club California](#)
- ★ [California Chamber of Commerce](#)
- ★ [Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association](#)

Who do I contact with questions?

If you have any questions about the interviews, please contact LWVC Vice President for Advocacy and Program, Gloria Chun Hoo at ghoo@lwvc.org or LWVC Public Policy and Organizing Manager, Julissa Rodriguez at jrodriguez@lwvc.org.

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Legislative Interview Questions

Question 1: Shrinking California's Voter Participation Gap

California has a problem. Despite the fact that we are a state where underrepresented groups are a majority of the population, and that we have recently passed laws designed to remove impediments and promote access to voting, there are significant disparities in participation among youth and voters of color compared to our older, non-Hispanic white population. This means that decisions about critical issues of local and statewide importance are being made by a predominantly older, white, and profoundly unrepresentative electorate. There is also [evidence](#) that public awareness of new opportunities to participate in democracy is lacking and that many do not know how to access basic information like where to vote in-person. In addition, a reduction of in-person voting locations (a feature of Voter's Choice Act counties) has [discouraged turnout of Black and Latino Californians](#).

- Do you believe that targeted voter outreach and education would help to shrink California's participation gap?
- Would you support funding to the Secretary of State, county elections offices, and/or community-based organizations to address the problem?

Background on Question 1

Recent Legislation Removing Impediments to Voting

California has enacted many laws in recent years to expand access to voting. The following are some reforms.

- Online voter registration
- [Universal ballot mailing](#)
- [Restoration of voting rights to people on parole](#)
- [Restoration of voting rights to people in county jails under realignment](#)
- Ballot Dropboxes in every county
- [Voter's Choice Act](#) - a new model currently adopted by twenty-seven counties and designed to promote convenience, accessibility, and early voting. (See the [LWVC VCA Toolkit](#)).
- [Same-Day Voter Registration](#) expanded to every voting location.
- [Cure process](#) for missing or mismatched ballot envelope signatures.
- [Remote Accessible Vote by Mail](#) is now available to all voters and not just those with disabilities. See also this [SoS fact sheet](#).
- Improved process for obtaining and voting [Medical Emergency ballots](#).
- [Ballot tracking](#)

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California's Participation Gaps

California is a “majority-minority” state - no race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of our population: 39 percent of state residents are Latino, 35 percent are white, 15 percent are Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 5 percent are Black. Demographic groups that are underrepresented in the electorate make up a majority of California's population.

Despite a [historically high voter turnout](#) in the November 2020 election, voter registration rates of eligible Asian American, Black, and Latino Californians were between 10 to 18 percentage points lower than the comparable rate for eligible non-Hispanic white Californians. The voter turnout rates of people in these underrepresented groups were between 11 to 20 percentage points lower than the comparable rate for non-Hispanic white Californians. These trends have persisted over several presidential elections in California, and within the United States as a whole.

Disparities in turnout rates between younger and older Californians endure as well. The November 2020 turnout rate among California's eligible 18- to 24-year-olds was 20 percentage points lower than the population overall.

While the turnout gap for youth, Latino, and Asian American voters is somewhat improved in Voter's Choice Act (VCA) counties compared to non-VCA counties, VCA counties still show a large turnout gap between those demographic groups and the general voting public. In order to achieve a full and accurate understanding of voter participation, we use statistics related to the turnout of “eligible voters” - those who are registered or could register to vote, as opposed to using just the subset of people who are registered to vote. In California, 66.7 percent of eligible voters participated in the 2020 general election (67.6 percent in VCA counties and 65.8 percent in non-VCA counties). Asian American turnout in VCA counties was 47.2 percent and 45.9 percent in non-VCA counties; Latino turnout in VCA counties was 54.5 percent and 51.9 percent in non-VCA counties, and youth turnout was 51 percent in VCA counties and 45.5 percent in non-VCA counties. (See [Tables 6 and 8](#)).

Resources on California Participation Gaps

- U.S. Census Bureau (2020). [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020, Table 4b](#).
- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, [Voter's Choice Act: 2020 General Election Voter Registration and Turnout](#), May 2022.
- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, [The Experience of Black Voters In California: 2020 General Election and Beyond](#), December 2021
- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, [Voter Registration in California: 2020 General Election](#), December 2021.

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- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Price School of Public Policy, [California's Changing Electorate: A 2020 Post Election Analysis of Voting Behavior](#), August 2021.
- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, [November 2020 General Election: Latino and Asian-American Vote](#)
- Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, [California's Youth Vote: November 2020 Election](#).

Addressing the Challenges of Vote-by-Mail Expansion

California's [New Motor Voter law](#) has successfully added [millions of new registrants](#) to the rolls since its inception in 2016. The [2021 law](#) requiring that every California voter be mailed a ballot is likewise designed to expand access and make voting more convenient. While both are important pro-voter reforms, the expansion of vote-by-mail - especially to a broad universe of new voters - is not without peril. In the November 2020 election [over 80,000 \(0.5 percent\) vote-by-mail ballots were rejected](#), primarily because of a mismatched or missing signature or for being late. These numbers were higher for Latinos, young voters, first-time voters, and previous polling place voters. (See also this [three-county study](#)).

The successful implementation of new voting laws requires robust outreach targeting those who are less comfortable or familiar with vote-by-mail. Voters need to be aware of the availability of options like in-person voting, understand how to track their ballots, and know how to avoid or fix errors that could invalidate their votes.

Language Access

Voters who need language assistance will not get translated materials at home unless they have registered a language preference or proactively contact their elections official. California's [more than 2.6 million limited-English-proficient Asian and Latino eligible voters](#) need education and outreach to successfully access translated materials at home or to find in-person assistance.

Voter Preferences and Information Gaps

About a third of Californians said their [preferred way to cast their ballot in 2020 was in person](#), with greater percentages of youth, Black, and voters with a disability preferring to vote in person. Given this preference, it is troubling that over a quarter of eligible voters in the primary election of that same year stated that they do not know or are unsure about where to find information about in-person voting locations. The largest percentages who did not know or were unsure about where to find voting information were youth (45 percent), Asian American (31.4 percent), Latino (34.2 percent), and Black Californians (24 percent), compared to a much lower percentage for non-Hispanic whites (19.6 percent) (See [Figures 7 and 8](#)). Furthermore, over two-thirds of voters in counties with significant voting changes in 2020 were unaware of those changes.

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A [recent PPIC report](#) suggested that election officials should work to target underrepresented groups in primary elections, as part of implementing reforms, to avoid unintentionally expanding turnout gaps in low-turnout contests. The report also found that consolidating voting locations expanded turnout gaps for African Americans and Latinos and suggested “that election officials should make efforts to help mitigate or even counter negative effects from consolidation.”

Election Mis and Dis-Information

Election mis- and dis-information, which erodes voter trust and confidence in elections, has become widespread and is a pervasive problem in California and nationwide. It can only be countered by increasing the volume of reliable election information available to voters. Official county government election materials, and trusted community messengers, are effective sources of election information, as noted in [research](#) from the Center for Inclusive Democracy.

Other Hard-to-Reach Communities

Certain communities are especially susceptible to the fear caused by mis and dis-information related to elections and eligibility to participate. California recently restored [voting rights to people who are on parole](#), but it takes trusted, community-based messengers many cycles to re-register and encourage participation among people who were formerly incarcerated. This is especially true due to the fear engendered by incidents such as [recent arrests of formerly incarcerated people in Florida](#) who believed that a new law had given them the right to vote.

Targeted messaging is also important for immigrant communities who need in-language communications, people with disabilities, low-income people, people who are [currently in jails](#), and those who are unhoused, housing insecure, or geographically mobile.

Precedents for State Education and Outreach Funding

There are many precedents for state-funded outreach campaigns to raise public awareness among California’s hard-to-reach communities. For example, the state appropriated \$187.2 million for [Census outreach activities](#) targeting hard-to-count households, [grants are awarded](#) to Community Based Organizations for education and outreach activities to raise awareness of the Golden State Stimulus (GSS) and the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) administers [public awareness campaigns](#) on testing and vaccination, and the Department of Social Services (DSS) conducts [multilingual public outreach activities](#) to increase participation in human services programs like CalFresh.

The public dollars spent on [Census outreach](#) was a successful model, with California exceeding the highest average self-response rate for hard-to-count tracts among the ten states with the largest populations. With the state’s 2020 Census outreach focused on

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hard-to-count households, including many of the same groups as underrepresented voters, we saw over one-third of hard-to-count tracts in California meet or exceed the 2010 self-response rate. The opportunity to invest in voter education and outreach funding with a similar focus on reaching underrepresented voters, and a commitment to collaborating with trusted messengers like CBOs, could help increase voter registration and participation in California and tackle historic age and racial disparities in the voting population.

Resources for Question 1

Most resources are linked in the main body of Question 1's background. Here are a few relevant news articles.

- [Voting in California is easier, but large disparities in turnout remain](#)
- [California needs to step up funding for voter education and outreach](#)
- [Report: Reducing Voting Locations 'Discouraged Participation' for California's Black and Latino Voters in 2020](#)

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Question 2: Equitable Funding for California's School Facilities Program

Construction or modernization of school facilities is normally financed by issuing general obligation bonds at the state and local levels. Repayment of state bonds issued is financed from General Fund revenue. Local bond measures are financed by property tax increases during the lifetime of the bonds issued. California's School Facility Program provides grants to local school districts to help fund new construction and modernization.

Dependence on property taxes means that to fund school construction/modernization, taxpayers in districts with low property value per student must pay a far higher property tax rate than those in wealthier districts to raise the same amount of money per student. Would you advocate for changes to the School Facilities Program to reduce this inequity? One way to do this would be to have the School Facilities Program structured so that the required match percentage from a school district is reduced for low-wealth districts.

Background on Question 2

Current Law Summarized

Construction or modernization of school facilities is normally financed by issuing [general obligation bonds](#) at the state and local levels. Repayment of state bonds issued are financed from General Fund revenue. Local bond measures are financed by property tax increases during the lifetime of the bonds issued.

In 1998 California voters established the [School Facility Program \(SFP\)](#). Proceeds from voter-approved state bond sales help fund the construction, modernization, and seismic retrofit of public schools. Since 1998 voters have approved a total of \$43 billion in state general obligation bonds for K-12 school facilities, most recently in 2016. All funds from these bonds have been committed. Voters rejected the most recent bond measure, Proposition 13, in March 2020. However, the 2022-2023 budget includes a \$1.4 billion in direct General Fund support for the SFP to keep the program going, as well as intent language for \$2.9 billion more funding over the following two fiscal years.

Voters have also authorized more than \$100 billion in *local school bonds* since 2004. Under the SFP, school districts may apply to receive grants from the state, and the state will pay 50 or 60 percent of the cost of an approved project. The local contribution is occasionally reduced or waived due to financial hardship. In general, funds are provided on a first come/first-served basis.

Equity and Other Concerns about School Facilities Program

In presenting his FY 2017 budget, then-Governor Brown stated:

The existing school facilities program is overly complex,

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creating costs for school districts to navigate a process that can involve as many as ten different state agencies. The program creates an incentive for districts to build new schools when they already have the capacity to absorb enrollment growth, and allocates funding on a first-come, first-served basis, giving districts with dedicated facilities personnel a substantial advantage. Finally, the existing program does not give districts enough flexibility to design school facility plans to reflect local needs. The inherent problems with the current program, along with billions of dollars in long-term liabilities created by the issuance of state debt, is no longer sustainable.

Governor Brown opposed the 2016 bond measure and slowed the sale of the authorized bonds after it passed.

A major issue with the School Facility Program not articulated above is that it reinforces inequalities between property-rich and property-poor school districts. Districts receiving state bond money are required to match the state money with local money. The amount of bond revenue a district can raise with a given tax rate is directly proportional to the assessed value of property in the district. Low-wealth districts (as measured by assessed property value per student) must impose higher property tax rates than high-wealth districts in order to raise the same amount of bond money per student. Researchers have [documented](#) that as a result high-wealth districts have actually received **more** state funding per pupil for construction and modernization than lower wealth districts because they can more easily raise the required match. See [Figure A](#). This has also been confirmed in [an analysis](#) done by the office of the State Auditor.

With respect to funding school construction, California is in a similar situation to 60 years ago, when both instruction and facilities were funded almost exclusively from local property taxes. The result of that situation was that wealthy districts could provide far more instructional funding per student at a lower tax rate. This practice was ruled unconstitutional ([Serrano vs. Priest, 1971](#)) and the mechanism for funding instruction has changed in the years since. However, the funding of school facilities perpetuates the same sort of inequality that was ruled unconstitutional by the *Serrano* decision. There has been minimal effort to change this situation.

[Figure B](#), found below, illustrates the issue dramatically by comparing the funding capacities of the San Francisco and Fresno Unified School Districts.

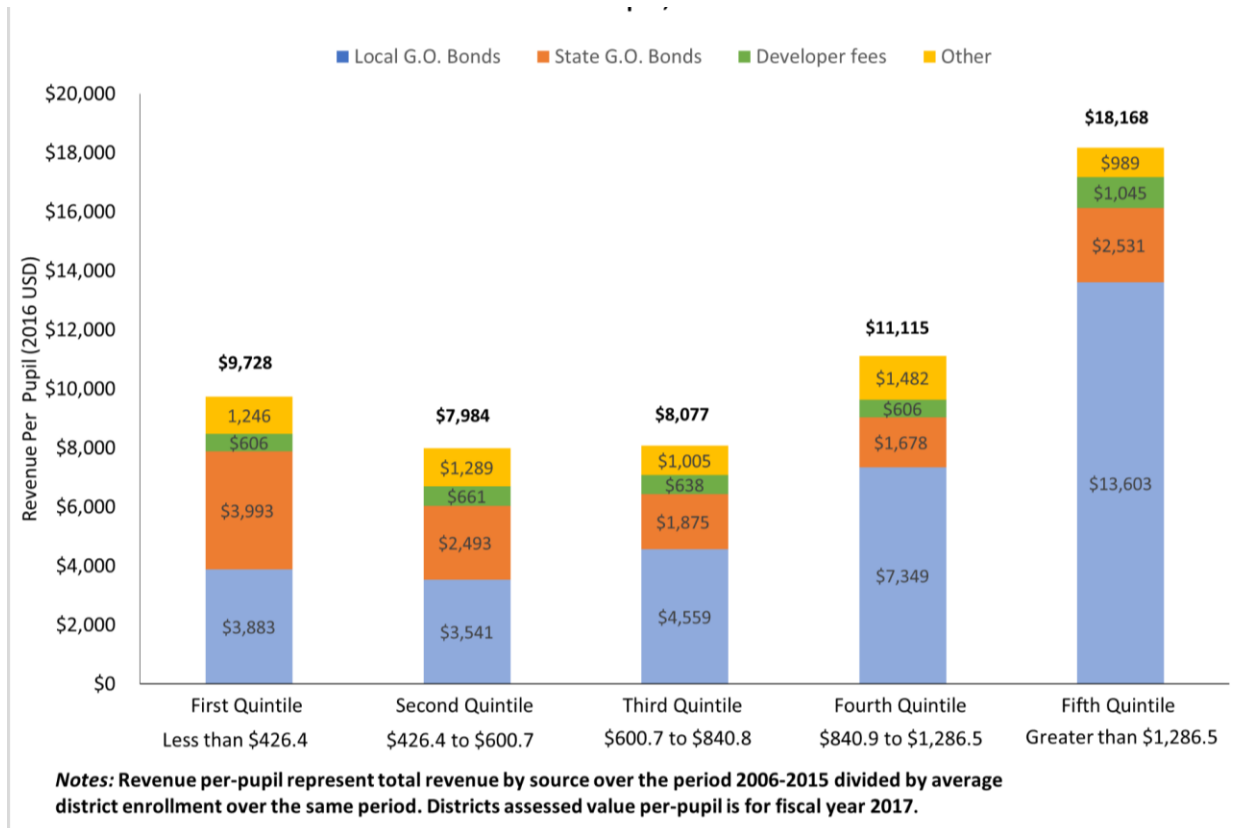
In the recent past, far more K-12 school bond funding has come from local bonds (\$110 billion between 2004 and 2018) than from state bonds (\$23.5 billion). See data for [bonds passed in 2017 and 2018](#) and for [bonds passed from 2004-2016](#). Given that most bond funding currently comes from local sources, there is a compelling argument to be made that limited state resources be used primarily to help low property-wealth districts.

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Resources for Question 2

Most resources are linked in the main body of Question 2’s background. Below are a few supplementary ones.

Figure A: Distribution of Revenue Per-Pupil by Quintiles of Assessed Value Per-Pupil, Unified School Districts



Source: Eric J. Brunner and Jeffrey Vincent, *Financing School Facilities in California: A 10-Year Perspective*, Figure 8, 2018.

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Figure B: An example

San Francisco and Fresno Unified School Districts: A comparison

Data Points	San Francisco USD	Fresno USD
Enrollment (FY 2018) San Francisco data Fresno data	60,263	73,455
Total assessed property value (FY 2019) San Francisco Assessor-Recorder Fresno County Tax Rate Book	\$250B	\$21B
Assessed Property Value/Student	\$4.1M	\$288K
Unduplicated Pupil Count (FY 2018) San Francisco data Fresno data	62%	89%
Bond measures since 2001 San Francisco data Fresno data	\$2.02B	\$704M
School District Debt Service (FY 2019) San Francisco Fresno County Tax Rate Book	0.0387%	0.1889%

SFUSD has a property tax base per student (\$4.1M) that is about 14 times higher than FUSD (\$288K). That means that in order to provide a comparable amount of funding per pupil, the tax rate for Fresno’s taxpayers would have to be more than 14 times higher than for San Francisco’s taxpayers.

The reality is that San Francisco USD has invested much more in its facilities than Fresno USD, while Fresno has had to assess its taxpayers at a higher rate. FUSD has passed three bond measures since 2001 for a total of \$704 million. During that same period, SFUSD has passed four bond measures for a total of \$2.02 billion – nearly three times more for a smaller student population. But because of the lower tax base in Fresno, the property tax rate to service its debt is almost 5 times that of San Francisco.

Note: Of 326 unified school districts for which data was collected, San Francisco USD ranks 17 and Fresno USD ranks 301 in terms of assessed valuation/student.

[Ed Source video](#) describing Fresno’s challenges.

[Equitable State Funding for School Facilities: Assessing California’s School Facility Program](#), Public Policy Institute of California, Julien Lafortune and Niu Gao, with research support from Joseph Herrera, March 2022.

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Question 3: Sustainable and Equitable Water Resource Management

Climate unpredictability and drought are making it clear that the ways we are accustomed to managing water in California—for cities, for agriculture, and for the environment—are neither sustainable nor equitable. In the case of agriculture, which is the largest user of water, increasing temperatures, uncertainties about surface water supply, groundwater overdraft, food production costs, and market fluctuations lead to cropping choices that may adversely affect food supply and food prices.

How would you propose to transform management of California’s water resources in response to changing conditions to minimize impact on food production and its associated jobs without adversely affecting food security and other users and uses of water?

Background on Question 3

California in 2022 is trying to cope with a millennium drought while honoring water rights and expectations dating back over 100 years and relying on infrastructure developed in the comparatively wet 20th century. This is true for state and federal water projects relying on northern California watersheds and also for the Colorado River, for which allocations of federal water supplies are likely to be cut in 2023, affecting California in the long run if not immediately ([Becker, 2022](#), and [Smith, 2022](#)). Decisions about how to allocate water have implications for all uses of water—urban, agricultural, and environmental.

The *Los Angeles Times* noted in October, 2022 that although the drought in California pits farmers against cities, the [biggest water victim is the environment](#). Except in the case of fisheries, the environment has no economic voice in discussions about water.

Twentieth century decisions about allocation of California’s water were based on optimistic expectations of precipitation and water availability. Historically, the breakdown on water use is that urban consumption has represented 10 percent of water use in California, agriculture has represented 40 percent, and 50 percent has gone to rivers and streams. However, water going to the environment shrinks in dry years as [cities take 20 percent and agriculture takes 80 percent](#) of most of the available water.

Reductions in environmental flows affect species like Chinook salmon, but they also affect the condition of water in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta through which water flows to much of the rest of the state, making it too salty for agricultural use in the Delta itself and creating problems with toxic HABs (harmful algal blooms) that are dangerous for people living in the Delta region. Reduced flows also adversely affect water quality and safety in the Bay-Delta Estuary, impacting Bay Area cities.

Any reduction in historic natural flows may also affect Indigenous Peoples. California’s water rights system is based on a “hybrid” of property rights and prior appropriations, so

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questions about who land belongs to are central to any discussion of allocations. [Tribal rights to water are complicated by secrecy that has surrounded treaties with California's Indians for tribal land.](#)

Efforts to cut back on urban water use have been reasonably effective, especially in Southern California. Cutbacks affecting domestic users in rural areas have, by contrast, led to serious shortages, as [Forbes reported in September, 2022](#). Those most burdened by domestic water shortages in the Central Valley are low-income communities of farmworkers, many of them immigrants or people who lack documentation of citizenship.

Agriculture, the largest user of water, accounts for about 3 percent of California's gross domestic product but contributes 13 percent of agricultural production nationwide, [more than any other state](#). It is certainly true, as signs along I-5 in the Central Valley remind us, that "food grows where water flows." But how much food is grown, and for what uses, fluctuates not just with available water but with other growing conditions and with demand. Farmers—producers of food and fiber—are operating the businesses that drive the agricultural sector of the economy, making decisions that will keep them and the jobs they support in business. Government subsidies can have an enormous impact on what farmers grow because subsidies ensure a market for their goods. Alfalfa is not subsidized, but it is grown predominantly as livestock feed for the [subsidized meat and dairy industry](#). [Alfalfa is the largest agricultural user of water in California.](#)

In recent years, growers have moved away from field crops such as wheat, cotton, and alfalfa toward fruits, vegetables, and nuts - especially almonds and pistachios, which [have been more lucrative](#). The choice to grow nuts for export has led to complaints that California water is in effect being exported outside California and overseas in almonds and pistachios. Similar complaints are also made about cotton and alfalfa which are also exported. However, the [Pacific Institute](#) reports that California is a net importer of "virtual" water in the form of food, clothing, electronics, and other products.

Meanwhile, other California growers, especially those in arid regions with unreliable water supplies, [face competition from outside the U.S.](#) Agricultural markets are global.

This October, the Western Farm Press reported that California farmers may move away from growing almonds to growing cotton and canning tomatoes in rotation. The record canning tomato price this year was not enough to cover costs. Pima [cotton may become a more reliable cash crop than almonds](#).

The consequence of high costs for growers is higher costs for consumers. Reuters reported in October from the southern Central Valley that California's drought is [pushing grocery prices higher](#) by withering summer crops such as fresh and processing tomatoes, onions, garlic, and leafy greens. This also affects pantry staples such as pasta sauce and premade dinners. Canners and processors have seen a 50 percent increase in costs from 2021 to 2023, and that increase gets passed along to consumers.

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Institutions like the state and federal water projects and the Farm Bill, the primary U.S. instrument for agricultural and food policy, have historically made incremental changes in a fixed system. For all planning that affects California water management, including management that affects agriculture, we need changes that are transformative rather than incremental. One possible transformative change involves repurposing agricultural land.

For the past century, many California growers have been relying on groundwater to supplement or replace surface water for irrigation in the years that were frequently dry. The result is drastically reduced groundwater and land subsidence. But as agricultural regions respond to the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, farmers have to reduce use of groundwater. The [Public Policy Institute of California](#) (PPIC) estimates that over 500,000 acres of farmland may need to be taken out of production over the next two decades to meet SGMA requirements. The LA Times reported this past spring that an area larger than Los Angeles, 395,000 acres of California cropland, went unplanted last year, costing close to [9,000 jobs and \\$1.2 billion in direct costs](#).

One solution to helping to cover the cost to growers of taking land out of production is repurposing of irrigated land for groundwater recharge, biodiversity conservation, wildlife and pollinator habitat, cattle grazing, recreation open space, and other beneficial and less water-intensive uses. Repurposing fallowed lands would avoid problems with invasive weeds, pests, and dust in between active farms that reduces the profitability of neighboring farms and impairs air quality.

Legislation introduced in 2021 would have provided \$500 million for land repurposing. However, the bill did not survive end-of-session negotiations. Instead, a newly created Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program received \$50 million in last year's budget. That has been supplemented by \$40 million in this year's budget. But the Environmental Defense Fund, sponsors of the original legislation, say that \$90 million is far too little to accomplish what needs to be done to repurpose irrigated land for more sustainable uses.

Another transformative change is the movement toward [climate-smart agriculture](#). Supporters of climate-smart agriculture argue that industrial agriculture, with its reliance on energy-intensive monocropping with mechanized distribution of pesticides and fertilizers, adversely affects soil health and agricultural workers. Supporters advocate for strategies that reduce the use of toxic chemicals, replenish the soil, sequester carbon, improve treatment of farm animals and the health of farm workers and consumers, and support small and mid-sized family farms.

Not yet receiving adequate widespread attention is [food waste](#), which also wastes water. Organic food waste is now being dealt with as a composting issue (under [SB 1383](#), which took effect this year to combat methane pollution from organic waste in landfills) but is not yet widely recognized as a contributor to food insecurity. The California Department of Food and Agriculture reports that U.S. food waste is estimated

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to be up to 40 percent of the food supply, and Californians throw away about 6 million tons of food waste annually, some of which could be used through “[food recovery](#)” to feed hungry people.

Not clear yet is how we will move, store, and use the vastly increased amount of composted material. Other reuse strategies will require attention, such as infrastructure for recycling water and for transporting biosolids from sewage treatment facilities.

Resources for Question 3

Resources are linked in the main body of Question 3’s background.