



IN BRIEF

SB 767 creates the *Digital Education Equity Program (DEEP)* to be planned and implemented by the California Department of Education (CDE) in concert with County Offices of Education (COE) to provide equitable educational technology support to all school districts. This bill provides funding to support the COE staff needed to administer professional development and technical assistance to school districts to effectively plan and use technology to support instruction and learning in schools and homes. The cost-benefits and impact of DEEP will be documented and used to inform future program improvements.

BACKGROUND

Educational technology and online instruction or ‘distance learning’ has been a State and Federal priority over the past 30 years as evidenced by legislation authorizing funding for programs providing: 1) internet connectivity to schools and homes; 2) professional development for teachers, school, district and county administrators and Information Technology staff; 3) development of applications to support curriculum standards; and 4) devices to help students access research, instructional programs, and homework assignments. However, in recent years, State funding for educational technology and support was eliminated when funding merged into the *Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)* resulting in a significant lack of access to needed technical support and teacher-administrator support, computing devices, and sufficient high-speed internet access at schools and homes.

In 2018, the Legislature passed ACR 268 by then Assemblymember Tony Thurmond recommending the Legislature consider education technology a priority to expand and optimize instruction and learning opportunities for all students. COVID-19 has upended the traditional learning environment for all California students, exacerbating the need to provide tangible support to close the digital and educational divides.

THE PROBLEM

COVID-19 has created an urgent need for educational technology and online instruction. The pandemic has also exacerbated inequities in school readiness to implement distance learning. While online or distance learning cannot replace classroom instruction, due to COVID-19 school closures, most districts have attempted to move to online instruction at home. However, online instruction is only effective if educators and administrators have access, and knowledge to integrate online tools into aligned curriculum and instruction.

¹ Educational Support Systems, Santa Cruz County Office of Education, California Education Technology Support Needs Assessment, May 2019

The *Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)* had eliminated programs including regional COE educational technology support services. Without regional educational support services, online instruction is not equitably supported and implemented by schools across the State. Furthermore, the effort by the State to support necessary connectivity, devices, and professional development (PD) needs to be increased—at least to the level prior to LCFF. Now is the time to take action by restoring educational technology and online learning support resources statewide. Doing so will increase *tech equity* across school districts and reduce duplicative efforts.

Teachers and administrators want access to up-to-date professional learning experiences to integrate effectively the technology and instruction. Administrators want guidance procuring effective educational technology as well as managing student information. These conclusions are strongly supported by a recent statewide survey¹ of 238 school administrators, conducted prior to COVID related school closures. Over half of the educators indicated that the COE was the major source of support for teachers and administrators to address their tech needs.

THE SOLUTION

SB 767 seeks to accomplish the following:

- Establishes the State Office of Educational Technology to support implementation of DEEP.
- Tasks and funds COEs to collaborate with CDE to develop DEEP services as defined in the provisions of this bill.
- Re-establishes centralized Statewide Educational Technology Services (SETS) to address critical technology-related needs as they emerge.
- Ensures that DEEP enables school districts to have more equitable access to information and resources necessary to supplement instruction with tech support

SUPPORT

Educational Support Systems, Inc.
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Napa County Office of Education
San Mateo County Office of Education
Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Solano County Office of Education
Computer-Using Educators (CUE)