April 4, 2024

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 8630  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel  
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 8230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Roger Niello  
Vice Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 7110  
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The Honorable Vince Fong  
Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 4630  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird  
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #3  
1021 O Street, Room 8720  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable David A. Alvarez  
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3  
1021 O Street, Room 5320  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Golden State Teacher Grant Program

Members of the Legislature:

On behalf of the universities and teacher preparation programs listed here, thank you for your ongoing service to the State of California during this challenging time. Over the next several months, we recognize that you and your colleagues will be faced with many difficult decisions—please know that we stand ready to work with you to advance key education goals in the K12 and higher education sectors.

As you well know, California continues to face an ongoing shortage of K12 classroom teachers. Years of chronic shortages in key subject areas and in high-need schools have been exacerbated in recent years by pandemic-related upheaval and the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK), which is currently siphoning multiple subject teachers as the state implements a new PK-3 credential. At the same time, the nation’s divisive politics and culture wars have begun to infiltrate schools, making it increasingly difficult to recruit young people and career-changers into the teaching profession—especially when it requires leaving a job for at least one year and paying their own way through a preparation program. **Today, the typical teacher candidate does not have the personal or family resources to pay for a graduate-level teacher credential program.** Most have low incomes and few or no assets. Many are food-insecure and lack adequate housing as well. Faced with the daunting prospect of borrowing heavily to pay for teacher preparation, many prospective candidates simply decide that the teaching profession is out of reach.
Amidst this bleak landscape, The Golden State Teacher Grant (GSTG) program is a rare example of what’s working. It is helping to address all of the problems listed above and strengthen the teacher pipeline. GSTG is making teacher preparation more accessible and affordable, which is critically important for recruiting diverse candidates from high-need communities. It is an invaluable recruitment tool because it lowers the barrier to entry and expands the pipeline to include candidates who are financially insecure. GSTG has also greatly reduced debt for new teachers who received an award, allowing them to put their full salaries toward household expenses rather than loan payments. It has also leveled the playing field so that lower-income candidates can afford to choose pre-service preparation rather than intern/emergency routes – a plus for both retention and student learning, especially in disadvantaged communities. Finally, GSTG’s service commitment sends graduates directly into the schools where they are needed most, with a powerful incentive to stay in the same school through the challenging early years of teaching.

As policymakers grapple with many challenging decisions, we hope that the Legislature will continue to invest in the Golden State Teacher Grant program to help ease the state’s teacher shortage and create opportunities for upward economic mobility. Specifically, we hope the Legislature will:

- **Invest $150 million to augment dwindling GSTG funds and keep the program viable during the state’s budget crisis.** We have heard and read conflicting information from different state agencies about how much money is remaining, but most seem to agree that GSTG funds will run out in 2024-25. A modest additional investment of this size can keep the program going through 2025-26 as the Legislature originally intended, with hopes that a longer-term source of funding can be found when the state’s budget picture improves.

- **Consider funding this investment by shifting funds from a lower-priority program such as the Learning-Aligned Employment Program (LAEP).** The LAO estimates there is roughly $485 million in unspent funds for LAEP. Although both programs are worthy causes, GSTG leads recipients directly into open teaching positions within as little as a year; LAEP is a work-study experience with far more nebulous effects for both individuals and industry.

- **If it is necessary to invest less at this time, stretch GSTG dollars by making the award available only to those candidates with demonstrated financial need and/or slightly lowering the individual award amount.** (Currently, there are no financial eligibility criteria for this award.)

- **Investigate and clarify exactly how much funding is left for GSTG and how long funds will last given current uptake rates.** Estimates from different agencies vary significantly. We ask the Legislature to direct CSAC to clarify and communicate this information – with regular updates – to all teacher preparation programs in the state (not just financial aid offices, who often don’t communicate CSAC updates to individual schools/departments).

While we recognize that the state’s ability to make new investments will be very limited this year, we hope that you will consider this highly strategic investment in the state’s teacher workforce pipeline. California’s schools are counting on it.
Sincerely,

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