

Hello GENup Community,

On March 16th, 2022, GENup hosted a policy slate unveiling where we announced the five bills that were written by us (GENup) and introduced to the legislature for this 2022-2023 cycle! We are so honored that California Secretary of State Dr. Shirley Weber, Chair of the Senate Education Committee Senator Connie Leyva, longest serving President of the California State Board of Education Dr. Mike Kirst, and over thirteen current State Assembly Members and Senators were able to speak at our event.

The K-12 issues on our policy slate this year encompass health and safety, identity equity, environmentalism, learning accessibility and resource equity, and funding stability/finance transparency. Some notable bills addressed include Senate Bill (SB) 955 (Portantino), which will allow for each student to use one school-day length excused absence to participate in a civic activity such as voting, poll working or protesting; SB 997 (Pan), which mandates that student stakeholders be involved in every school district's process of approving a Local Control and Accountability Plan; SB 1236 (Glazer), which would mandate that student board members on local school boards become full voting members of their boards; and Assembly Bill (AB) 1939 (Rivas, Calderon, and Ward), which would make climate change studies a high school graduation requirement.

The Collegiate issues covered this year include sexual violence and sexual harassment (SVSH) prevention, financial aid, mental health, and disability rights. Holding the belief that students have the right to feel safe, whether on or off-campus, we wrote and are currently sponsoring the bill AB 2683 (Gabriel), which requires and encourages each California public university system to annually train students on SVSH prevention and provide them with updated information on such topics. As students currently face escalating mental health needs and numerous barriers to accessing the care they require, we as sponsors and writers of AB 2122 (Choi) advocate for this bill to require that campus mental health hotlines be printed on either side of student identification cards as a way to bring easy localized access to support all students. We are also passionately in support of other important policies that will help promote further positive campus representation and empowerment with AB 1712 (Medina), and also advocate for solutions for affordable student housing with AB 1602 (McCarty), allowing for greater equity across college campuses in California.

Dr. Shirley Weber opened up as our first speaker with positive and encouraging words to our GENup community! "GENup is an amazing organization...working together always gave us an opportunity to do more than just hear from our peers but to hear from you, from those of you who are most affected by the policies and will have the greatest impact on its implementation."

Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell discussed two policies, AB 2034 and AB 2508. He highlighted how AB 2034 "seeks to make it easier for providers to access dollars to paper services at the school site" and covered the key parts of mental health, advocating for schools to be able to get funding in order to provide their students with mental health services.

O'Donnell also introduced the second bill, AB 2508, on vocational education so that students can obtain well paying jobs and contribute to the economy. This bill is about providing career technical education at our schools and having one budget, so that schools can get the money required from the California education budget. He mentioned that "some kids go to school because of career education... [he] see[s] it as necessary for students and for our economy."

Next, we had Assemblymember Steven Choi explain AB 2122, which is sponsored and written by GENup Collegiate, on the topic of access to mental health hotlines on UC, CSU, and community college campuses. Additionally, he mentioned AB 1736, also co-sponsored by GENup, which ensures disabled college students in California the ability to participate in student body associations. Choi thoroughly expressed his support to GENup regarding these two bills and looks forward to working with us.

The following speaker was Troy Flint, Chief Information Officer for the California School Boards Association, who stated "we are in a time of civic disillusion. The fabric of our society is frayed; focus on civic engagement is so important particularly... issues involving public education." He also expressed how he believes "in the contribution student voice can make to providing better conditions, better policies, and better resources for kids today and for kids to come," even quoting Frederick Douglass saying "power concedes nothing without a demand." Flint ended with encouraging GENup to continue making demands, because he believes we are moving in the right direction in order to create positive change.

On the topic of accessibility, Senator Anthony Portantino and GENup are proud to be partnering on SB 387 on mental health training, SB 1302 on wellness centers for high school, and SB 237 on dyslexia screening definition. Portantino raised awareness that "there's a huge social justice inequity behind learning disabilities." He explained SB 906, saying how when parents register their kids for school, they disclose whether that child has access to a gun in the house or not. Portantino said "the bill would mandate that if your school receives notice of a credible threat that you must investigate that credible threat." He also wrote about safe storage laws since he believes "schools [should] make sure to educate parents about safe storage of weapons in the household."

On the topic of civic engagement, Dr. Mike Kirst stated that "students need to be involved in the money in the budget. You can pay us bills, pay us resolutions, but if they're not funded you're not going to get anywhere... budget is policy... you can see the priorities in the budget." He encouraged us to ask our district about the funding on students as well as identifying any changes in the budget. Kirst ended by motivating us to "argue for your physical priorities" at school board meetings.

As Alvin Lee (GENup's Executive Director) introduced, GENup is closely working with Senator Richard Pan on a COVID-19 vaccine mandate, and we passed SB 742. This year, GENup and Senator Pan are working on three bills. The first bill, SB 997, works to improve student involvement in the LCAP process which could require each school county district to have at least two student members in the advisory committee. The next bill, SB 871, is about keeping schools safe by mandating that all pupils receive their COVID-19 vaccinations.

Senator Richard Pan said that “requir[ing] students to attend in person school to be vaccinated against Covid-19 [allows] all students including those with unique health concerns [to] have the right to quality, in-person education.” He also explained that SB 1479 is important “to ensure quality education to students, requires schools to work with the California department of public health to develop Covid-19 testing plans and ensure schools have resources to implement testing plans, increasing vaccination rates...”

We also had Senator Leyva discuss SB 955 which would “require all school boards in California to allow one day length excused absence per year of school for middle and high school students to participate in a civic event such as a town hall, public commenting, civic forms, or even working the polls.”

Last but not least, Assemblymember Medina greeted us through a prerecorded video. He said “education and higher education specifically is the reason why [he] decided to pursue a path in public service. For [him], equity and fairness in education has been the focus of so much of [his] work in the last legislature including removing barriers in students and their families so that they can pursue higher education...” He also discussed “fully modernising our CA Cal Grant financial aid program...student housing, addressing hate crimes, [and] creating a better pathway for teachers...” to create the best education system possible.

Thank you to our speakers who spoke at our policy slate unveiling, and thank you to our GENup community members for attending! We are proud to pursue our legislative goals by engaging with our local assemblymembers and senators to make youth voices heard. We look to the future with great excitement as we envision greater dialogue over the needs of the youth in our state and country.

In solidarity,

Asheley, Rylee, Benjamin, Michael, Ashlyn, and Ethan
GENup Communications Team