LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Office of Government Relations

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Superintendent of Schools

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August 28, 2019

Adam Day
Chairman, California State University
Board of Trustees
401 Golden Shore
Long Beach CA 90802

Peter J. Taylor
Committee on Educational Policy
CSU Board of Trustees
401 Golden Shore
Long Beach, CA 90802

Timothy P. White
Chancellor
California State University
401 Golden Shore
Long Beach, CA 90802

RE: Opposition to CSU Proposal to Require Four Years of Mathematics or Quantitative Reasoning for Incoming Students

Dear Chairman Day, Trustee Taylor and Chancellor White:

On behalf of the Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles Unified), I am writing to regretfully express our **opposition** to the proposed change to admissions to the California State University (CSU) System. Under this proposal, prospective students would be required to take a fourth year of mathematics or quantitative reasoning as part of the A-G college preparatory requirements for eligibility to a CSU campus.

As you may know, Los Angeles Unified serves over half a million students, of whom close to 85 percent are Latinx, African American, Filipino, and Native American and nearly 80 percent are identified as low-income students. We are fully committed to ensuring college access and career opportunities for our ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body by improving the percentage of graduates eligible to attend California public colleges and universities. To that end, we are proud of the tremendous work our district is undergoing, and has undergone for over a decade, to make the A-G requirements the expectation for all students.

Funding from the 2015 College Readiness Block Grant enabled Los Angeles Unified to increase fourth year mathematics course options, expanding the Transition to College Math and Statistics (TCMS) course from 7 schools in 2015 to 71 schools in 2019. This was achieved through our partnership with California State University Northridge and included extensive professional development and resources. While students can experience success in TCMS, not all students who completed the course were identified as "college ready" according to CSU metrics. Research is needed on the outcomes of these students, who are potentially in their third year of college. Much of the research on the benefits of fourth year math courses comes from studies on students who voluntarily selected advanced math courses. Recent research has inconclusive results, and in some cases negative consequences when advanced courses were mandated for all students. While a fourth year math course is recommended for students applying to STEM majors, creating a hurdle for students aspiring to enter fields outside of math or science. Currently, the UCs recommend additional years in the math, science and foreign language than the CSUs. Students have the option to pursue these courses making themselves more competitive applicants however, it is not a requirement for admissions to UCs.

While we support access to a high-quality, rigorous curriculum, it is important to acknowledge that high school graduates have been subjected to additional barriers for admissions to postsecondary institutions, including higher grade point averages and higher standardized test scores as a result of the competition over too few seats for eligible students at CSU campuses. Los Angeles Unified opposes this proposed expansion of coursework required for admissions since it would only make it more difficult for students to gain admission and would further exacerbate the existing barriers to eligibility to the CSU, thus disproportionately affecting historically underrepresented students. Existing CSU requirements already provide high school students with the option to gain eligibility by taking an additional year of a mathematics or quantitative reasoning. Changing the eligibility requirements could potentially result in three tiers of graduation requirements that could cause confusion and misalignment across our education systems: CSU, University of California, and the minimum courses required to graduate from high school.

Furthermore, we remain concerned that this proposal is lacking broad-scale consultation with school districts, ignores the real challenges of limited quantitative course offerings in high schools, and fails to recognize the chronic teacher shortage facing California schools across the state. This proposal is also moving forward in the absence of a comprehensive evaluation that clearly articulates why this change is necessary and lacks definitive evidence that four years of mathematics directly improves CSU student success while not posing a disparate impact on underrepresented students, including low-income and English learners.

In fact, CSU's own analysis acknowledges that additional data is necessary to validate the proposal's assumptions. College and universities have historically used mathematics to predict student success in college-level courses, leading to a disparate impact on African American, Filipino, Latinx, and Native American students who are, in effect, disproportionately placed in remedial courses and have less access to credit-bearing college-level coursework that will support their quest to earn a college degree. Students who take advanced mathematic courses do tend to perform well in college, but research shows this effect is tied to other factors, like race and income.

Before any additional modifications are made to the existing admissions requirements, we urge the CSU Board of Trustees and its staff to evaluate the existing infrastructure across our Pre-Kindergarten through 12 grade public education system. In order for any initiative to be successfully implemented, a broader set of stakeholders must be engaged to examine potential unintended consequences, including, but not limited to:

- Impact on the master schedule, including on elective courses to ensure a well-rounded education;
- Availability of high-quality mathematics teachers, particularly educators prepared to teach upper level courses;
- Availability of professional development and development of an implementation plan for supporting teachers;
- Funding needs for school districts to implement additional mathematics courses; and
- An assessment of any other barriers that would need to be mitigated to ensure every student has an equal opportunity to access a postsecondary education.

Much of this work will need to be consulted with the Pre-Kindergarten through 12 grade public education school community, including the California Department of Education and local educational agencies serving diverse student populations. For these reasons, Los Angeles Unified must regretfully **oppose** the passage and adoption of this proposal and urges the CSU Board of Trustees to vote against this proposal that would further exacerbate access challenges for California's students.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns when this issue is discussed by the Board of Trustees. If you have any questions regarding our position, please feel free to contact me at martha.alvarez1@lausd.net or (213) 434-6066.

Sincerely,

Martha Alvarez

Martha Alvarez
Director, Legislative Affairs and Government Relations
Los Angeles Unified School District

cc: Alison Y. Towery, Interim Chief Academic Officer, Los Angeles Unified School District
Monica Henestroza, Higher Education Advisor, Office of Speaker Anthony Rendon
Megan Baier, Higher Education Consultant, Office of Senate Pro Tempore Toni Atkins
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