

# Hundreds in Silicon Valley advocate for public education

By Amanda Quintana | Published May 18, 2022 11:04AM | Updated 12:41PM | Education | KTVU FOX 2

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**SAN JOSE, Calif.** - The 19th annual Sacramento Bus Trip for Education took off on Wednesday, when a group of nearly 250 students, teachers and public education advocates from Santa Clara County took a free trip to the state capitol.

Throughout the day, they had the chance to meet with state legislators face-to-face and ask some of the questions they have about education in California.

The buses left San Jose around 6:30 a.m.

This is an annual trip, but it hasn't been held in-person since 2019 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think COVID has really put local schools to the test," said Michael Tsai, a Milpitas school board member.

Many education issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and the advocates taking advantage of this trip want to make sure state leaders address them.

"The state has money. We just have to make sure that state money is being applied to the best and highest use at the local level. For me, I think that means high quality online education, making sure everyone is safe. I think there's work to do in upgrading our HVAC systems, making sure all the air that teachers and staff are breathing in is always going to be clean and purified, amongst other priorities," said Tsai.

Some attendees know exactly what issues they want to advocate for.

"I think one of the most prominent issues for education in California is the digital divide, which is the tech access gap between the rich and the poor. And since low income students, especially during the pandemic, didn't have access to devices, internet, broadband, etc., then they weren't able to get as high quality of an education," said Ayush Agerwal.

Agerwal, a high school junior, started the non-profit, Closing the Divide – taking old devices, getting them refurbished and donating them to low-income families.

"With the release of every new iPhone you throw your old one away, and it ends up in a landfill, pollutes the environment, does nobody good," said Agerwal.

Closing the Divide has donated more than 700 devices, but Agerwal knows more can be done. He's taking advantage of this Sacramento bus trip to advocate for more resolutions at a state level.

Other young students said they want to get a better understanding of state government.

"I see what's going on with Ukraine, Russia, and a lot of the topics that are going on at the present time and I'm just worried how does it affect us, and what can we do as young adults? Even though we're young, we're the next generation so might as well help in whatever way we can," said West Valley college student Loriann Ho.

The trip, hosted by Senator Dave Cortese, is a day full of face-to-face meetings with decision makers.

"We have about 12 speakers ranging from state assembly members to state senators from all over the Bay Area, as well as different parts of California. We have representatives from the department of finance and the governor's office, as well as the head of public education department," said Roy Tongilava, a district field representative for Senator Cortese.

The goal is to have attendees bring what they learn at the capitol back to Silicon Valley.

"I want to see how we can help people in the community much more than we have been doing," said Ravi Pathak, president of the Rotary Club of San Jose.