



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

January 19, 2022

Dear Colleague,

In what can be categorized as very unsurprising, “standardized test scores in California fell during year in distance learning.”

After [five straight years](#) of gradual improvement, [standardized test scores declined significantly](#) last year for many California students, most of whom spent 2020-21 in distance learning. Gaps in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian peers, already wide before the pandemic, expanded in math and English language arts.

State education officials, however, cautioned that the number of students who took the tests last year was much smaller than in earlier years. Before the pandemic, districts were required to administer Smarter Balanced tests each spring. The tests were suspended in the spring of 2020 and last year the tests were optional. Only 744,000 of 3.1 million students in grades three to eight and 11 took the Smarter Balanced tests last spring. While less than a quarter of the total, the scores are a strong indication of how much students have fallen behind in learning during the pandemic.

Also reversing a decade-long trend, [4-year graduation rates](#) fell by less than 1 percentage point, to 83.6%, although they fell sharply among Black students, by 4.3 percentage points, and Latino students by 1.6 percentage points, reflecting the disruption and havoc caused by Covid in communities of color. Graduation rates, however, increased among whites and Asians, rising to 94.1%.

To continue reading, go [here](#).

California schools could see more than \$20,000 per student in state spending under Gov. Gavin Newsom’s \$102 billion education budget proposal, with significant funding to help districts weather the ongoing pandemic.

The governor’s proposal acknowledges some of the strain public schools have faced during the pandemic, including a loss of enrollment and attendance, which affect how much districts and charter schools get in state funding.

“The last two years have created unprecedented challenges for schools, teachers, families and children,” according to the governor’s budget document. “The COVID-19 pandemic has stretched the capacity of public schools like never before.”

This year, the state did not withhold money for declining enrollment related to in-state migration, birth rate declines and parents opting for alternatives to their local public schools.

Many districts would face a precipitous drop in revenue if the state reverts to funding based on how many students are enrolled next fall.

The governor proposed softening that blow by funding districts based on whichever is greatest: enrollment from the current year, the prior year or the average of the three prior years. The plan would cost the state an estimated \$1.2 billion.

Newsom’s budget also focuses on the state’s youngest, with \$1.02 billion to expand transitional kindergarten to all students turning 5 between Sept. 2 and Feb. 2, and to add an additional teacher to all TK classrooms to keep class sizes at state preschool levels.

Before- and after-school programs would also get a huge infusion of cash under the proposal, with an additional \$3.4 billion on top of existing funding for these expanded learning opportunities. Many [after-school programs, including in San Francisco](#), struggled to hire this year, forcing them to take fewer students and further stressing families in need of care.

...The Legislature would still need to approve the budget by mid-June.

To learn more, go [here](#).

*“More COVID-19 School Closures Spell End of Teachers Unions Empire” reads the headline in a *Daily Signal* piece written last week.*

According to a school tracker maintained by Burbio, as of early December, just 336 schools were closed. That figure now stands at over 3,200.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found all the way back in 2020 that in-person learning was rarely a source of outbreak. More recent findings published in *Nature Medicine* on school closures in Japan found that closures did not reduce the spread of COVID-19. And a meta-analysis of 90 studies published in the *Journal of Global Health* found that children and adolescents had a lower chance of catching COVID-19 in schools than they did in the community, demonstrating once again that school closures are not an effective mitigation strategy.*

But it’s not just that these closures are counterproductive when it comes to reducing the spread of COVID-19; the damage done to children will not be easily fixed. As some have quipped, “two weeks to slow the spread” has turned into “two years to flatten a generation.”

The academic, social, and emotional costs to young children—to those whose families are beholden to a monopolistic government-run school system—will appear soon, and in shocking fashion in the data. And let's not forget the older students who have missed numerous proms, homecomings, and sporting events in recent years. Remember how much those meant to you at that age.

The only way out of this mess is to free families from the clutches of the teachers unions. Funding students directly would empower families to access educational alternatives. The good news is that the unions' political games could further the movement to fund students instead of systems, which already enjoyed significant growth in 2021.

To continue reading, go [here](#).

Also, on the school choice front, an interesting op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* posits that “Covid Should Revive School Vouchers as a Liberal Cause.”

For millions of American parents, including big-city liberals, the Covid-19 pandemic was a faith-shattering experience in public education. But there's a forgotten liberal solution: vouchers.

Our colleague Stephen Sugarman, who died Dec. 26, was a committed liberal. In a 1970 book, “Private Wealth and Public Education,” he, John Coons and William Clune introduced a vision for educational vouchers that would extend the Supreme Court's guarantee of an abstract right to attend a K-12 school of one's choosing, public or private, into the concrete capacity to do so.

The book proposed decoupling school funding from the arbitrariness of community or family wealth. For school districts, that meant the same tax rates should yield the same dollars per student independent of property values. For families it meant vouchers in proportion to the percentage of income they were willing to contribute toward tuition. As Sugarman explained in a [2016 interview](#) about the equalizing power of vouchers for families he and Mr. Coons had long advocated, “Rich or poor, make the same effort, you would get the same ability to spend.”

To read on, go [here](#).

“Restorative justice” continues to be a contentious matter in schools. An Indiana father of two has written a forceful piece about his experiences with it.

My son had been the target of three young boys for a month. The boys would regularly threaten him, call him ‘homo,’ ‘fag,’ and ‘pussy,’ steal his lunch money and chase him out of school. They ultimately beat him up.”

The idea that my son would sit in a circle with three boys who had tormented him for months made me physically sick. He would have no one there to sit beside him and support him. I had been an educator long enough to know what would happen—I may be cynical, but I'm not stupid.”

The situation didn't end well, with the three boys again attacking the initial victim, this time pantomiming the "restorative circle" during the attack. The accused went on to allegedly assault another student. One finally faced suspension, while the other two "could not be suspended due to the district policy on excessive suspensions for certain groups of students." The victim has since changed schools.

To continue reading, go [here](#).

On a similar note, the "Defund the Police" movement is not that popular with the folks who may suffer the consequences of such a radical action.

In a recent Heritage Foundation survey, only [7 percent](#) of teachers responded affirmatively to the question, "Do you think defunding school resource officers will make schools more safe?" Additionally, an [EdWeek Research Center poll](#) from 2020 found that only 20 percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders completely or partly agreed that armed police officers should be eliminated from public schools.

Parents aren't fond of the idea, either. In Los Angeles, a [district-commissioned survey](#) found that 72 percent of Asian-American and Pacific Islander parents, 67 percent of Hispanic parents, 54 percent of white parents, and [50 percent of black parents](#) agreed that a police presence makes schools safer.

To learn more, go [here](#).

In our upside-down world, many school districts deny teaching Critical Race Theory even as they proceed to teach it. Most recently, the Los Angeles Unified School District Office of Human Relations, Diversity & Equity "prepared a [presentation](#) that told students critical race theory isn't being taught in schools while the district made presentations that did precisely that. The district also mandated that teachers take an "antiracism" course taught by a known critical race theorist who told them to challenge whiteness."

One presentation told students to check their privilege and included a video called "What is Privilege." It shows people engaging in a privilege walk, an activity that [I had to do](#) six years ago as a freshman at my California high school. In it, people line up and take steps forward or backward depending on their answer to a series of questions. It is incredibly easy to manipulate the results through selective questioning in order to make people believe CRT's sweeping claims of privilege and oppression based on skin color.

The presentation claims that white people, among others, are uniquely privileged, before telling students how to become an ally of left wing social justice movements. There's also a slideshow about the Black Lives Matter movement that includes a note signed by the LAUSD Human Relations, Diversity and Equity team. The presentation mocks the phrase "all lives matter" in a comic.

To continue reading, go [here](#).

And finally, in a world awash with data, we at [CTEN](#) make every effort to keep up with the latest info. If you have any questions, or want more information about anything related to education, please let us know. Also, if you enjoy these letters and find them informative, please pass them along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

As always, thanks for your continued interest and support of [CTEN](#).

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President