



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

April 20, 2022

Dear Colleague,

California's schools are losing students at a fairly rapid clip. In fact, for the first time since the start of the century, the state has fewer than 6 million students attending public schools.

According to new data released by the California Department of Education, [enrollment in public schools continues to drop](#) more quickly than it did before the pandemic, stirring fears of more budget cuts and long-term financial instability for schools.

Among key takeaways from the newly released data:

- *Statewide enrollment has dropped by more than 110,000 students to 5,892,240 during the current school year, a 1.8% dip from last year but less steep than the 2.6% decline during the first year of the pandemic.*
- *Charter school enrollment also is down for the first time since at least 2014.*
- *Kindergarten enrollment is up, though nowhere near pre-pandemic levels.*
- *And 9,000 more students are enrolled in private schools, a 1.7% increase, but that doesn't explain much of the exodus from public schools.*

For the better part of a decade, public school enrollment was in steady decline in California mostly due to a lack of affordable housing, education officials across the state said. When the pandemic reached California, early job losses collided with that trend, making the decline worse.

On a similar note, data show that nearly half of Los Angeles Unified School District students have been chronically absent this year, meaning they have missed at least 9% of the academic year. According to data provided to the *Los Angeles Times* in March, in the three years just before the pandemic, the district's chronic absentee rate averaged about 19%. But this school year it has ballooned to about 46%.

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

Many districts are addressing the loss of students by shuttering schools with dwindling enrollment. In February, Oakland school board members voted to close seven of the city's public schools by 2024. Some L.A. Unified schools also face uncertain futures. While closing schools is a common response to under-enrollment, very little is known about the effects of the closures on

nearby neighborhoods, which according to scholars are disproportionately low-income and Black. But a [study](#), set to publish this spring, “examined every urban school closure nationwide between 2000 and 2012. It revealed that closures increased the likelihood of property values rising and more affluent households moving into Black communities, from 19 to 27%. When school closures happened in white and Latinx communities, however, researchers found no evidence of the same pattern.”

Los Angeles Times writer Laura Newberry spoke with the study’s co-authors, Francis Pearman and Danielle Marie Greene, about possible explanations for these findings.

Affluent people moving into a previously disinvested neighborhood generally consider public schools with mostly white or Latinx students an asset, Pearman told me. Yet they’re more likely to have negative associations with schools that serve large numbers of Black students. “When it comes to Black neighborhoods, affluent people do mind the neighborhood school,” Pearman said of the study findings. “If you close it, it increases the likelihood that the neighborhood will be seen as a potential destination.”

On the other hand, when Black schools in these neighborhoods stay open, they may act as a safeguard against gentrification. “This is partly due to the fact that white, affluent households are unlikely to enroll their children at majority Black schools, regardless of their quality,” Pearman said.

Oakland school board member Mike Hutchinson, whose 2020 election campaign revolved around ending school closures and financial mismanagement, had a blunt reaction to these findings. “[The researchers] might not use the words racism or white supremacy,” he said, “but what they describe is the definition of white supremacy ideology and anti-Black racism.”

Gentrification can also contribute to declining school enrollment, according to a 2019 study by Pearman. That’s because when affluent people move into gentrifying neighborhoods, they often opt to send their kids to private or charter schools. And if the local school then closes due to under-enrollment, gentrification may intensify. It’s a cyclical process, Pearman explained.

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

At the same time that students are leaving California schools, student standardized test scores are plummeting.

Math scores of California’s average eighth graders on standardized tests in 2021 were in line with the knowledge and skills of fifth graders, according to [a new analysis of the state’s Smarter Balanced tests](#).

The results raise doubts whether traditional strategies like summer school and tutoring can succeed in making up such a huge gap in learning.

The analysis, which looks at performance over time, shows that students fell behind each year incrementally even before the pandemic, starting in third grade when tests were first given.

Progress completely stalled last year, when most students were in remote learning. Eighth graders overall scored at the same level that they did when they took the sixth grade test two years earlier.

The state canceled Smarter Balanced tests in the spring of 2020 because of the Covid pandemic, so there are no results from seventh grade for these students.

Progress in math builds on knowledge accumulated in previous years. Missing instruction and skills compound (sic) the challenges that elementary and middle school math teachers face moving forward after another disruptive year dealing with Covid variants.

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

The College Fix reports that California is mulling diversity scores for community college employees.

California Community Colleges has asked for comments on a plan to require professors and other employees to exhibit aptitude in skills related to “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.”

The comment period for the proposal is open until the end of April.

The proposed regulation would require evaluations to consider an employee’s “proficiency in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA)-related competencies that enable work with diverse communities.”

It would also weigh these competencies and “anti-racist principles” when making tenure decisions.

Another section states that “[d]istrict employees must have or establish proficiency in DEIA-related performance to teach, work, or lead within California community colleges.”

Regarding the performance of professors in the classroom, the proposal states “faculty members shall employ teaching and learning practices and curriculum that reflect DEIA and anti-racist principles.”

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

“Teachers union spends more on Dem causes than its own members, analysis finds,” reports Fox News.

A new analysis of the National Education Association's spending shows that in 2020-2021 the teachers union spent a fraction of its money on representing members and more than double that amount on political activities.

According to data compiled by Americans for Fair Treatment, 17.6% of the NEA's spending went to political activities and lobbying, with just 8.6% going to representational activity. Political activities also accounted for more spending than employee benefits, which made up 15.1% of the organization's expenditures.

"The NEA spent a total of \$374 million during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. A meager 9% of the union's spending was on 'representational activities,' or money that is spent directly to support its members," AFFT CEO David Osborne said in a statement. "In contrast, 18% went to political activities, while another 32% went to 'contributions, gifts, and grants,' spending that is also largely political in nature. Those numbers show where their priorities lie."

"The National Education Association's (NEA) political and charitable spending in 2020-2021 makes the NEA look more like a political organization than a membership organization," Americans for Fair Treatment added in its report.

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

On the educational freedom front, a proposed initiative for California that would have provided about \$14,000 per student for parents and guardians to select the school of their choice fell substantially short of the signatures needed to put the measure on the ballot in November. As John Fensterwald notes in *EdSource*,

Advocates were hoping dissatisfaction with remote learning and a slow restart to schools when Covid-19 receded would fuel support. Although two previous school choice initiatives in California — to create school vouchers — failed to get more than 30% of the vote in 1994 and 2000, a [2021 poll commissioned by California Policy Center](#), a conservative think tank, found 54% of 800 voters surveyed said they'd support an education savings account initiative, 34% opposed and 12% were undecided.

"It should be an ideal year," said Lance Christensen, vice president of education policy and government affairs for the center, who helped draft the initiative. "Parents feel really handicapped and limited by their choice for kids' education and providing savings account to use for any school would have been huge blessing."

But internal fissures, a lack of money and bad timing doomed chances that a measure would make the ballot, let alone have the resources to counter a multi-million effort to defeat it by the California Teachers Association.

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

Also concerning school choice, "Biden rule could force charter schools to close, former education official warns."

A former Department of Education official said a proposed regulation restricting federal funding for public charter schools could force a number of schools to close their doors.

On March 11, the Biden administration's Department of Education announced a new regulatory proposal regarding the use of federal funds for public charter schools that places significant restrictions on the disbursement of funding to the schools while also mandating new demographic reporting requirements.

Robert Eitel, a former Department of Education official and the president and founder of the Defense of Freedom Institute, told the Washington Examiner in an interview that if the rule were adopted, then "it [would] have a chilling effect on new charter schools and make it difficult for existing ones to continue."

"There's been an ideological realignment within the Democratic Party that is reflected in this in these priorities," Eitel said. "This is confirmation that the Democratic Party has shifted hard to the left on education issues and that they're no longer supportive of the charter school."

The proposed regulations specifically target charter schools whose governing nonprofit organization contracts most day-to-day operations to a for-profit company. Such schools, while managed by for-profit education management organizations, are still considered to be nonprofit entities.

To read on, 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