



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

September 21, 2022

Dear Colleague,

EdSource reports that across California, low-income students are more likely to have unqualified teachers, but what has been a longstanding problem of inequity between rich and poor schools may be showing progress.

Among all schools statewide, the rate for unqualified teachers is lowest in the wealthiest schools and higher in the rest. There are 40% more teachers in poor schools who lack the required qualifications than in the richest schools, an EdSource analysis found.

But the analysis of newly released [state data](#) also shows there may be reason for optimism.

The state's [largest school districts](#) showed an equitable distribution of qualified teachers across low- and higher-income schools. At the five largest districts in the state, there is little to no gap in teacher qualifications between the wealthiest and poorest schools.

This analysis considers poverty and goes deeper than [EdSource's initial report](#) on the data, which showed that while 83% of K-12 classes in the 2020-21 school year were taught by teachers credentialed to teach that course, 17% were taught by teachers who were not.

While [inequalities exist](#), the disparities among schools and districts in staffing classes with fully prepared teachers don't appear as stark as 20 years ago, said John Affeldt, managing partner of Public Advocates, a public interest law firm that has tracked inequities in teacher qualifications in California for two decades.

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

Also, California does little to ensure all kids read by third grade, writes John Fensterwald.

California fourth graders [trail the nation](#) in reading, and [half of its third graders](#), including two-thirds of Black students and 61% of Latino students, do not read at grade level.

Yet, California is not among the states — including Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Connecticut, Colorado, Virginia and New York City — that have adopted comprehensive literacy plans to ensure that all children can read by third grade. And California has not set a timeline or given any indication it intends to create such a plan.

“The problem is we’re still at the first stage of acknowledging there’s a problem,” said Todd Collins, a Palo Alto school board member and an organizer of the [California Reading Coalition](#), a literacy advocacy group.

“We’re just not seeing that same level of involvement and intensity that other states have had,” said Linda Diamond, a retired executive of a California-based reading improvement firm who tracks literacy legislation and teacher preparation programs across the nation.

In 2017, California was the first state to be sued on the grounds that it had denied children’s civil right to literacy under the state constitution. After initially fighting the lawsuit, [the state settled](#) the case in February 2020. It agreed to spend \$50 million on a three-year reading improvement program for 75 of the lowest performing schools, where at some schools fewer than 10% of children were reading at grade level.

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

The rest of the country also has to deal with serious education issues. As *The Los Angeles Times* recently reported, “Worst national reading and math scores in decades show large pandemic-fueled equity gaps.”

National reading and math test scores of 9-year-olds released Thursday revealed alarming trends about the extent of the pandemic’s negative effect on learning, with scores showing the steepest declines in decades and the biggest drops among children who were already academically struggling.

The declines and wide equity gaps come as Los Angeles Unified Supt. Alberto Carvalho said he has reviewed unreleased state tests scores in the nation’s second-largest school district that “show devastating loss in terms of student achievement levels, particularly in reading and mathematics.”

Average math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests fell 7 points to 234 on a 0-500 scale. For students performing in the bottom 10%, the drop was 12 points, compared with 3 points for those in the top 10%.

Average reading scores fell 5 points to 215. Students performing in the lowest 10% lost 10 points. The top 10% of test takers lost about 2 points.

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

“Problems plague California school district data system, putting funding at risk,” reads a headline in a recent *CalMatters* post.

The data management system for California’s K-12 schools has been on the fritz for months after it was updated in April then rolled out with minimal testing, potentially jeopardizing school district funding.

The California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, or CALPADS, stores information for the state's 6 million public school students. It's how the state knows how many students have learning disabilities, are experiencing homelessness or qualify as English learners. The California Department of Education uses this demographic data to calculate how much funding will go to the state's more than 1,000 school districts. Districts with more high-needs students get more money based on that data.

While one department official said nearly all the state's schools will still get their full funding, the recent malfunctions have alarmed some district officials.

Earlier this year, the state's new software update generated reams of inaccurate data about students with disabilities, disrupting standardized testing. Leading up to the new school year, districts that usually might have a few dozen initial errors were seeing thousands when their data specialists uploaded student data into the statewide system. The errors included wrong enrollment numbers, duplicate student information and missing information about accommodations for students with disabilities. Administrators feared they would lose funding due to these inaccuracies.

To continue reading, [here](#).

In more bad news from the Golden State, teachers' retirement investments have recorded a negative return for first the time since the recession in 2008.

For the first time since the Great Recession in 2008, the California State Teachers' Retirement System had a negative return on investments for the year ending June 30.

CalSTRS, which provides retirement benefits for nearly a million current teachers and retirees, saw a minus 1.3% return on its portfolio. The year-end value of the portfolio dropped \$8.6 billion to \$301.6 billion as a result. The loss followed a record yearly investment gain in 2020-21 of 27.2%, CalSTRS reported.

In a statement, the CalSTRS attributed the decline to market volatility complicated by inflation, rising interest rates, the impact of Covid-19 and the ongoing war in Ukraine. Earlier last month, CalPERS, the nation's largest public pension fund, which funds retirement benefits of state and local workers, including public school administrators and classified workers, reported an end-of-year loss of 6.2% in value.

Investment income, replenished by contributions by teachers, the state and school districts as the employer, provides funding for retiree benefits. CalSTRS assumes an annual rate of return of 7% on investments to meet its yearly obligations.

The one-year drop in value, which also happened in 2015-16, won't affect the level of benefits for teachers; those are a state obligation, as is the level of teachers' payroll contributions, which is also locked in by law. However, a multiyear failure to meet the annual revenue target could lead to an increase in school districts' payments, which already were scheduled to rise substantially — by about \$1.3 billion statewide — in 2022-23. Together with scheduled

CalPERS' increases, districts are facing \$1.6 billion more in pension contribution costs this year.

“The amounts at stake here are enormous, and they overshadow all the other new investments the state is considering. Worse, the pension costs will hit school budgets even harder if student enrollments continue to decline,” said Chad Aldeman, policy director at the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University and the creator of TeacherPensions.org.

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

On the union front, the California Teachers Association is being accused of spying on parents. It has been revealed that the union conducted opposition research on parent groups that were fighting for schools to reopen during the height of the COVID pandemic.

The California Teachers Association (CTA) employed a researcher who emailed a parent arm of the local union in April 2021, hoping to dig up information on the motives of San Diego County parents who had successfully sued the state to reopen schools a month earlier.

According to [emails obtained](#) through a public records request, the union was seeking to uncover “some of the ideological leaning of groups that are funding the reopen lawsuits.”

The researcher, Ann Swinburn, appeared to at least speculate that the parent groups suing for California schools to reopen were funded by right-wing political groups and big money interests, according to archived tweets she shared.

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

Having passed a year ago, AB 367 is now in effect. Among other things, the bill requires that **menstrual products be available in middle school and high school boys' bathrooms.**

Existing law requires a public school maintaining any combination of classes from grade 6 to grade 12, inclusive, that meets a 40% pupil poverty threshold specified in federal law, to stock 50% of the school's restrooms with feminine hygiene products, and prohibits a public school from charging for any menstrual products provided to pupils.

This bill would enact the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021, which would require a public school, as provided, maintaining any combination of classes from grades 6 to 12, inclusive, to stock the school's restrooms with an adequate supply of free menstrual products, as defined, available and accessible, free of cost, in all women's restrooms and all-gender restrooms, and in at least one men's restroom, at all times, and to post a designated notice, on or before the start of the 2022–23 school year, as prescribed.

This bill would require the California State University and each community college district, and would encourage the Regents of the University of California and private universities, colleges, and institutions of higher learning, to stock an adequate supply of menstrual products, available

and accessible, free of cost, at no fewer than one designated and accessible central location on each campus and to post a designated notice, as provided.

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

Due to union “opt-out windows,” which are very possibly illegal, the time to quit if you are planning to do so, could be very soon. If you have any questions about the process, or have experienced any problems because of your decision to leave your union, please let us know and we will do our best to help you – possibly getting you legal assistance, if necessary. We will also be able to share your concerns with other teachers across the state.

And talking about sharing, please pass this email along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

Also, anyone wishing to donate to CTEN can do so very simply through check, money order or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of others. Thanks, as always.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President