

Assembly Education Committee and Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance

Hearing on Pandemic Response Oversight

Testimony of Linda Darling-Hammond

November 30, 2021

Good morning, Chair McCarty, Chair O'Donnell, and members of the Budget Subcommittee and Education Committee: I am Linda Darling-Hammond, president of the State Board of Education and president of the Learning Policy Institute, an organization dedicated to conducting research on behalf of education policy that supports equitable and empowering education for each and every child.

Thank you for inviting me to address this important hearing. We are clearly at an inflection point in the history of public education in this state. It is a time of enormous changes and stresses. It is also a time of great opportunity to rethink and redesign our educational system so that it truly meets the needs of all our children and of our great state.

Where are We Now?

It's important to think about the long-term trajectory for education in California with a sense of our recent history. In the 1970s, California was a leader in education in the nation and the world. The long slide that followed proposition 13, however, led one filmmaker to create a documentary about our school system called "From First to Worst." By 2010, CA was one of the worst funded and most poorly performing states in the nation. It was reliably in the bottom 5 states in spending, in the number of teachers, administrators, and counselors per pupil, and in reading and math achievement. Many districts had done away with libraries and librarians, school nurses, music and art, extracurricular activities and much more.

Over the last 10 years, the Legislature's vision and commitment, in partnership with Governor Brown and now Governor Newsom, have enabled California to overhaul an inequitable and inadequate funding system and a punitive approach to school accountability that undermined our progress. Total funding for K-12 education from all sources has increased from \$64 billion in 2011-12 to \$124 billion in 2021-22, nearly doubling in just 10 years. Of this new \$60 billion, nearly half was added over the last 3 years – much of it just this past year for the child-centered supports you enacted that will unfold over the years to come. In addition to investments in the progressive LCFF formula, these include \$1 billion for professional development aimed at learning recovery; \$3 billion for community schools; \$4 billion for mental health supports; nearly \$2 billion for afterschool and summer programs; another \$1 billion in supports for additional staffing; more than \$600 million annually for universal school meals; and billions in ongoing support for universal transitional kindergarten, among others.

We have not yet had a chance to implement these investments or to feel their effects in our schools. It will be critically important in the coming years that we focus on thoughtful implementation – that we bring these initiatives to life in ways that are supportive of children, families, educators, and schools and that we remove the many bureaucratic barriers that can stand in the way of success.

Meanwhile, we know are on a more productive path than in the recent past. Between 2013 and 2019, California's funding level rank rose from 47th in the nation to 30th and its funding

equity rank went from 21st to the 8th most progressive state in the nation.¹ These increases have been associated with significant gains in graduation rates – especially for African American and Latinx students – and with large gains in student achievement on national as well as state measures. The investments the Governor and legislature made in emergency legislation last spring to offset the effects of the pandemic allowed nearly 9 out of 10 districts to offer summer school this past summer and allowed California to become the safest state in the country as we were reopening schools this fall. We had declining case rates even as schools were opening in August and September, and on most days, we had the lowest case rates in the nation. Furthermore, although California has 12% of the nation’s school children, we have had less than 1% of the nation’s school closings.

We are indeed beginning to build back better, and it will be important to pursue a clear vision for California schools so that we can use these resources and this time to maximum advantage, even as we encounter the many challenges before us that you have heard about in this hearing: The uncertainties about enrollments, for example, are a national phenomenon associated with the pandemic. In California, they are a function of declining birth rates that were already underway in some parts of the state, mixed with out of state migration due to costs of housing as well as the pandemic, and some pandemic-related moves to private schools and virtual schools, along with growth in home schooling. In households hit with income insecurity, some young people have had to go to work or care for younger siblings.²

As we saw at the beginning of this school year, many families want to return to public schools that are safe, welcoming, and supportive. Some want to return virtually because the remote learning environment is actually working well for their children. But the numbers will depend on many variables, including the course of the pandemic and the degree to which public school options are made appealing to parents.

Finally, the increases in enrollments that will accompany the implementation of universal TK may be further spurred by the passage of the federal Build Back Better Act, recently passed by the House and soon to be considered by the Senate, which includes \$400 billion in supports to states for child care and universal preschool for 3 and 4 year-olds. Even as they are contending with uncertainty around enrollment declines and around how many students are attending in-person and virtually, school districts need to plan for major increases in enrollments of the youngest learners, who will then have an important on-ramp into public education and may swell the size of classrooms in years to come.

What Can We Do?

Districts face many dilemmas with the challenges to enrollments they are experiencing in the moment. They are asking, “Do we lay off staff (even in the midst of shortages that make qualified staff so hard to find)? “Do we close school buildings (even if that exacerbates our enrollment problems as disappointed parents leave and even as we expect preschool enrollments to climb)? Districts also face the challenges of making schools work well so that they are not only good choices for parents but also successful for children’s development and for the welfare of us all – as we depend on a well-educated citizenry to support our economy and our democracy. We need to think about this problem in terms of both the short-term issues of enrollment disruptions and the long term issues of supporting student learning recovery and developing a system that works for all of our children and families.

There are several things we can do:

1. Smooth the Path to the Future – During times of great disruption, organizations need to maintain continuity to the greatest extent possible to serve their clients well. The challenge of maintaining services when enrollment is variable is even greater in the 7 states – including California – that use average daily attendance to calculate school funding, because attendance has become more difficult to measure with remote options for attendance. In addition, across the country and in California, it has become more difficult to estimate poverty rates, as schools have become eligible for universal meals, and it has become even harder to get families to turn in forms for free- and reduced-price lunch counts.

States are using many different approaches to handle these uncertainties³ and to measure the extent of student needs.⁴ In California, our recent investments have provided a short-term cushion while enrollment adjustments become clearer. For those districts that have the capacity and infrastructure to do so, it would be helpful to incentivize expanded preschool programming, which can both help to create the early on-ramp to public schools and can help to offset the lack of preschool many children experienced, strengthen their learning for the future.

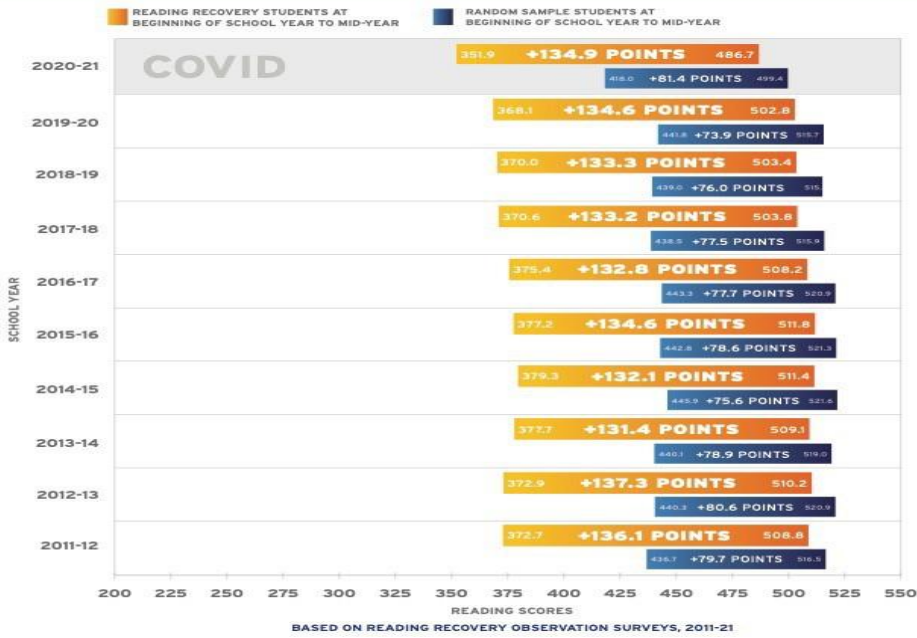
2. Use Time and Resources Strategically – It is important for us to effectively use the huge investment of one-time funding from the federal government as well as the state to enable this cohort of students to catch up and accelerate their learning. It will not work for most teachers to line up all the grade-level standards and march through them with strict pacing guide and expect that to work for most students. Several things are important for using time strategically.

1) Teach the big ideas in the content areas and use technology to leverage greater learning. Last year, when the pandemic hit, the legislature asked the State Board to develop guidance for using technology effectively to teach the most critical standards in literacy and mathematics, and with the help of the Sacramento County Office of Education, we sent an incredibly helpful [resource](#) to the field several months ago that outlines those “big ideas” in the California standards with resources for teaching them deeply, and documents best uses of technology tools with examples of best practices from classrooms throughout the state.

2) Create intensive intervention programs that meet students where they are and accelerate their progress. The benefits of high-intensity tutoring – one to one or in small groups – that directly addresses students’ learning needs have been known for decades, since a set of experiments in the 1970s and ‘80s showed that it is possible in a short period of time to double or triple the gains that students would make in a large class that is conventionally taught. More recent studies have shown that there are dozens of highly effective tutoring models that can be used one-on-one or in small groups to dramatically improve student outcomes and are ultimately cost-effective.⁵

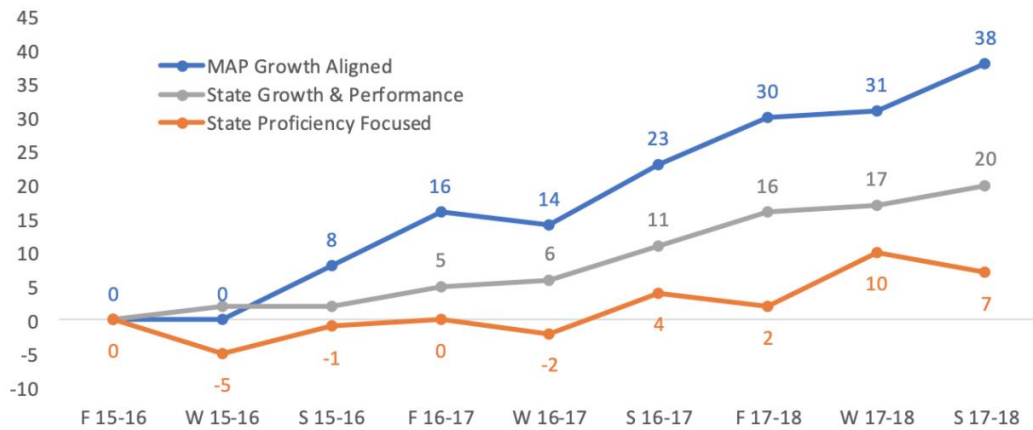
For example, the last 10 years of Reading Recovery data in California, including during pandemic, have found that the most severely struggling readers nearly double the gains of other readers in a single semester and almost catch up to the average reader within 12-20 weeks. Last year, the American Institutes of Research found similar results for the Spanish language version of this program, Descubriendo la Lectura, and concluded that “as a supplemental intervention spanning only 12–20 weeks, DLL produces impressive impacts of a magnitude rarely seen for educational programs of any type.”⁶

Closing the Gap: Growth Rates for Reading Recovery 1st Graders vs. Random Sample



It's critically important that educators know how to use diagnostic tools to meet students where they are and focus on helping them make progress in a focused way, rather than simply remediating around grade-level standards that may miss their actual learning needs. For example, a study of a mathematics intervention that individualizes instruction based on students' prior learning found that gains for students when schools focused on growth from the students' starting point were more than 5 times greater than students in schools focused on just teaching grade-level proficiency standards irrespective of students' needs.⁷

Figure 13 – Change in School-Level Percentile by School Category



Note: figure shows percentile gain for consistently-enrolled students. The MAP Growth Aligned category includes schools 4, 5 & 6. The State Growth & Performance category includes schools 1, 2, 3 & 7. The State Proficiency Focused category includes schools 8-14.

Recent research has shown that there are many tutoring programs with consistently strong outcomes that can be offered by trained teachers or paraprofessionals,⁸ and many districts have prepared to activate such programs as part of their learning recovery plans funded with federal and state dollars. Some of the funding allocated last year by the legislature is being used to plant training for the most effective learning recovery programs in county offices and universities throughout the state, so that every district – large or small – can access the knowledge base that will allow them to provide the supports their students need. These skills for educators can then live on beyond the pandemic and increase our capacity as a state to ensure student success.

3) **Invest in social and emotional learning and supports**, as well as mental health resources, with the professional development funding and mental health funding the legislature enacted. We know that students are returning to school carrying significant trauma and that social and emotional learning and supports are essential to helping them cope and teaching them skills that will support them through life. Research shows that in schools where students experience such programs, safety and behavior improve, teachers are more likely to be retained, and students achieve at higher levels.⁹ Furthermore, these benefits to students are maintained over time, and students continue to be more successful in school and in life.¹⁰ Thus, these short-term investments that transform school environments can live on over time in both healthier schools and healthier human beings.

4) **Invest intensely in staff recruitment, retention, and training to eliminate shortages and support long-term expertise and stability.** Both federal ARPA funds and major state investments in the educator workforce¹¹ can be used to recruit and prepare teachers from multiple pipelines for high need fields and schools, to boost compensation and offer recruitment and retention bonuses, and to recruit accomplished Board-certified teachers to low-income schools where they can offer expertise and mentoring to novice teachers so that they become effective and stay for the longer term. A recent LPI study found that districts that have been able to stabilize staffing in this turbulent year have used all of these tools, including building their own high-retention teacher residency programs that are training teachers for their specific students and districts needs, setting themselves up for success in the long term as they recruit a diverse, well-prepared and stable teaching force.

A number of districts are profitably making all of these kinds of investments. For example, Long Beach Unified used CARES funds to hire more teachers, counselors, psychologists and social workers for interventions and strategic academic support, investing in more efficient and proactive HR processes to recruit and hire staff. During the first weeks of school, all Long Beach students participated in Smart Start activities that centered relationships and student belonging. To address the trauma of the pandemic, Long Beach has also developed a detailed [learning acceleration and support plan](#) and is leveraging \$1.5 million in federal funding for provide additional tutoring supports during the school day, after school, and on Saturdays. These kinds of actions now will create a foundation for learning recovery for these students and for school-centered school practices that live into the future.

3. Use Space Strategically – Rather than reflexively closing school buildings in this time of enrollment uncertainty, we might use this moment to envision a new future for school buildings as hubs of their communities. In addition to making room for our youngest learners in

TK and preschool, the Governor and legislature have funded the creation of community schools that will connect to health and mental health resources, social services, before and after school care, and adult education in as many as 1/3 of our schools statewide. This would be an important time to remove obstacles for school districts to be able to lease and rent space for community partners to use, especially as these partners are increasingly priced out of other venues as real estate prices continue to rise.

The \$4 billion allocated last year to mental health services for young people will also ideally place mental health providers on site at schools, offering group and individual counseling and advising for staff so those services can be well used. Leasing space to mental health providers could transform access for young people and ensure more distributed counseling and supports for educators when and where they are needed. If we create schools as true community hubs we will be strengthening communities in multiple ways and welcoming families back with open arms. We will also be creating sustainable business practices that are student-centered.

4. Support Learning Models that Students and Families Want – Finally, we can recognize that this is a moment to rethink the factory model schools designs created 100 years ago and use this opportunity to invent and support new learning models that students and families want. Our current school models – created during the era when Henry Ford’s assembly line was the latest technology, when bureaucracy was the modern form of organization, and when eugenics determined how children were to be tested, tracked, and treated -- were not designed for close relationships, for 21st century forms of deeper learning for all children, or for educational equity. However, the assumptions of those models are deeply ingrained in the regulatory system we have inherited, and they influence everything from how we organize classrooms, staffing, and seat time, to how we manage teaching, textbooks, and testing.

Those new designs include high-leverage uses of technology, including part- and full-time virtual school models and innovations that use technology to reorganize the school day. While in-person schooling is the best solution for most children, there are some who are thriving in on-line learning – especially in contexts, like San Diego, where a virtual school was already in place and well-operated before the pandemic and in others where such schools have been created. Some innovative school districts want to blend on-line learning with in-person classes and off-site apprenticeships and internships for students. A student might take a dual credit course on-line in the morning and take classes at the school site in the afternoon on one day, and engage in an apprenticeship or internship the following day, doing research on-line with class colleagues and peers in other schools to solve a computer programming problem in their joint computer science course.

All these approaches will require us to think flexibly about the use of time and space for learning, so that we don’t inadvertently make it difficult for parents and students to get what they need from public schools, and districts to provide the 21st century education children deserve. As we evolve new systems, we should also be mindful that educators want and need to be spending their time focused on pupils, not paperwork, so that we do not contribute to the flight from public schools by making teaching an untenable occupation.

We can also use this moment to develop pathways to the future for all our young people – and create efficiencies by aligning exciting, experiential high school pathways and dual credit

courses with community college and college pathways to careers in fields that are in high demand, such as computer science and engineering, green technologies, and teaching, including our much need pathways to early childhood education. For example, a high school student taking dual credit coursework and apprenticeship placements in early childhood education could be learning and earning while gaining an initial child development permit while still in school, adding another permit while in community college and working part time as a supervised teacher's aide, and eventually when ready, completing a credential that builds on these stackable permits in an aligned university program. It should be possible for young people to pursue their passions in a wide range of programs, and to have a strong viable pathway to the future.

If we imagine the California school system we need at this moment in history, and invest strategically, we can marshal our human and financial resources to build an education future for our children that is more supportive, meaningful, and successful.

Endnotes

¹ Education Law Center (2021). *Making the Grade: How Fair is Your School Funding in Your State?* https://edlawcenter.org/assets/MTG%202021/2021_ELC_MakingTheGrade_Report.pdf

² Lee, V., Gutierrez, and Blagg, K. (October 6, 2021). <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/declining-school-enrollment-spells-trouble-education-funding>.

³ Blagg, K. (February 26, 2021). How are states funding school districts in the wake of changing enrollments? *Urban Institute blog*. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-are-states-funding-school-districts-wake-changing-enrollments-caused-covid-19>.

⁴ Cookson, P. (2020). Measuring school socioeconomic status: Toward a comprehensive approach. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Measuring_Student_Socioeconomic_Status_REPORT.pdf

⁵ Bloom, B.S. (1984). The 2 Sigma Problem: The Search for Methods of Group Instruction as Effective as One-to-One Tutoring. *Educational Researcher*, 13 (6): 4-16. See also, more recently, Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P. & Quan, V. (2020). *The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence*. National Bureau of Economic Research. American Institutes for Research, [National Center for Intensive Intervention](https://www.nber.org/papers/W26880) website.

⁶ Borman, T. and Zhu, B. (2019). A multisite randomized controlled trial of Descubriendo la Lectura. <https://www.air.org/project/multisite-randomized-controlled-trial-descubriendo-la-lectura-dll>.

⁷ New Classrooms (2020). *The iceberg problem*, p. 37. <https://www.newclassrooms.org/icebergproblem/>

⁸ Edgerton, A. (2021). The importance of getting tutoring right. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-getting-tutoring-right>

⁹ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

¹⁰ Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100 (4), 18-23.

¹¹These include the Golden State scholarships, teacher residency programs, the Classified staff program, stipends for National Board Certified teachers who work in and mentor other teachers in high-poverty schools, and professional development funds for inclusive instruction, social-emotional learning, computer science and STEM.