



SMMUSD Financial Oversight Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, January 6, 2022

Time: 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Location: Zoom

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zdLTfDT_CGK-Z5r7jZVUyUudX9Qb1j7X/view?usp=sharing

I. Call to Order

6:06 pm

Committee Members: JW Beekman
Matthew Crawford
Seth Jacobson
Shawn Landres
Renu Mevasse

Matthew Covington
Alex Farivar
Michael Kremer
Payal Maniar
Michael Rotgin

Staff: Gerardo Cruz
Bonnie Kung
Deanna Sinfield – *departed at 9:24 pm*
Melody Canady – *departed at 9:26 pm*
David Chiang – *departed at 8:31 pm*

Board Liaison: Keith Coleman
Craig Foster

Absent: Jon Kean
Zoe Pollack, Malibu student rep

Public: Shilo Gorospe, District Auditor – *Eide Bailly – departed at 7:56 pm*

II. Approval of Agenda

6:10 pm

A motion was made by Mr. Crawford and seconded by Mr. Kremer to approve the meeting agenda as amended to defer Agenda Item IV.D. Update on Debt Policy to a later date.

AYES: Ten (10) (Mr. Beekman, Mr. Covington, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Farivar, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin)

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTES: None (0)

NOES: None (0)

ABSENT: None (0)

ABSTAIN: None (0)

III. Approval of FOC Meeting Minutes

6:13 pm

A motion was made by Mr. Landres and seconded by Ms. Maniar to approve the December 7, 2021 meeting minutes as amended.

Under IV.A. 1st Interim Budget Report:

The committee **requested** ~~suggested setting a timeline for the plan and that providing any further information~~ **be provided** to the Financial Communications subcommittee ~~would be helpful~~ **in order** to better assist in communicating the plan to the public.

AYES: Ten (10) (Mr. Beekman, Mr. Covington, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Farivar, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin)

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTES: None (0)

NOES: None (0)

ABSENT: None (0)

ABSTAIN: None (0)

IV. Discussion/Action Items

A. District Audit Report

6:18 pm

Ms. Gorospe provided the committee an overview of the draft 2020-21 district audit report. She explained that while there were some outstanding items at the time of the presentation, no significant changes nor findings were anticipated. The committee discussed their concerns of non-compliance with contracts resulting in lost ADA due to students required to quarantine for COVID-19.

Mr. Crawford suggested that further clarification be provided in the statement regarding the unrestricted net position on page 10.

The committee discussed the material weakness identified in the internal controls report. There was a timing difference in reporting the issuance of the Certificate of Participation (COP) in the financial statements. The unaudited actuals were adjusted within the audit report and there was no significant impact on the unrestricted general fund. The committee also discussed the District's readiness to implement GASB 87.

Mr. Cruz reminded the committee that the Business Office made budget cuts to reduce positions and funding as part of the Fiscal Stabilization Plan.

The draft audit report may be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v9N_OMSsJBuQmRaIYkIDlk3VpJlp9rM/view?usp=sharing

A motion was made by Mr. Landres and seconded by Mr. Jacobson to accept the draft audit report and forward the following recommendations to the Board of Education for its consideration when it receives the audit report:

- The Board instruct its legislative advocates to seek relief for attendance-related audit issues and disadvantage funding apportionments that could result from disproportionate absences in the current school year; note as example pending legislation (SB 579).
- The Business Office identify funding and fill a position focused on special projects, local funding, and unusual funding and contracts, to ensure that the department is supported and fully in compliance with audit standards.
- The Board allocate training and consulting resources to ensure the District's compliance with GASB 87.

AYES: Ten (10) (Mr. Beekman, Mr. Covington, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Farivar, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin)

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTES: None (0)

NOES: None (0)

ABSENT: None (0)

ABSTAIN: None (0)

B. Measure R Audit Report

7:35 pm

Ms. Gorospe provided the committee a brief overview of the draft Measure R audit report. The performance audit was a clean report, as the expenditures in Measure R were approved and found to be in accordance to the ballot text.

The committee discussed the Measure R Reporting and Process Review subcommittee's relevance in communicating the information presented in the report. The committee suggested including the schedule of line items from the Measure R Plan to the report.

The draft Measure R audit report may be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1325JpCBsTz2YSsNKEWrGRUtqcDXuNyU_/view?usp=sharing

A motion was made by Mr. Crawford and seconded by Mr. Landres to the accept the draft Measure R audit report and recommend to the Board of Education for approval.

AYES: Nine (9) (Mr. Beekman, Mr. Covington, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin)

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTES: None (0)

NOES: None (0)

ABSENT: One (1) (Mr. Farivar)

ABSTAIN: None (0)

C. Presentation of Special Education mid-year report

7:56 pm

Ms. Sinfield provided the committee with a mid-year report that included the total budget for Special Education, salary totals, COVID funds, non-public school and residential treatment budgets, new students to SMMUSD, the learning recovery budget, legal liabilities, additional and unique costs, cost anomalies, new funding, and alternative dispute resolution. She explained that there is difficulty in hiring Speech & Language pathologists and paraeducators. Consequently, there were cost anomalies for the independent contractors hired to provide those services, which were offset by the unfilled salaries.

Mr. Cruz shared the budget breakdowns of the District's general legal costs by department, a summary of Special Education legal costs by year, and the Special Education legal settlements as multi-year, long-term liabilities.

The committee discussed their concerns about the District's long-term liabilities and recommended taking proactive steps in tracking services provided and researching the potential impacts from COVID-19 and changes to funding in anticipation of their fiscal impact on Special Education.

The committee made the following recommendations:

- The FOC receive an annual presentation from Special Education (budget) and include key items such as long-term liabilities and legal settlements by cross-sections of the various categories.
- The Board evaluate the pay gap that exists between the Special Education resources (para, educators, therapists, special ed staff and teachers, etc.) to what is in the market; in addition to a cost analysis of using outside agencies vs. making changes internally.
- The Board look into lobbying opportunities to get federal and state to fully fund the various legislations that support Special Education, including ADA.

The presentation may be found at:

<https://www.smmusd.org/cms/lib/CA50000164/Centricity/Domain/300/FinReports/SPEDReporttoFOC010622.pdf>

The legal costs document may be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p4bCPfzB2n_ZnQxt5hY9DN2DAUZEJHdP/view?usp=sharing

D. Update on Debt Policy

This item was amended from the agenda and will be agendized once the Bond Oversight subcommittee has met with staff.

E. Update from Nominations Ad-hoc Committee: FOC Vacancy Candidate Recommendation – Ryan Chin

9:23 pm

Mr. Covington shared a memo from the Nominations subcommittee which detailed the steps taken to select Ryan Chin to fill the vacancy in the FOC. The memo also provided background information for Mr. Chin. The subcommittee reviewed the agreed upon procedures from the previous application process. Mr. Covington clarified that there isn't a requirement to re-post the vacancy. The subcommittee reviewed the existing applications and decided to not reopen the application process. They interviewed Ryan Chin and recommend that he fill the open seat on the FOC. A footnote in the memo further explained the selection process from the available candidates.

The memorandum from the Nominations ad hoc committee and the FOC nominations process documents may be found at the following links:

- Memo dated January 4, 2022:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jomYkhDhDzNLHqXCJF9teLbniY3kXQUF/view?usp=sharing>

- Nominations Process Documents:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GbpDH_ZvZMAvV6xpopogukM55GAp7tZB/view

A motion was made by Mr. Covington and seconded by Ms. Maniar to recommend that the Board of Education appoint Ryan Chin to fill the vacancy in the Financial Oversight Committee.

AYES: Ten (10) (Mr. Beekman, Mr. Covington, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Farivar, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin)

STUDENT ADVISORY VOTES: None (0)

NOES: None (0)

ABSENT: None (0)

ABSTAIN: None (0)

Mr. Landres noted that he accepts the logic of the procedures taken to fill the vacancy but believes that every vacancy should be published.

V. Ad hoc Subcommittee Report

9:33 pm

A. Budget Recommendations: *Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Covington, Mr. Beekman, Mr. Rotgin*

There was no report.

B. Tax Revenue and Assessed Valuation: *Mr. Farivar, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Kremer, Mr. Beekman*

Mr. Farivar reported that the subcommittee met and will follow up with staff and the city contact. Per initial communication, the tax revenue from the city is looking stronger than anticipated.

C. Bond Oversight: *Mr. Kremer, Mr. Crawford, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Rotgin*

Mr. Kremer reported that the subcommittee met to review the draft of the debt policy generated by bond counsel. A memo was drafted with suggested revisions and the subcommittee will meet with staff to further discuss.

D. Measure R Reporting and Process Review: *Mr. Crawford, Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar*

Mr. Crawford reported that the subcommittee recently received documents from Dr. Mora. The subcommittee will review the documents and discuss with staff to determine a work product before the Measure R process is completed.

E. Financial Communication and Reporting: *Mr. Landres, Ms. Maniar, Ms. Mevasse, Mr. Jacobson*

Mr. Landres reported that the subcommittee will meet on the following Thursday.

F. Nomination: *Mr. Covington, Mr. Kremer, Ms. Maniar, Mr. Farivar*

Update was given during Agenda Item IV.E. Update from Nominations Ad-hoc Committee:
FOC Vacancy Candidate Recommendation – Ryan Chin.

VI. Receive and File (Limited Discussion)

- 9:36 pm
- A. 2021-22 Financial Oversight Committee (FOC) Conflict of Interest Pledge
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yspMXfYkbpnxTTq_yQK5YKtvpicdu3B/view?usp=sharing
 - B. School Services of California – November 18, 2021 “*LAO Issues Bright Forecast, Increased Funding for K-12*”
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nDIKk4I4_q6BoFjcLcg6s6A-HXafydLk/view?usp=sharing
 - C. School Services of California – November 30, 2021 “*Revenues Continue to Beat Projections in November Finance Bulletin*”
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yo77V4pz6HSUaS-oFoH0He43-D1OdZmn/view?usp=sharing>
 - D. Los Angeles Times – January 3, 2022 “*California lawmakers may stop tying K-12 schools’ funding to daily attendance*”
 - E. Cal Matters – October 19, 2021 “*California schools are running out of money*”
 - F. Cal Matters – April 23, 2021 “*Public school enrollment hits 20-year low: Biggest dip in youngest grades*”
 - G. Cal Matters – September 28, 2021 “*Why many California students keep missing school*”

VII. Public Comments None

VIII. Committee Comments None

IX. Next Meeting: Thursday, February 24, 2022 - Zoom

X. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

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Los Angeles Times



CALIFORNIA

California lawmakers may stop tying K-12 schools' funding to daily attendance



Students sound out words phonetically at Esperanza Elementary School in Los Angeles in August 2019. (Liz Moughon / Los Angeles Times)

BY MACKENZIE MAYS | STAFF WRITER

JAN. 3, 2022 **UPDATED** 10:12 AM PT



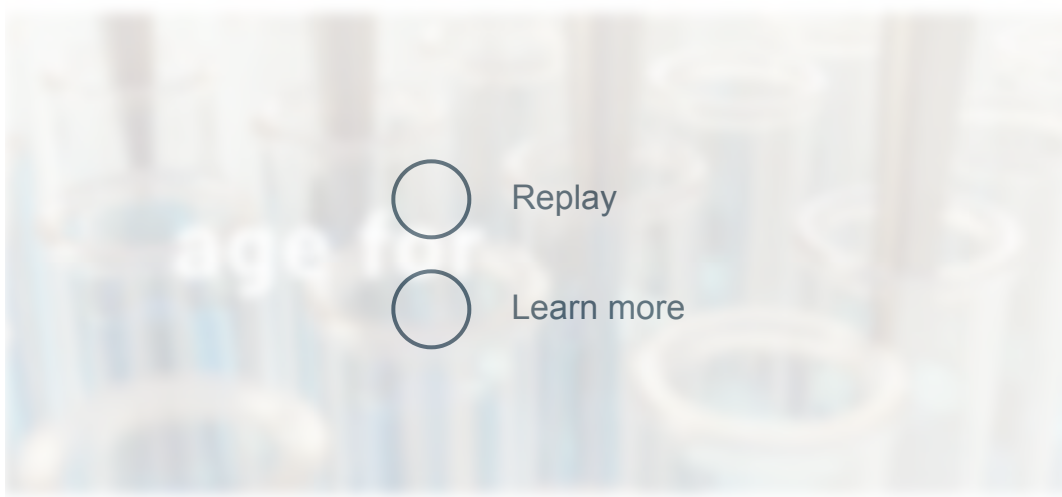
SACRAMENTO — After decades of linking K-12 school funding to daily student attendance, California lawmakers are poised to consider abolishing that standard, choosing instead a new method that could provide a significant boost to big districts such as Los Angeles Unified.

State Sen. Anthony Portantino (D–La Cañada Flintridge) will introduce legislation on Monday that would tie education funding to annual enrollment rather than average daily attendance records. The move could bring in an additional \$3 billion in annual state funding for schools, Portantino said.

California has long funded its 1,000-plus school districts based on how often students show up to class instead of a total head count of those enrolled. The policy has been promoted as a way to hold schools accountable for student absences.

But supporters of the new bill, including the Los Angeles Unified School District, say that an enrollment-based policy is less volatile and will allow schools to tap into more money and better plan for spending.

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To address absentee concerns, Portantino's proposal requires that at least half of any new funds schools receive under the new policy be put toward combating chronic absenteeism and truancy.

"This should not be seen at all as an effort to devalue getting kids in class," Portantino said in an interview with The Times. "That's a red herring argument."

Twelve percent of California's 6 million-plus K-12 students were marked "chronically absent" in 2018-19, meaning they missed at least 10% of the school year. The chronic absenteeism rate for Black students [was more than double](#) that of white students.

In November, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office projected that K-12 schools and community colleges will receive more than \$102.6 billion in the current fiscal year — almost \$9 billion more than what was already hailed as a record amount of funding when Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the state budget last summer. Public schools have been guaranteed the largest single share of general fund revenue since voters approved education funding formulas in 1988.



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By Urovant

There are ways to treat your OAB symptoms.

Supporters of Portantino's bill said that student absences during the pandemic have brought to light the problems many campuses have long faced due to linking funding to attendance.

"Our current attendance-based funding system takes resources away from schools in lower-income communities because they experience higher rates of absenteeism," California School Employees Assn. President Shane Dishman said in a statement. "The truth is, attendance-based funding punishes students in schools that most need the state's financial support."

Although a shift to enrollment-based funding could create a wider gap between small and large districts, the bill states that no school would receive less funding.

A "hold harmless" provision would maintain current funding levels but allow districts to apply for supplemental funding if enrollment totals are greater than the average daily attendance formula. The bill would go into effect in the 2023-24 school year.

“What we’re saying is, let’s give them what the actual enrollment numbers are and that will translate into extra dollars for districts. No school district will lose money, it will only force the pot to grow,” Portantino said. “My districts have been saying for years that this would lead to more stability and more funds.”

California is among only a handful of states, including Texas and Kentucky, that base school funding on average daily attendance.

Portantino’s proposal comes after Newsom moved to temporarily protect California schools from attendance-based funding penalties as students were forced out of classrooms by the COVID-19 pandemic. The long-standing attendance rules have since been set back in motion as a way to promote in-person instruction.

Last year, the California Department of Education reported its [largest drop in enrollment in 20 years](#), with about 160,000 fewer students than the prior year. A significant portion of those losses were among kindergartners, with families choosing to opt out of entering a school system during one of the most disruptive years in history.

But even without pandemic-related absences, school officials have been warning of the financial consequences of declining enrollment. California’s population fell in 2020 for the first time in the state’s recorded history — due in part to plummeting birth rates — with 5- to 17-year-olds making up a smaller portion of the population each year, according to state Department of Finance researchers.

Proponents of Portantino’s plan say that, regardless of changes in overall enrollment, an enrollment-based policy will always offer the potential for more dollars, as attendance can change by the day.

Times staff writer Taryn Luna contributed to this report.



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Mackenzie Mays covers state government and politics in the Los Angeles Times’ Sacramento bureau. Previously, she worked as an investigative reporter for Politico, the Fresno Bee and the Charleston Gazette-Mail. In 2019, she received the National Press Club Press Freedom Award for her political watchdog reporting. She is a graduate of West Virginia University and proud Appalachian.

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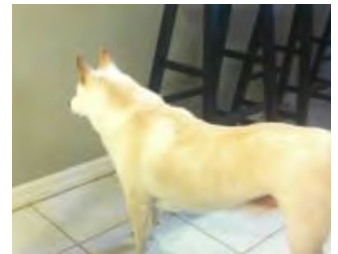
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Jan. 4, 2022

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WHATMATTERS

California schools are running out of money



BY EMILY HOEVEN
OCTOBER 19, 2021



Laurel Elementary serves as a hub for five Oakland schools during summer classes with 120 in-person students ranging from incoming first-graders to incoming fifth-graders on June 11, 2021. Photo by Anne Wernikoff, CalMatters

IN SUMMARY

California school districts have two choices: Bite the bullet and make budget cuts now, or delay them and face even more painful decisions.

California school districts have two choices: Bite the bullet and make budget cuts now, or delay them and face even more painful decisions.

That was the ultimatum Michael Fine, CEO of the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, a school finance agency, [delivered to district leaders](#) last week.

But warnings have been popping up everywhere. The state is hiring a fiscal consultant to help San Francisco Unified – which [is currently facing a \\$116 million shortfall](#) – figure out how to slash 13% of its \$1 billion annual budget. Hayward Unified is [considering closing an elementary school](#) – one that primarily serves immigrant families – to plug budget gaps. West Contra Costa Unified, [confronting a possible \\$30 million deficit](#), says it may have to lay off teachers.

Yet the state is pouring [a record amount of money into education](#). So what gives?

Some of the primary culprits, experts say, are declining attendance and enrollment – which partially determine school funding. During the first year of the pandemic, [California's public schools lost more than 160,000 students](#) – the largest enrollment drop in two decades. Although this year's statewide numbers haven't yet been released, the numbers from individual districts are grim. [Los Angeles Unified's enrollment](#) has fallen by more than 27,000 students since last year, while [San Francisco Unified](#) lost 3,500 students over the past two years.

The state Department of Finance, meanwhile, [predicts that](#) California's pre-pandemic enrollment will decrease by 703,000 students by 2031.

The state is still funding schools based on their pre-pandemic enrollment, but – unless lawmakers intervene, which some administrators are begging them to do – that practice will come to an end next year. Schools could then see their funding affected by declining enrollment and [surging chronic absenteeism](#).

- [Sara Bachez of the California Association of School Business Officers](#): “There needs to be a stopgap measure, some sort of protection for one more year.”

Money isn’t the only challenge schools face. On Monday, [some parents kept their kids home from school](#) and held demonstrations to protest Gov. Gavin Newsom’s student vaccine mandate. Also Monday, San Francisco officials announced three school board members [will face a recall election in February](#).

And although schools next year will start providing [free meals to all students](#), they aren’t required to make dietary accommodations for religious beliefs – which could disproportionately impact Muslim students, [CalMatters’ Joe Hong reports](#).

The coronavirus bottom line: As of Sunday, California had **4,588,231 confirmed cases (+0.4% from previous day)** and **70,416 deaths (+0.4% from previous day)**, according to [state data](#). CalMatters is also tracking [coronavirus hospitalizations by county](#).

California [has administered](#) **51,271,175 vaccine doses**, and **72%** of eligible Californians are [fully vaccinated](#).

Plus: CalMatters is tracking [the results of the Newsom recall election](#), which will be certified Oct. 22.

Other stories you should know

1. Rain hits parched landscape



Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Photo via iStock

The bad news: California just wrapped up its driest year in a century and its second-driest year in recorded history, with only 11.87 inches of rain and snow falling in the Golden State from Oct. 1, 2020 through Sept. 30, 2021, [according to the Western Regional Climate Center](#). That's half of the 23.58 inches California logs in an average water year – suggesting that [mandatory statewide restrictions could be on the way](#) as [devastating drought](#) persists. On Monday, [Vice President Kamala Harris visited Lake Mead](#), the Nevada reservoir that supplies water to 25 million people in California, Arizona, Nevada and Mexico, to promote the Biden administration's infrastructure and climate change packages (which are currently stalled in Congress). Behind her, the reservoir's water levels were at their lowest in history.

The good news: Rain and snow are here! A light shower of rain fell on Sacramento Sunday night, ending [a record-long dry spell](#) that had stretched 212 days. Unfortunately, the rain also knocked out power for 35,000 PG&E customers, 11,000 of whom [still lacked power](#) Monday morning. [Drizzle fell on Los Angeles](#) Monday morning, and [snow was dusting](#) the Sierras. Another rainstorm is forecasted to drench much of Northern California tonight, [ushering in a string of isolated showers](#) expected to last through next week. However, experts warned that particularly heavy rainfall [could result in mudslides](#) near recent wildfire burn areas.

In other environment news: Rep. Nanette Barragán, a San Pedro Democrat, asked Newsom Monday [to declare a state of emergency in Carson](#), where the foul smell of hydrogen sulfide has been swirling for more than two weeks.

2. Fiona Ma in hot water – again



State Treasurer Fiona Ma.

Should California's statewide elected officials who decide not to relocate to Sacramento be able to charge taxpayers for their lodging, meals and travel? The question – raised in 2019 when [Politico reported](#) that Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara was charging taxpayers thousands of dollars to rent a Sacramento apartment while maintaining a primary residence in Los Angeles – reemerged in a Monday [Sacramento Bee report](#). The investigation found that Treasurer Fiona Ma – who maintains a primary residence in San Francisco – is the only statewide officer who consistently charged her food and lodging costs to taxpayers while staying in Sacramento. (Lara stopped charging taxpayers for the Sacramento apartment in 2019.) It's the latest bit of bad press for Ma, who is also facing scrutiny for [sharing hotel rooms with staff](#) and a sexual harassment lawsuit from a former employee.

- [Ma](#): "I am a dedicated public servant who takes my responsibilities and stewardship of California's dollars and resources seriously, and this will always be my highest priority."
- [Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association](#): "If you run for statewide office, you should be expected to maintain – at your own expense – a residence in Sacramento."

3. Did Bay Area cops make criminal threats?

Photo via iStock

A superior court judge on Monday was set to consider an 18-year-old woman's request for a temporary restraining order against her relatives, Oakland police sergeant Lee French and his wife, Richmond Police Chief Bisa French. It's the latest development in a convoluted and controversial case that has resulted in criminal investigations involving at least five law enforcement agencies – and raised questions about the Frenches' blurring of personal and professional boundaries as they tried to wrest their young relative away from a man who they believed was sex trafficking her, according to reports from [the East Bay Times](#) and [San Francisco Chronicle](#).

But the teenager denies she is a victim and calls Oho McNair, 34, her "partner." In her restraining order request, she said the Frenches tried to physically restrain her against her will and threatened to kill McNair. Police are also investigating whether the Frenches made criminal threats against McNair's mother when they confronted her at her home. Both the Frenches are now on leave from their respective police departments, while McNair –

who was previously convicted of sex trafficking – has pled not guilty to felony charges of pimping and pandering in connection to the teenager.

- [Mike Rains, the Frenches' attorney](#): "I've not heard of any allegations out there that they're trying to use their badge or law enforcement status in any way. ... Even a couple of cops never realized the power these guys can exert over a girl."
-

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CalMatters commentary

[CalMatters columnist Dan Walters](#): California's ban on gas-powered lawn equipment will hit the little guys hardest.

Clean water in California is overdue: As we approach the 50th anniversary of the federal Clean Water Act, the state must ensure swimmable, fishable and drinkable waters for all residents, [writes Sean Bothwell of the California Coastkeeper Alliance](#).

Other things worth your time

Amid federal charges, Mark Ridley-Thomas will 'step back' from council duties, but not resign. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

California union moves to strip SEIU Local 1000 president of powers. He calls vote illegitimate. // [Sacramento Bee](#)

Women firefighters call for Chief Terrazas' resignation, citing lack of 'accountability and action' in LAFD. // [LAist](#)

Former Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa: 'Rome is burning.' // [NBC Los Angeles](#)

California #MeToo leaders say Capitol's sexual harassment unit is too close to the Legislature. // [Sacramento Bee](#)

Trouble in the Crime Lab: Questions arise amid 'Mean Girls' atmosphere. // [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)

State authorities destroy 1 million marijuana plants in crackdown on illegal operations. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

Court: Parts of pesticide program violate California law. // [Associated Press](#)

How a prescribed burn in Santa Cruz County got out of control. // [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Parking fines no longer pay Los Angeles' bills. // [Crosstown](#)

San Jose has no funding to expand permit parking program. // [Mercury News](#)

They lost the first battle for San Diego's sports arena site. Now they're mounting a comeback. // [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)

LAUSD says it's hiring 922 mental health workers. 75% of the positions sit empty. // [KCRW](#)

In Los Angeles, glimpses of an oasis with immigrant roots. // [New York Times](#)

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Emily Hoeven

✉ emily@calmatters.org



Emily Hoeven writes the daily WhatMatters newsletter for CalMatters. Her reporting, essays, and opinion columns have been published in San Francisco Weekly, the Deseret News, the San Francisco Business... [More by Emily Hoeven](#)

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WHATMATTERS

Public school enrollment hits 20-year low: Biggest dip in youngest grades



BY EMILY HOEVEN
APRIL 23, 2021



The coronavirus pandemic led to an unprecedented drop in public school enrollment in California. Image via iStock

California's public schools lost more than 160,000 students amid the pandemic, the largest enrollment drop in [two decades](#) and a likely harbinger of serious educational and financial challenges.

The sharp 2.6% decline, announced Thursday [by the California Department of Education](#), doesn't capture the full effects of the pandemic. The enrollment tally comes from a one-day headcount in October and doesn't include students who may have left the public school system afterward. But the drop is already steeper than the 155,000-student decline [state officials were projecting in January](#). And it's disproportionately affecting the state's youngest students: 88% of the drop occurred in kindergarten to sixth grade, while public preschool enrollment [fell by more than 6,000 students](#).

- [State Superintendent Tony Thurmond](#): "While there are many reasons to stay optimistic that enrollment will rebound as conditions improve ... we must also help schools identify opportunities to engage with families who either sought new options for their students during the pandemic or need additional resources and support."

California's public school enrollment was already decreasing before the pandemic, partly due to [slowing population growth](#). But it also appears that many parents decided to pull their kids out of public school as the Golden State continued to offer its students [the least amount of in-person learning in the country](#). Charter schools saw their enrollment jump by more than 15,000 students amid the pandemic, according to [state data](#). Meanwhile, some families decided to hold off on school altogether. Potentially tens of thousands more children than usual will enter first grade next school year [without having been through kindergarten](#), stretching an already strained system even tighter.

- [Lorin Yin, a San Francisco public school parent](#): "There's no version of this where we would have voluntarily left the school. I feel pushed out of the school system. I feel like I'm not fleeing it, I feel like I'm being kicked out."

Districts aren't at risk of losing state funding due to declining enrollment until the 2022-23 school year. But after that, smaller rosters could cause state funding to drop by [\\$10,000 per student or more](#).

The coronavirus bottom line: As of Thursday, California had **3,624,838 confirmed cases (+0.1% from previous day)** and **59,992 deaths (+0.2% from previous day)**, according to [a CalMatters tracker](#).

California [has administered](#) **26,823,157 vaccine doses**, and **33.9%** of Californians are [fully vaccinated](#).

Plus: CalMatters regularly updates this pandemic timeline tracking the [state's daily actions](#). We're also [tracking the state's coronavirus hospitalizations by county](#) and [lawsuits against COVID-19 restrictions](#).

A Message from our Sponsor

Other stories you should know

1. Bonta confirmed as attorney general

Assemblymember Rob Bonta has been confirmed as the new California Attorney General. Photo by Anne Wernikoff, CalMatters

The Legislature on Thursday confirmed [Assemblymember Rob Bonta](#) as California's next attorney general, positioning the state to take a markedly different approach to criminal justice than it did under now-U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. In his confirmation hearings, Bonta vowed to take a tougher hand in policing the police by thoroughly investigating deadly officer shootings of unarmed civilians, releasing misconduct records and pursuing civil rights probes of local law enforcement agencies, [CalMatters' Robert Lewis reports](#). The Alameda Democrat also pledged to rebuild trust between law enforcement and communities of color in the wake of ex-Minneapolis police officer [Derek Chauvin being convicted of murder](#) in the death of George Floyd and [a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans](#). Bonta, one of the Assembly's most progressive lawmakers, also voiced support for a pending bill he

co-wrote that would allow the state to decertify officers for misconduct.

- **Bonta:** “California talks often about how we lead, we’re first, we’re bold. Not when it comes to decertification. This is not – should not be – a controversial concept that we’re talking about.”

2. CA set to regain power to regulate car pollution

Image via iStock

California appears poised to regain its unique authority to set its own vehicle emissions standards after the U.S. Department of Transportation on Thursday [announced plans](#) to roll back portions of [a Trump-era rule that the Golden State had been fighting in court](#). The proposed change, which is subject to a 30-day comment period, would also permit California to require car companies sell more electric vehicles. The move signals that the Biden administration is likely to institute tougher federal fuel

economy rules – and all signs indicate California will have a big seat at the negotiating table. Newsom joined 11 other governors Wednesday in [calling on Biden](#) to ban new gas-powered cars by 2035 – a goal [Newsom set for the Golden State last year](#). One indication that the letter won't go unnoticed: General Motors, which originally supported the Trump administration's legal battle against California's fuel economy standards, [dropped the lawsuit in November](#) and [announced plans in January](#) to only sell zero-emission vehicles by 2035.

3. UC, CSU to require vaccines

An informational sign posted outside a vaccination clinic at Sacramento State on Jan. 29, 2021. Photo by Rahul Lal, CalMatters

The [University of California](#) and [California State University](#) systems unveiled plans Thursday to require students, faculty and staff who use campus facilities this fall to be immunized against COVID-19 once the vaccines receive full approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The proposal – which includes exemptions based on medical or religious grounds – applies to

more than 1 million people, making it [the largest higher-education vaccination policy in the nation](#). The news came the same day that [Stanford announced](#) vaccines were mandated for all students returning to campus in the fall – with medical and religious exemptions – regardless of whether the vaccines receive FDA approval beyond emergency use authorization. (UC and CSU [said in February](#) such a requirement could raise legal issues.)

As California's coronavirus rate drops [to the lowest in the continental U.S.](#), demand for vaccine [appears to be withering](#) across the state. But gaps persist: The Golden State ranks 45th nationally when it comes to vaccinating its most vulnerable communities, according to [a recent analysis](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- [Marin County Public Health Officer Dr. Matt Willis](#): "It may take us as long to get through the last 15% as it took to get to the first 85%. ... It's not a practical issue of making it accessible. It's going to rely on dialogue."

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CalMatters commentary

Getting through drought: Coupling critical infrastructure investments with recent water management and planning improvements – based on lessons from 2014-15 – will help us better manage through 2021, [argues Chandra Chilmakuri of the State Water Contractors](#).

Building a stronger workforce: I support Assembly Bill 628 because it would support individuals who face systemic employment barriers by providing them with training and education programs aligned with regional needs, [writes Zima Creason of the California EDGE Coalition](#).

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Other things worth your time

San Francisco debates controversial homeless proposal to make city provide shelter to all. // [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Skid row skeptical of judge's order to sweep homeless people into shelters. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

Report: Number of new homeless people in county doubled in 2020. // [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)

Mayor Breed wants an answer from Biden administration: Are sanctioned drug use sites legal? // [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Some of the biggest names in the California GOP are staying quiet on the Newsom recall. // [Sacramento Bee](#)

Caitlyn Jenner has infrequently voted. Now she might run for office. // [Politico](#)

How Los Angeles' Brentwood school became a battleground in the culture wars. // [Los Angeles Magazine](#)

Los Angeles City Council votes to make plastic utensils only available upon request. // [Daily News](#)

Forest Service logging challenged in California lawsuit to protect endangered mammal. // [Sacramento Bee](#)

Should California protect forest fire 'burn bosses' from lawsuits? // [Sacramento Bee](#)

Photos: Here's what Yosemite looks like one year after the animals took over. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

Gerald Haslam, chronicler of rural California life, dies at 84. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

See you Monday.

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WHATMATTERS

Why many California students keep missing school



BY EMILY HOEVEN
SEPTEMBER 28, 2021



Photo via iStock

IN SUMMARY

While Gov. Newsom brags about students returning to classrooms, an EdSource report found many districts are experiencing a massive uptick in chronic absenteeism.

It would seem that the kids are not all right.

The day after he secured a landslide victory in the Sept. 14 recall election, Gov. Gavin Newsom visited an Oakland school to tout [the state's progress in reopening campuses](#), noting that 95% to 100% of students in most districts had returned to in-person instruction. But that picture was complicated by [a Monday EdSource report](#) that found many districts are experiencing a massive uptick in chronic absenteeism – students who miss more than 10% of school days. Since the school year started:

- **46% of students at Thermalito Union Elementary**, a rural district serving mostly low-income families in Butte County, have been chronically absent – up from 8.8% two years ago.
- **39% of Stockton Unified students** have been chronically absent – more than double the rate two years ago.
- **Almost 33% of Oakland Unified students** have been chronically absent.
- **More than 26% of Elk Grove Unified students** have been chronically absent.

Experts say the staggering numbers are due partly to [kids in quarantine](#), who are counted absent if they don't log on every day and complete their assignments. Another possible reason for the skyrocketing absenteeism: a surge in families who want their children to continue learning remotely. Many of the 15,000 Los Angeles Unified students who signed up for the district's independent study program have encountered snafus that blocked them from attending school for days or even weeks, [the Los Angeles Times reports](#).

The problem is especially acute for students with disabilities. Newsom last week [signed legislation](#) clarifying that students with special needs can continue accessing services remotely – but

some have already gone more than a month without any instruction or specialized care, [as CalMatters has reported](#).

- [Lisa Cruikshank, Thermalito Union's director of special projects](#): "What keeps me up at night is all these kids losing out on high-quality instruction, falling behind, falling through the cracks."

Further complicating matters is California's [shortage of teachers](#) and [substitutes](#). A whopping [37% of positions in Los Angeles Unified](#) are currently filled by substitutes – who, under state law, must be transferred to different students after 30 days (a timeframe [recently extended](#) to 60 days through July 1, 2022). The sheer chaos and difficulty of setting up a reliable staffing plan is one reason why many districts this year won't be able to deliver on Newsom and lawmakers' \$5 billion plan to address learning loss through [expanded school days and summer programs](#).

A Message from our Sponsor

The coronavirus bottom line: As of Sunday, California had **4,471,635 confirmed cases (+0.5% from previous day)** and **68,362 deaths (+0.4% from previous day)**, according

to [state data](#). CalMatters is also tracking [coronavirus hospitalizations by county](#).

California [has administered](#) **49,116,036 vaccine doses**, and **70%** of eligible Californians are [fully vaccinated](#).

Plus: CalMatters is tracking [the results of the Newsom recall election](#) and [the top 21 bills](#) state lawmakers sent to Newsom's desk.

A Message from our Sponsor

Other stories you should know

1. Judge mandates vaccination for prison guards

Guards monitor inmates at San Quentin Prison. Photo by Penni Gladstone for CalMatters

California prison officials and employee unions have two weeks to come up with a plan to implement mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for prison staff, inmates who work outside the facilities and prisoners who want in-person visitation, [a federal judge ruled Monday](#). The order came a few days after a federally appointed official who oversees medical care in California's prison system [urged the court to require vaccines for prison guards](#), citing the rapid spread of the delta variant and ongoing outbreaks traced to infected staff members. But it could face a legal challenge from the powerful prison guards' union, which has so far been [exempt from Newsom's sweeping mandates](#) impacting other state employees, [CalMatters' Byrhonda Lyons reports](#). The California Correctional Peace Officers Association donated [\\$1.75 million to committees fighting the Newsom recall](#) – the sixth-largest contribution overall.

Meanwhile, California on Monday had the lowest coronavirus case rate in the country, according to [data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

2. Newsom signs key election, labor bills

A California vote-by-mail ballot. Photo illustration by Anne Wernikoff, CalMatters

Newsom on Monday whittled down the stack of 500-plus bills on his desk by signing a bunch related to [elections](#) and [workers' rights](#). Here's a look at what some of the new laws mean for the Golden State:

- Every active, registered California voter will [receive a mail-in ballot for all elections moving forward](#). This could benefit Democrats, who were more likely than Republicans to vote by mail in the Sept. 14 recall election. It will also likely boost turnout: In the November 2020 election – the first in which all voters were mailed a ballot – turnout topped 70%, [the highest rate since 1952](#). And more than [12.5 million ballots have been counted](#) in the recall so far – approaching [the record 12.7 million](#) cast in the 2018 gubernatorial general election.

- **Californians will vote on two races for the same U.S. Senate seat** in 2022. [As first reported in this newsletter](#), the confusing setup allows the state to avoid violating the U.S. Constitution – in what critics have called “the most undemocratic way possible.”
- **Fashion brands must [pay garment workers by the hour](#)** unless they collectively bargain to be paid by the piece, and each link in the fashion chain – from factories to brands to retailers – can be held liable for wage theft. The clothing industry warns the new regulations could [move jobs offshore](#), reversing a recent trend that saw jobs return to America during the pandemic.
- The state will [phase out a program](#) allowing companies to pay **workers with disabilities less than minimum wage.** [Supporters say the program was exploitative; opponents say](#) ending the program will make it that much harder for disabled Californians to find a job and lead independent lives.

3. The political calculus of redistricting

Image via iStock

The independent commission tasked with redrawing California's legislative and congressional boundaries each decade is supposed to be just that – independent. But the commission – which is meeting today and Wednesday in Sacramento ahead of [a Dec. 27 deadline to submit final maps](#) to the secretary of state – may not be as sheltered from political forces as its name suggests, [CalMatters' Ben Christopher and Sameea Kamal report](#). That's because not all Californians who testify before the committee reveal possible conflicts of interest. A few examples:

- Ada Briceño, who urged the commission to put in separate districts “the very different communities” of north and south coastal Orange County, described herself as a “labor organizer” – neglecting to mention she's also chairperson of the Orange County Democratic Party.
- A caller named “Austin” said the commission should keep both Orange County coasts in the same congressional district. Her phone number fragment and biographical description match those of Austin Eisner, whose husband Alexander is a law partner of Shawn Steel, the husband of GOP U.S. Rep. Michelle Steel – who narrowly ousted Democratic incumbent Harley Rouda in November 2020 to represent coastal Orange County.

Heightening the political stakes of the commission's job: California [losing a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives](#) for the first time in history – likely one held by [a Los Angeles County Democrat](#). Further scrambling the political reshuffling, U.S. Rep. Karen Bass – who represents Los Angeles – [formally launched her bid for Los Angeles mayor](#) on Monday.

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CalMatters commentary

Building an “endemic” economy: California must create consistent policies for the long haul, rather than enacting arbitrary, short-term mandates, [argue Rob Lapsley of the California Business Roundtable and Tracy Hernandez of the Los Angeles County Business Federation](#).

It's time for a civilian climate corps: The state and federal governments must support young people who want to stay in their home communities and reverse the harm from decades of fossil fuel pollution, [writes Maricruz Ramirez of Sunrise Kern County](#).

Other things worth your time

Podcast: Why Fresno is one of the nation's hottest housing markets. // [CalMatters](#)

What killed Bay Area teen? Suicide follows bout with COVID. // [Mercury News](#)

Leaders grapple with Pajaro Valley's pandemic-fueled youth violence crisis. // [Lookout Local Santa Cruz](#)

Veto pressure on Newsom mounts as ethnic studies deadline looms. // [Jewish News](#)

California's secret war over Pentagon aid in fighting wildfires. // [New York Times](#)

Los Angeles County district attorney to dismiss 60,000 past marijuana convictions. // [Los Angeles Times](#)

California's new misdemeanor diversion law sparks confusion, disparities in DUI cases. // [Mercury News](#)

San Francisco could foot the bill for school board recall to help cash-strapped district. // [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Small Business Administration nominee Dilawar Syed, a California businessman, stalled from confirmation by GOP. // [Washington Post](#)

Unflattering audit of San Diego real estate deals prompts pushback from city attorney. // [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)

San Diego County gave pay raise to troubled COVID-19 hotel contractor. // [inewssource](#)

'He held me hostage with no gun but with his words': The phone scam gaslighting California therapists. // [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Why California's youth population, birth rate is decreasing. // [Mercury News](#)

Cargo piles up as California ports jostle over how to resolve delays. // [Wall Street Journal](#)

Scenic ranch near Mission San Juan Bautista preserved in land conservation deal. // [Mercury News](#)

Los Angeles luxury real estate fight: The battle over 'The One.' // [Los Angeles Times](#)

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