



Schools Under Stress

Pressures Mount on California's Largest School Districts

Overview

The number and intensity of internal and external stress factors on California schools and school districts are on the rise as a result of state budget deficits and the nation's struggling economy.

Schools and the children they serve are experiencing these stresses at the same time that they are coming under increasing pressure to meet ever higher accountability standards as measured by student performance on standardized tests.

Some stress factors are “internal,” such as the impact of teacher and staff layoffs, increasing class sizes, a shorter instructional year, fewer counselors, cutbacks in summer programs, and declining enrollments. Others are “external,” such as schools having to cope with the impact of high unemployment rates and increasing poverty in California’s most economically distressed communities.

These stress factors were the focus of three EdSource surveys of the state’s 30 largest school districts, conducted in July 2011, October/November 2011, and March 2012. Almost one third of the state’s 6.2 million public school students are enrolled in these 30 districts.

The surveys were intended to provide an overview of how school districts are responding to the state’s budget crisis and the cascading impacts of the Great Recession on schools and the children they serve.

In November 2012, Californians will be asked to vote on two tax initiatives intended to provide funds for its K–12 public school system, assuming that both qualify for the ballot. But most voters do not have children in the schools, and have no way of objectively assessing the extent of the need. The challenge of understanding what is happening in the state’s schools is further complicated by California’s size and diversity.

Although Californians are bombarded with a plethora of reports about schools, from a wide range of media and other sources, those reports rarely provide a broad overview of what is happening on the ground in these schools or districts.



Photo by: cybrarian77

This overview is intended to provide California voters with a portrait of how the state's largest school districts are doing, by focusing on stress factors that some or all districts are coping with.

NOTES

1 See "California's public schools have experienced deep cuts in funding since 2007-08," a [report](#) by the California Budget Project, April 2012.

This overview is intended to provide California voters with a portrait of how the state's largest school districts are doing, by focusing on stress factors that some or all districts are coping with.

The impact of the financial crisis has been extreme. As the California Budget Project noted in its April 2012 report,¹ between 2007–08 and 2010–11, the state cut the basic amount it spends on schools—so-called general purpose funding—by \$3.6 billion, or 10.7 percent. That amounts to an average reduction of \$530 per student, which in a class of 30 students amounts to nearly \$16,000 per class. For some of that time, state cutbacks were offset by the infusion of federal stimulus funds. But now that those funds have been mostly expended, schools are being forced to make deeper cuts.

As Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent John Deasy testified in Sacramento earlier this year, as he detailed his district's grim financial situation, "The funding cliff is here."

Detailed descriptions of the current surveys' findings are provided separately in the body of this report.

The EdSource surveys did show some positive findings:

- Several districts were able to restore the instructional days they eliminated during the 2010–11 school year.
- A third of the districts surveyed did not issue any teacher layoff notices last spring, and many of the remaining districts were able to rescind some or all of their notices before the start of the 2011–12 school year.
- Some districts found innovative ways to stretch fewer resources, such as forming partnerships with community and other nonprofit organizations to meet student needs.
- The Academic Performance Index (API) of all 30 districts improved—in many cases substantially—since 2007–08 when the recession began. The API is based on the test scores of students on standardized tests mandated by the state, and is the main measure used by the state to gauge academic accomplishment in a school and district.

However, these positive developments were offset by a plethora of other factors affecting districts' core capabilities to provide a high-quality education to all of their students.

Some of the principal findings include:

- **Teacher Layoffs:** California's teaching force continues to shrink, with 2,213 teachers in the 30 largest districts losing their jobs at the end of the 2010–11 school year.
- **Larger Class Sizes:** Class sizes in kindergarten through 3rd grade are growing in most of the state's 30 largest districts. Half of these districts report having 30 or more students in one or more K–3 grades. Only one of the districts

School districts have had to deal with some variations of these stress factors before, at various points in California's turbulent history. But both the level and number of stresses that districts have to deal with today seem unprecedented.

has average class sizes of 20 or fewer in any grade—a dramatic reversal from just two years ago. In grades 4 and 5, only three districts report having class sizes smaller than 30.

- **Fewer Instructional Days:** Twelve districts have fewer than 180 instructional days.
- **Fewer Counselors:** Twenty-two districts have fewer counselors than they had in 2007–08—and many have none at the elementary school level. In the 30 districts, there are now approximately 2,400 counselors serving about 2 million students
- **Fewer Summer Programs:** Most districts have cut back their summer programs drastically since the beginning of the Great Recession. As a result, schools are losing a critical resource to keep in school students who are on the verge of dropping out or lack the credits they need to advance to the next grade.
- **Declining Enrollment:** Sixteen districts had smaller student enrollments in 2010–11 compared with the 2007–08 school year. Fewer students translates into less money received in basic funding from the state—about \$5,000 to \$6,000 less per student—which has forced schools to cut back on a range of education programs.
- **Increasing Childhood Poverty:** Nearly all of the state's 30 largest districts are educating more students living in poverty than before the current recession. Paralleling this increase, the number of low-income students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals has increased. Increasing poverty places a great burden on school districts, as poor children often require additional services and support in order to succeed.
- **High Unemployment:** Almost all districts surveyed are coping with the impact of high levels of unemployment in their communities. High unemployment means that students may be living in households with more domestic discord, may be forced to move, or in some cases may be rendered homeless—all of which can make it more difficult for students to succeed academically at optimal levels. School staff may also have to work harder to help students succeed.

School districts have had to deal with some variations of these stress factors before, at various points in California's turbulent history. But both the level and number of stresses that districts have to deal with today seem unprecedented.

In the 2010–11 school year, only nine of the districts surveyed attained an API of 800 or more, the goal set by the state for schools and school districts. Although this report does not argue that the API is the only or even best measure of school effectiveness, this result is nonetheless cause for concern.

The challenge for Californians is to relieve the stresses on school districts to the fullest extent possible so they can focus their energies on helping students achieve their full academic potential.



School officials often say that the most stressful consequence of the state's budget crisis is teacher and staff layoffs, including the practice of issuing preliminary notices by the March 15 legal deadline, typically to far more employees than will eventually be laid off.

NOTES

² *How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement* by Matthew Ronfeldt, et al., National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2011.

DEFINING SCHOOL STRESS

In this report, we describe the multiple challenges faced by school districts as “stress factors.”

We define a “stress factor” as any internal or external influence that makes it more difficult for a school or district to carry out its basic mission of providing a high-quality education to all its students, as well as ensuring that its students succeed on state and federal accountability measures.

The stress factors described in this report are not intended to be a statistical measure of the pressures a school is under. However, the concept of “stress factors” provides a convenient framework within which to organize the multiple ways schools are being affected by the state’s budget crisis, as well as the pressures they face in the most economically distressed communities in the state.

In this report, we have identified eight major stress factors: teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, fewer instructional days, fewer counselors, cutbacks in summer school, declining enrollments, increasing childhood poverty, and high unemployment.

There are numerous other stress factors that we did not identify in our survey. These might include whether a district closed schools or experienced labor strife, increasing truancy rates, the extent to which financial reserves have been depleted, and high housing foreclosure rates.

For a range of reasons, we did not spotlight these factors in this report, but where appropriate, we will do so in future reports in an ongoing effort to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing the state’s largest school districts.

Also, we do not suggest that the stress factors discussed are of equal severity, or that they have the same impact on every school district.

School officials often say that the most stressful consequence of the state’s budget crisis is teacher and staff layoffs, including the practice of issuing preliminary notices by the March 15 legal deadline, typically to far more employees than will eventually be laid off.

The stress caused by layoffs, as well as the threat of being laid off, has a rippling effect across a school, and is felt by parents, children, and remaining staff. Recent research from the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that teacher layoffs can have an impact on students’ academic achievement.²

Other stress factors, such as increasing class sizes in the elementary grades, have less, though still significant, impact and may be felt only in certain classrooms or schools.



SCHOOLS RESPOND DIFFERENTLY TO STRESS FACTORS

The current school year is the fifth successive year that California school districts have had to respond to one or more of the stress factors identified in this report.

However, how districts are affected by the budget crisis, and how they are responding to it, varies from place to place. To date, no research has been done to measure the combined or cumulative effects of multiple stress factors on a district and on student academic outcomes.

In January 2011, an EdSource report noted that “many of the options used to address past deficits are now, or soon will be, closed off.”³

That is even more true today.

Under state law, school districts can receive one of three designations to characterize their finances from the state or their county office of education: positive, qualified, or negative. A “negative certification” means that state officials have determined that a school district will not be able to meet its financial obligations in the current year or the next.

This year, only seven school districts out of nearly 1,000 in the state received a negative certification. But that tally does not accurately reflect the perilous fiscal condition of many districts. Many districts—perhaps the majority—are at a breaking point, as they struggle to figure out what further cutbacks they should make to stay solvent. To stay afloat, many have had to dip deeply into their reserves.

David Gordon, Sacramento County superintendent of schools, said that he is “amazed at the resilience of school personnel in the face of all this uncertainty.” At the same time, he added, “You reach a point where people get worn out and there is nothing to elevate their mood. That will grind you down.”

School districts are currently bracing for further cutbacks because of a looming state budget deficit of \$9.2 billion during the next 18 months, and uncertainties over whether voters will approve in November tax initiatives that

“You reach a point where people get worn out and there is nothing to elevate their mood. That will grind you down.”

—David Gordon, Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools

NOTES

³ “School Finance Highlights 2010-11,” EdSource, January 2011.

METHODOLOGY

EdSource sent e-mail surveys to the state’s 30 districts with largest enrollments. Follow-up phone calls were made to verify information, and in some cases the information was obtained from the California Department of Education’s DataQuest. For economic indicators, EdSource drew on tables in the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census. The American Community Survey provided figures for average unemployment rates and poverty rates broken down by school district, but 2010 is the most recent year for which those figures are available from the Census.



“We are rapidly reaching a point where realistically we can’t lay off any more staff.”

*—Kent Bechler, Corona-Norco
Unified Superintendent*

would raise additional funds for schools. Once again, they are faced with the excruciatingly difficult decision about whether to plan for the worst-case scenario—that neither of the initiatives for which signatures are currently being gathered will be approved by voters in November—or to base their budgets on more optimistic projections.

Some school superintendents are saying that they have reached a point where they can’t lay off more teachers or other key personnel, and that the best solution would be to just shorten the school year even further below the current state minimum of 175 instructional days.

Gov. Jerry Brown has warned that if his proposed tax initiative is not approved by voters in November, schools will need to have the option of reducing the school year by another three weeks, to 160 days.

A March 2012 public opinion poll, conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California, indicated that a bare majority (52 percent) of likely voters, when read the title and summary of the governor’s initiative, were inclined to vote for it—a drop of 20 points in less than a month. However, a USC/Los Angeles Times poll later in the month on a compromise measure agreed to by Gov. Brown and the California Federation of Teachers showed that 64 percent of registered voters supported that measure.

With absolutely no certainty about what the outcome of the election will be on the compromise initiative—or on the so-called Munger initiative, which is also likely to be on the ballot—it is not unreasonable for local school boards and superintendents to prepare for their possible defeat.

At a February 2012 hearing of the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee in Sacramento, Corona-Norco Unified Superintendent Kent Bechler said his district is planning for the “worst-case scenario” despite optimistic projections coming from Sacramento.

“We are rapidly reaching a point where realistically we can’t lay off any more staff,” Bechler said.

At the same hearing, Los Angeles Unified Superintendent John Deasy said his district has lost \$2.8 billion in operating funds since the 2008–09 school year alone.

Like many districts, Los Angeles has had to cope with the state’s practice in recent years of “deferring” payments to school districts until the next fiscal year, which requires districts to borrow money from private lenders to pay current bills.

“The only way a school district can prepare a budget to satisfy Wall Street so we can borrow funds is to assume the worst-case scenario, and that demoralizes everyone,” Deasy said.

Deasy recounted how his district has all but eliminated summer school. Programs like counseling, school nurses, libraries, adult education, early childhood education, and art have all been “decimated,” he said.

Despite deep cuts in numerous programs, his district still faces a \$557 million deficit in the coming year. This year, to meet the March 15 deadline established by law, the district issued preliminary layoff notices to 4,556 teachers, another 647 to “support personnel” including librarians, counselors, psychiatric social workers and school nurses, and 2,206 to certificated administrators. All told, the district issued layoff notices to 11,713 school personnel, including hundreds of adult school instructors.

Sacramento City Superintendent Jonathan Raymond faces a similar grim scenario. To close an anticipated \$28 million budget shortfall, he said his district might have to eliminate middle and high school counselors, close all libraries, and do away with home-to-school transportation.

The prospects of more cuts if Gov. Brown’s ballot initiative failed to pass “is a killer for us,” he said. So is the March 15 deadline to issue preliminary layoff notices, which depresses teacher morale and productivity. “When we give teachers layoff notices, they are done for the spring, even though there is still two-and-a-half or three months of learning left for our children,” he said.

“This is not school,” he said. “This is not what our children, the very future of our country, our most important assets, deserve.”

The survey findings on the following pages detail the facts and impacts of the eight stress factors that are the focus of this report.

Photo by: World Linux Traveler





Photo by: cybrarian77

Just the threat of layoffs can demoralize staff, with a rippling effect in classrooms and throughout a district, potentially affecting student academic outcomes.

STRESS FACTOR: TEACHER LAYOFFS

Survey Findings

In what has become a demoralizing rite of spring, thousands of teachers and other staff have received preliminary layoff notices by the March 15 legal deadline in each of the past five years.

In the spring of 2011, according to the EdSource survey, two-thirds of the 30 largest districts issued layoff notices to 10,854 teachers.¹ Of those, 2,213 were not rehired for the 2011–12 school year.

Job losses varied from district to district. Los Angeles Unified laid off 969 teachers out of the 5,456 who received preliminary layoff notices. On the other hand, Riverside Unified and Elk Grove Unified were able to rehire all of the teachers who were issued pink slips in the spring.

The layoff crisis shows no signs of easing up. In spring 2012, according to figures gathered by the California Teachers Association, the 10 California school districts issuing the most layoff notices were the following: Los Angeles, 9,507; San Diego, 1,655; San Juan, 458; Capistrano, 392; Sacramento City, 389; Moreno Valley, 332; Long Beach, 309; San Bernardino City, 251; San Francisco, 210; and Sweetwater Union High, 209.

Not all of these layoff notices were issued to classroom teachers. For example, in Los Angeles Unified, of the 9,507 preliminary layoff notices, 4,556 went to K–12 classroom teachers.

Looking to the fall, some superintendents are bracing for a worse outcome than last year. “The number of actual layoffs will change, but sadly we expect in the end that more than 1,000 employees will remain laid off and not be recalled, unless we can achieve collaborative sacrifice,” San Diego Unified Superintendent Bill Kowba wrote in a districtwide letter.

Impact of Teacher Layoffs

Among the many stress factors identified in this report, teacher and other staff layoffs may have the greatest impact. Just the threat of layoffs can demoralize staff, with a rippling effect in classrooms and throughout a district, potentially affecting student academic outcomes. Thus, even when teachers are rehired, the issuing of layoff notices can inflict significant damage on the culture of a school.

“Teachers who receive a notice in March worry for months about their job security, damaging staff morale and working conditions,” Education Trust–West noted in its 2011 report.²

There is also evidence that teacher turnover has an impact on student achievement. A compelling recent study in New York City³ concluded that “teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and English language arts.” The study also found that teacher turnover is “particularly harmful” to students in schools with large populations of low-performing students.

NOTES

1 Not included in these numbers are temporary teachers, who are hired for a year or less. Districts can choose to not rehire temporary teachers without giving them pink slip warnings in March. No state statistics are available to indicate how many temporary teachers were laid off in 2011.

2 *Victims of the Churn*, The Education Trust–West, 2011.

3 *How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement*, by Matthew Ronfeldt, et al., National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2011.

TEACHER LAYOFF NOTICES IN SPRING 2011 AND NUMBER LAID OFF IN OCTOBER 2011

District	Number of Teachers, 2010-11	Layoff Notices, Spring 2011	% of Teachers Receiving Notices	Final Layoffs as of October 2011
Anaheim Union High	1,344	10	1%	1
Capistrano	2,120	0	0%	0
Chino Valley	1,215	54	4%	21
Clovis	1,684	0	0%	0
Corona-Norco	2,174	0	0%	0
Elk Grove	2,761	445	16%	0
Fontana	1,677	70	4%	40
Fremont	1,310	0	0%	0
Fresno	3,778	257	7%	31
Garden Grove	2,013	0	0%	0
Kern Union High	1,625	6	<1%	6
Long Beach	3,764	683	18%	508
Los Angeles	33,188	5,456	16%	969
Montebello	1,243	0	0%	0
Moreno Valley	1,515	184	12%	22
Mt. Diablo	1,583	95	6%	0
Oakland	2,675	438	16%	0*
Poway	1,285	0	0%	0
Riverside	1,715	455	27%	0
Sacramento City	2,138	408	19%	59
Saddleback Valley	1,289	66	5%	7†
San Bernardino City	2,524	257	10%	210
San Diego	7,095	1,374	19%	223
San Francisco	3,219	147**	5%	6
San Jose	1,592	0	0%	0
San Juan	2,260	237	10%	87
Santa Ana	2,442	0	0%	0
Stockton	1,764	100	6%	0
Sweetwater Union High	1,779	0	0%	0
Twin Rivers	1,455	112	8%	23
Total of Top 30	96,226	10,854	11%	2,213 (20% of teachers given notices were laid off.)

NOTES

* Teachers who did not have their CLAD (Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development) certification were not rehired. Information came from an official with the Oakland Education Association, not the district.

** An additional 25 pre-kindergarten teachers were also laid off.

† Only 44 of the teachers had their layoff notices rescinded. Five teachers resigned, and 10 were re-employed either as temporary or part-time teachers, leaving seven laid off.

DATA: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO EDSOURCE SURVEY, OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2011; CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DATAQUEST), 11/2011

EdSource 4/2012



Photo by: Old Shoe Woman

As class sizes get larger, fewer teachers are needed. An inevitable byproduct of increasing class size is laying off teachers, which compounds the stress on a school.

NOTES

1 Some districts, however, have been able to maintain smaller K-3 class sizes for students in selected schools, such as those receiving funds under the state's [Quality Education Investment Act \(QEIA\)](#) or under the federal [School Improvement Grant \(SIG\)](#). QEIA and SIG funds are aimed at schools that have some of the lowest test scores in the state.

2 *Class Size: What Research Says and What it Means for State Policy* by Grover Whitehurst and Matthew M. Chingos, Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings Institution, 2011.

3 "Class Size," *Education Week*, July 2011.

STRESS FACTOR: LARGER CLASS SIZES

Survey Findings

K-3 class sizes are growing in most of the districts surveyed by EdSource, indicating a drastic erosion of California's K-3 Class Size Reduction program, one of the most popular of California's education reform efforts in recent decades.

The purpose of the program was to reduce class sizes in the K-3 grades to 20 students, in the belief that smaller class sizes improve student academic outcomes. The program began unraveling in 2009-10 after lawmakers, in an effort to give school districts more flexibility in how they spend state funds, relaxed the requirements imposed on districts to receive a subsidy of more than \$1,000 per K-3 child in smaller classes.

Under the new rules, districts receive the full per-student subsidy for classes with 25 or fewer students. For classes with 26 or more students, districts can receive 70 percent of the subsidy. Gov. Jerry Brown, in his 2012-13 budget proposal, suggested eliminating separate categorical funding for the program altogether. This increased "flexibility," if enacted by the Legislature, would likely lead to even larger K-3 class sizes in many districts.

Of the 30 K-12 school districts in the EdSource survey, half reported having 30 or more students in one or more K-3 grades in the 2011-12 school year. Only Stockton had an average class size of 20 or fewer, and that was in only one grade—kindergarten.¹ However, San Francisco and Los Angeles have managed to keep average K-3 class sizes below 23 students.

In grades 4 and 5, only three districts—Elk Grove, Garden Grove, and Los Angeles—reported having class sizes smaller than 30.

Impact of Larger Class Sizes

As class sizes get larger, fewer teachers are needed. An inevitable byproduct of increasing class size is laying off teachers, which compounds the stress on a school.

Research on the impact of class sizes on academic outcomes has been mixed.

"Because the pool of credible studies is small and the individual studies differ in the setting, method, grades, and magnitude of class size variation that is studied, conclusions have to be tentative," a recent extensive review by the Brookings Institution concluded.²

The review did find that reductions of seven to ten fewer students per class can have a positive impact on student achievement, particularly for low-income students. An *Education Week* review³ tended to support the Brookings report.

Education Week also noted that "shrinking the number of students in a class does not automatically translate into better learning." To get the most out of smaller classes, "teachers may need to alter their teaching practices, dropping lecture-style approaches and providing more frequent feedback and interaction."

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 5TH GRADE CLASS SIZES IN CALIFORNIA'S 30 LARGEST UNIFIED DISTRICTS, 2011–12

District	K	1	2	3	4	5
Capistrano	33	32	32	32	31.5	31.5
Chino Valley	31	30	31	31	33	33
Clovis	26.4	23.7	24	24.4	33.3	33.6
Corona-Norco	28	28	29	28	33	33
Elk Grove	24	24	24	24	28	28
Fontana	32	32	32	32	32	32
Fremont	28	28	28	28	30	30
Fresno	26	26	30	30	31	31
Garden Grove	26.1	22.7	22.4	23.6	27.1	27.5
Lodi	28	28	28	28	32	32
Long Beach	30	30	30	30	35	35
Los Angeles	22.9	22.5	22.5	22.7	27.8	28
Montebello	30	30	30	30	34	34
Moreno Valley	30	30	33	33	33	33
Mt. Diablo	32	31	31	31	34	34
Oakland*	27	30	30	30	31	31
Orange	30	30	30	33	33	33
Poway	28	28	28	28	35	35
Riverside	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	31.8	31.8
Sacramento City	25	25	29	29	33	33
Saddleback Valley	31	29	29	29	34.5	34.5
San Bernardino	30	30	30	30	34	34
San Diego	24	24	24	24	32	32
San Francisco	22	22	22	21	33	33
San Jose	30	30	30	30	31	31
San Juan	31	31	31	31	34	34
Santa Ana	31**	25-26	25-26	30	34	34
Stockton	20	32	32	32	33	33
Temecula Valley	22	23	25	26	33	33
Twin Rivers	25	29	29	29	31	31

NOTES

Because three of the largest districts are high school districts and were never involved in the K–3 Class Size Reduction Program, EdSource included the next three largest unified districts—Lodi, Orange, and Temecula Valley—in this table only.

* In Oakland Unified, the numbers are maximums. School principals determine how to spend the money allocated to their schools, so that some schools could have class sizes as low as 20. Information came from an official with the Oakland Education Association, not the district.

** For the academic portion of the school day, the class sizes are reduced under Option Two of the Class Size Reduction program in which teaching is shared with another teacher.

DATA: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO EDSOURCE SURVEY, OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2011

EDSOURCE 4/2012



Depending on how many days are cut, less time in the classroom can make it more difficult to complete curriculum requirements. Because they may be under pressure to get through the required material, teachers may not be able to give students the individual attention they did in the past.

STRESS FACTOR: FEWER INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS

Survey Findings

Slightly more than a decade ago, California increased its school year from a minimum of 173 days to 180 days, which brought it in line with the school year in most other states. However, even at 180 days, California and the rest of the nation still lag far behind many other industrialized countries.

In 2009, the California Legislature gave districts the option of reducing the school year from 180 days to 175 days to give them more flexibility in managing budget cuts. Initially, few districts took advantage of this option. But by the 2010–11 school year, after negotiations with their teachers unions, many had done so.

In one of the few bright spots in the EdSource survey, eight of the districts that had cut back on their instructional days in 2010–11 were able to restore their instructional year to 180 days in the 2011–12 school year. Currently, 18 of the 30 largest school districts have a 180-day school year. Fontana, Long Beach, and San Jose are now back to 180 days, having been able to restore a full week to their school calendars.

However, in 2011–12, Chino Valley, Moreno Valley, and San Bernardino City all reduced their school year to 175 days.

Nine of the 30 districts surveyed now have a 175-day school year. Facing enormous budget uncertainties, school administrators are bracing for having to shorten their instructional year once again.

Impact of Shorter School Year

Depending on how many days are cut, less time in the classroom can make it more difficult to complete curriculum requirements. Because they may be under pressure to get through the required material, teachers may not be able to give students the individual attention they did in the past.

Although no research has been published on the recent impact of fewer school days on academic outcomes in California, research from other states suggests that reductions of just a few days do make a difference.

A 2007 Maryland study showed that “the pass rate for 3rd grade math and reading assessments fell by more than a half percent for each school day lost to an unscheduled closure,” such as a “snow day.”¹ Research in Virginia in 2010 showed that adding 10 instructional days led to more positive outcomes among 3rd graders than repeating a grade, having a better teacher, or reducing class sizes by four students.²

Another consequence of a shorter school year is its impact on staff morale. Shortening the instructional calendar is typically accomplished by giving teachers and other staff unpaid furlough days. In effect, staff are asked to take a pay cut in lieu of school districts having to lay off larger numbers of personnel.

NOTES

1 “Time for school?” by David Marcotte & Benjamin Hansen, *Education Next*, Winter, 2010.

2 “Unscheduled School Closings and Student Performance” by Dave Marcotte & Steven Hemelt, Institute for the Study of Labor, July 2007.

CHANGE IN NUMBER OF INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS 2010-11 TO 2011-12

	District	Compared with Previous Year, 2010-11	Number of Instructional Days in 2011-12
	Anaheim Union High		180
	Capistrano		179*
	Chino Valley		175
	Clovis	 †	180
	Corona-Norco		175
	Elk Grove		175
	Fontana		180
	Fremont		180
	Fresno		180
	Garden Grove		176
	Kern Union High		180
	Long Beach		180
	Los Angeles		180
	Montebello		180
	Moreno Valley		175
	Mt. Diablo		180
	Oakland		180
	Poway		175
	Riverside		181 ^{††}
	Sacramento City	 †††	177
	Saddleback Valley		175
	San Bernardino City		175
	San Diego		175
	San Francisco		176
	San Jose		180
	San Juan		180
	Santa Ana		180
	Stockton		180
	Sweetwater Union High		180
	Twin Rivers		175

NOTES

Information on Oakland comes from an official with the Oakland Education Association, not the district.

* When compiling the survey results described on page 12, EdSource counted Capistrano among the districts that had a 180-day school year because the school year was reduced by one day *only* because of the Southern California blackout.

† Decreased from 181.

†† 180 days for middle school.

††† The district decreased the number of days from previous years but converted some minimum days to full days so the total minutes of instruction remained “relatively the same,” according to the district.

DATA: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO EDSOURCE SURVEY OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2011

EdSource 4/2012



The diminishing ranks of counselors in K–12 schools in California are occurring at the same time as school officials report that students, especially those from economically distressed households, are likely to need more help.

NOTES

1 “Pupil Personnel Services Credential,” Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

2 American School Counselor Association.

3 See for example, *Paving the road to college: How school counselors help students succeed* by Richard T. Lapan & Karen Harrington, Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation, University of Massachusetts: Amherst, 2008.

4 “The Impact of More Fully Implemented Guidance Programs on the School Experiences of High School Students: A Statewide Evaluation Study” by Richard T. Lapan, Norman C. Gysbers & Yongmin Sun, *Journal of Counseling & School Development*, vol. 75, pp. 292–302, 1997.

STRESS FACTOR: FEWER COUNSELORS

Survey Findings

Twenty-two out of 30 districts surveyed by EdSource in winter 2012 have fewer school counselors than they had prior to the beginning of the Great Recession.

In these districts, there are approximately 2,400 counselors for slightly more than 2 million children, compared with approximately 3,000 counselors prior to 2007–08. That represents a decline of about 20 percent.

Mt. Diablo Unified in Concord, with about 34,000 students, has no school counselors, though it does have “student service coordinators” who fill some of the counselor functions. Capistrano and Saddleback Valley, both in Orange County, have cut their counseling staffs by about half since the beginning of the recession.

Officials in 13 out of the 30 districts surveyed indicated that there may be further reductions in their counseling staffs during the coming school year—including Chino Valley, which has issued preliminary layoff notices to all 33 of its counselors.¹

It should be noted that not all districts use the same definition of a counselor. Districts report that counselors schedule classes, offer academic guidance, and can also be called upon to counsel students who are having difficulties at home or school. As defined by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, counselors are those with a “pupil personnel services credential, with a specialization in counseling.” “Counselors” here does not refer to mental health professionals providing long-term therapeutic interventions.

Regarding counselors, California could hardly get any worse in its ranking relative to other states. In 2009–10, California already ranked dead last in its ratio of counselors to students, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The ratio in California of counselors to students was 1:810, compared with 1:459 nationally. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 1:250.²

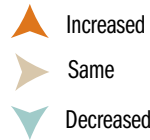
Impact of Fewer Counselors

The diminishing ranks of school counselors in K–12 schools in California are occurring at the same time as school officials report that students, especially those from economically distressed households, are likely to need more help.

Numerous studies show that school counselors can make a significant difference in improving student academic outcomes.³ The most effective counseling programs are those that have high counselor-to-student ratios and allow counselors to spend more time with students than on clerical and administrative duties.⁴

As caseloads mount, some school districts are trying to make up for having fewer counselors by reducing the time the remaining counselors spend on paperwork. But it is clear that as the ranks of school counselors thin out across the state, there will be less personal attention available for the students most in need of counseling, as well as for those who need help completing coursework or getting through the college admission process.

CHANGE IN NUMBER OF COUNSELORS IN 30 LARGEST DISTRICTS



Districts	# of Counselors Prior to 2007-08 Recession*	# of Counselors in 2011-12	Compared with 2007-08	Potential Layoffs in 2012-13
Anaheim Union High	71	67	▼	YES
Capistrano	33 [†]	14.6	▼	YES
Chino Valley	33	33	▶	YES
Clovis	53	38	▼	NO
Corona-Norco	72	60	▼	NO
Elk Grove	91	66	▼	NO
Fontana**	69	2	▼	NO
Fremont	38	23	▼	NO
Fresno	65	73	▲	NO
Garden Grove	53	40	▼	NO
Kern Union High	105 [†]	98	▼	YES
Long Beach	131.7	119.5	▼	YES
Los Angeles	912	647	▼	YES
Montebello	49 [†]	51	▲	NO ^{††}
Moreno Valley	83	56	▼	YES
Mt. Diablo***	0	0	▶	—
Oakland	34 [†]	20	▼	NO
Poway	56	44	▼	NO
Riverside	49	38.8	▼	NO ^{††}
Sacramento City	49.3	45.6	▼	YES
Saddleback Valley	26	14	▼	NO
San Bernardino City	124	127	▲	YES
San Diego	329	235	▼	YES
San Francisco	151	152	▲	YES
San Jose	53 [†]	32	▼	NO
San Juan	64	47	▼	YES
Santa Ana	69	60	▼	NO ^{††}
Stockton	69	53	▼	NO
Sweetwater Union High	135	135	▶	YES
Twin Rivers ^{†††}	—	27.8	—	NO

NOTES

Information on Oakland comes from DataQuest and from the Oakland Education Association, not the district.

* Depending on the response from the district, the figures may be from 2006-07 or 2007-08.

† Data from the California Department of Education (DataQuest).

** As of April 2012, Fontana had replaced its counselors with 30 "comprehensive student support providers" and 18 "academic pathway advisers." These positions were all filled by former district counselors. The new positions no longer include a 13% stipend that counselors had received for extra hours and days worked.

†† Reduction through attrition (not replacing a counselor who leaves), not layoffs.

*** Mt. Diablo has student service coordinators, who serve some of the counselor functions.

††† Twin Rivers became a district in 2008-09.

DATA: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO EDSOURCE SURVEY, MARCH 2012;
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DATAQUEST), MARCH 2012.

EDSOURCE 4/2012



Photo courtesy of San Diego's "6 to 6" Extended School Day Program

Cutbacks in summer programs mean that schools lose an important resource for students who need to make up for lost credit, are in danger of dropping out, or are generally struggling academically.

STRESS FACTOR: FEWER SUMMER PROGRAMS

Survey Findings

Most districts have cut back their summer programs drastically since the recession began, though all 30 of the state's largest districts offered some summer program last summer, albeit in significantly scaled down form, according to an [EdSource survey in summer 2011](#).

The survey found that at least three districts—Oakland, Fresno, and Santa Ana—have been able to expand their summer offerings in recent years by creatively using state and federal funding or getting support from private foundations.

But these districts are the exception. Officials at 25 of the 30 districts said fewer students participated in summer programs in 2011 than in 2008—in many cases substantially fewer than previously.

Shrinkage of summer programs accelerated since a state law passed in February 2009 allowed districts to use summer school funds for other purposes during the school year.

Districts—such as Elk Grove, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Ana—collaborated with nonprofit organizations to sustain their summer school programs.

Some county offices of education stepped in to retain summer programs. For example, a high school summer program is run in conjunction with the Orange County Office of Education, and some of the area's largest districts, including Capistrano and Anaheim, send their students to that program.

Impact of Fewer Summer Programs

Cutbacks in summer programs mean that schools lose an important resource for students who need to make up for lost credit, are in danger of dropping out, or are generally struggling academically. With the loss of this safety net, schools face even more pressure to make sure that students succeed academically during the regular school year, despite in many cases having fewer resources to do so.

Even students who are not in academic trouble are at risk of losing considerable academic ground over the summer. A June 2011 Rand Corporation report titled [Making Summer Count](#) summarized research showing that “by the end of the summer, students on average perform one month behind where they left off in the spring.”

The report noted that low-income students are likely to lose even more ground, that these learning losses are cumulative, and that students may never overcome them. As a result, a long summer break without any academic involvement is a likely contributor to the achievement gap between higher-achieving, middle-income students and low-income and disadvantaged minority students.

In light of state and federal mandates to improve test scores and close the achievement gap, the loss of summer school programs adds to the demands placed on teachers and other school staff to ensure student success.

SUMMER PROGRAMS AT CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS



District	Offered Some Summer Programs in 2011			2011 Summer Enrollment Compared with 2008
	Elementary	Middle	High	
Anaheim Union High	n/a*	Yes	Yes	▼
Capistrano	No	No	Yes	▼
Chino Valley	Yes	No	Yes	▼
Clovis	Yes	Yes	Yes	▶
Corona-Norco	No	No	Yes	▼
Elk Grove	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Fontana	No	No	Yes	▼
Fremont	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Fresno	Yes	Yes	Yes	▲
Garden Grove	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Kern Union High	n/a*	n/a*	Yes	▶
Long Beach	No	No	Yes	▼
Los Angeles	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Montebello	No	No	Yes	▼
Moreno Valley	No	No	Yes	▼
Mt. Diablo	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Oakland	Yes	Yes	Yes	▶ †
Poway	No	Yes	Yes	▼
Riverside	No	No**	Yes	▼
Sacramento City	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Saddleback Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
San Bernardino City	No	No	Yes	▼
San Diego	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
San Francisco	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
San Jose	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
San Juan	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Santa Ana	Yes	Yes	Yes	▲
Stockton	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼
Sweetwater Union High	n/a*	Yes	Yes	Can't compare††
Twin Rivers	Yes	Yes	Yes	▼

NOTES

Programs for special education students that are required by law are not included in this summary. Programs that require students to pay fees, such as those offered through local community colleges, are also not included.

* No figures available in case of high school districts.

† Although this year's enrollment is smaller than 2009 and 2010, it is similar to summer 2008, when Oakland substantially expanded its summer program.

** Except for about 20 students at risk of failing the 8th grade.

†† The district changed to a year-round program in 2009-10 so students don't have a typical summer schedule any longer.

DATA: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO EDSOURCE SURVEY, JULY/AUGUST 2011

EDSOURCE 4/2012



Declining enrollments can place significant financial stresses on districts, and can trigger layoffs, school closures, and other program cutbacks.

NOTES

1 Charter enrollments are included in the total enrollments of public schools because charter schools are regarded as public schools. However, when funds go to charter schools instead of the district, it can have an impact on school district finances as a whole.

2 In the first year that enrollments decline, districts are paid at the previous year's level. See "[Funding California Schools: The Revenue Limit System](#)" by Margaret Weston, Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), March 2010.

3 Los Angeles County Office of Education, [Letter to Felton Williams](#), Long Beach Unified, Jan. 6, 2011.

STRESS FACTOR: DECLINING ENROLLMENT

What the Data Show

More than half of the districts surveyed by EdSource showed declines in student enrollment in recent years. Declining enrollment means less revenue for schools, even as overhead costs remain fixed. In some districts, the declines were substantial, while in others they were very slight.

Of the 30 largest school districts, 16 showed declining enrollments between 2007–08 and 2010–11. Saddleback Valley experienced the largest decline, 5.5 percent, followed by Chino Valley and Montebello, each by more than 4 percent.

Underscoring the differences among regions and districts in the state, in 13 districts enrollments increased, slightly or substantially. San Jose Unified's enrollment rose by 5.7 percent, and Clovis Unified's by 4.6 percent.

Typically, enrollment declines or increases occur over a period of many years. Changes in enrollments are related to changes in birth rates, immigration trends, domestic migration, housing prices, and other factors, such as the rise in charter school enrollments, which have been considerable in districts such as Oakland.

Statewide, between 2007–08 and 2010–11, enrollments declined slightly from 6,275,469 to 6,217,002 students.¹ The recent enrollment declines in some districts reflect a reversal of a two-decade trend, which began in the early 1980s, during which total K–12 school enrollments in California rose steadily. Enrollments peaked at 6,322,141 in 2004–05.


































Impact of Declining Enrollment

Declining enrollments can place significant financial stresses on districts, and can trigger layoffs, school closures, and other program cutbacks.² That's because districts receive most of their funds from the state based on the average number of students in attendance (referred to as "average daily attendance"). Fewer students means less general-purpose funding from the state. In 2010–11, general-purpose funding averaged \$5,012 per pupil for elementary districts, \$5,244 for unified districts, and \$6,022 for high school districts.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education has projected a decline of 3,213 students at Long Beach Unified between the 2010–11 and 2012–13 school years.³ If state funding remains constant, that could result in a loss to the district of nearly \$17 million a year in general-purpose funding alone.

When enrollment declines significantly, districts almost certainly have to lay off teachers and other classroom personnel, with a potential rippling effect on morale and productivity throughout a school or district. Declining enrollments can lead to school closures, which typically are among the most stressful actions a school district can take. Sacramento City, for example, has averted some closures, but did vote to close one school in spring 2012 due to under-enrollment.

CHANGE IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT, 2007–08 TO 2010–11

	Districts in Order of Size	Enrollment 2010–11	Compared with 2007–08	% Change
	Los Angeles	667,251		-3.8%
	San Diego	131,784		+0.2%
	Long Beach	84,816		-3.8%
	Fresno	74,831		-2.1%
	Elk Grove	62,416		+0.2%
	Santa Ana	57,319		+0.5%
	San Francisco	55,571		+0.9%
	San Bernardino City	54,514		-3.9%
	Capistrano	53,192		+1.5%
	Corona-Norco	53,148		+3.6%
	Garden Grove	48,659		0%
	Sacramento City	47,896		-1.1%
	San Juan	47,116		-0.6%
	Oakland	46,584		+0.3%
	Riverside	42,532		-2.4%
	Sweetwater Union High	41,426		-2.7%
	Fontana	40,841		-2.7%
	Clovis	38,495		+4.6%
	Stockton	38,252		-0.4%
	Kern Union High	37,452		+0.3%
	Moreno Valley	36,615		-1.4%
	Poway	34,135		+2.6%
	Mt. Diablo	34,116		-3.5%
	Anaheim Union High	33,156		-0.6%
	San Jose	33,018		+5.7%
	Fremont	32,607		+2.1%
	Montebello	32,046		-4.3%
	Saddleback Valley	31,724		-5.5%
	Twin Rivers	31,632	 *	+2.3%
	Chino Valley	31,608		-4.4%

* 2008–09 enrollment because Twin Rivers became a district that year.

Note: In this table only, the 30 districts are listed by size of enrollment, from largest to smallest.

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DATAQUEST), 2/27/2012

EDSOURCE 4/2012



Rising levels of poverty are likely to intensify the need for a wide range of services.

NOTES

1 The Census Bureau analyzed poverty rates within the boundaries of every school district in California. The figures presented in the table on page 21 represent poverty rates for 2010, the most recent year for which figures are available. The Census Bureau's definition of poverty in 2010 was \$22,113 or less in annual income for a family of four that includes two adults and two children. The level does not take into account California's higher cost of living.

2 Brian Rowan's research is published in the path-breaking volume from the Russell Sage Foundation, *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*.

STRESS FACTOR: INCREASING CHILDHOOD POVERTY

What the Data Show

Nearly all of the state's 30 largest school districts are educating more students living in poverty than before the Great Recession, based on an EdSource explanation of both U.S. Census Bureau surveys¹ and enrollments in the federal free and reduced-price school meals program.

Twenty-six of the districts surveyed by EdSource are situated in communities with a higher proportion of young people 18 and under living in poverty than in the 2007–08 school year. In two of these districts, nearly half of the children were living in poverty in 2010—49% in Fresno and 46% in Stockton.

This mirrors the rise in the number of children living below the federal poverty level in California—from 17 percent in 2007 to 22 percent in 2010. In six districts, the rise in the number of children living in poverty was in double digits. San Bernardino City posted a 16 percentage point increase in childhood poverty levels of districts surveyed. San Bernadino City also had the most children eligible for the federal meals program in 2010–11—88%.

For almost half of the 30 districts, two-thirds or more of the students were eligible for school meals. All but four of the largest school districts showed an increase in the percentage of students eligible for the meals program.

Impact of Rising Poverty on Schools

Decades of research have shown that academic outcomes are highly correlated with students' family incomes. Greater proportions of students living in poverty are likely to have multiple impacts on school climate, as well as on what happens in the classroom. Students from low-income families are likely to move more frequently and to have a home environment less conducive to doing homework.

The impact is felt almost immediately in the earliest grades. "As early as when they first begin in school, poor children are less attentive to schoolwork and more likely to engage in behaviors that get them into trouble," noted University of Michigan researcher Brian Rowan.²

Rising levels of poverty are likely to intensify the need for a wide range of services. Students may need more individual attention, including counseling, mental health services, and intensive drop-out prevention programs. Poor attendance and higher drop-out rates could lower average daily attendance, and thus potentially have an impact on a school district's budget and its ability to provide the very services that its struggling students need.

The rising numbers of students qualifying for the meals program means that more students may not be getting adequate nutrition at home, which could make it more difficult to fully concentrate in the classroom and could contribute to other behavior or health problems.

CHILDREN LIVING AT OR BELOW FEDERAL POVERTY LINE IN 2010

District	% of Children (under 18) Below Poverty Level in 2010	% Point Change (2007 to 2010)
Anaheim Union High	23%	+4
Capistrano	7%	0
Chino Valley	7%	+4
Clovis	13%	+3
Corona-Norco	12%	+7
Elk Grove	20%	+4
Fontana	28%	+14
Fremont	9%	+5
Fresno	49%	+11
Garden Grove	23%	+11
Kern Union High	31%	+5
Long Beach	26%	+1
Los Angeles	31%	+4
Montebello	28%	+1
Moreno Valley	27%	+8
Mt. Diablo	12%	-2
Oakland	33%	+8
Poway	7%	+4
Riverside	26%	+7
Sacramento City	34%	+13
Saddleback Valley	8%	+2
San Bernardino City	43%	+16
San Diego	27%	+8
San Francisco	12%	+1
San Jose	17%	+2
San Juan	22%	+7
Santa Ana	31%	+4
Stockton	46%	+14
Sweetwater Union High	19%	0
Twin Rivers	36%	n/a*
California	22%	+5

Note: Figures are estimates of poverty levels within each district's geographic boundaries. The year 2010 is the most recent year for which figures are available.

* Twin Rivers became a district in 2008-09.



Photo courtesy of DC Central Kitchen

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR THE FEDERAL FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE MEALS PROGRAM IN 2010-11

District	% of Students in Federal Meals Program, 2010-11	% Point Change (2007-08 to 2010-11)
Anaheim Union High	62%	+11
Capistrano	21%	+5
Chino Valley	37%	+11
Clovis	34%	+5
Corona-Norco	44%	+4
Elk Grove	51%	+5
Fontana	79%	+13
Fremont	20%	0
Fresno	82%	+2
Garden Grove	69%	+4
Kern Union High	61%	+11
Long Beach	70%	+3
Los Angeles	76%	+5
Montebello	76%	-4
Moreno Valley	77%	+12
Mt. Diablo	40%	+6
Oakland	70%	+1
Poway	13%	0
Riverside	55%	+8
Sacramento City	70%	+5
Saddleback Valley	20%	+4
San Bernardino City	88%	+7
San Diego	66%	+3
San Francisco	61%	+7
San Jose	44%	0
San Juan	45%	+9
Santa Ana	84%	+4
Stockton	83%	+10
Sweetwater Union High	54%	+11
Twin Rivers*	79%	+7
California	57%	+6

* Twin Rivers Unified did not exist in 2007-08. The 7 percentage point change is the difference between 2008-09 and 2010-11.

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DATAQUEST), 2/28/12

EDSOURCE 4/2012

STRESS FACTOR: HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

What the Data Show

Nearly all of California's largest 30 districts are having to cope with the impact of high levels of unemployment in their communities.

Because no current figures are available for unemployment within the geographic boundaries of California school districts, EdSource looked at 2012 unemployment figures for the primary cities within each of the 30 largest districts surveyed.

Unemployment in half of those cities is higher than the state unemployment rate.

To get a more accurate picture of unemployment in the entire school district, EdSource also looked at data from the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census bureau. The survey breaks down unemployment data by school district, providing average figures for 2010, the latest year available.

Those figures provide a far grimmer picture of unemployment within school district boundaries. They show that unemployment rates were in double digits in 27 out of the 30 districts.

The 2010 and 2012 figures should not be compared with one another because they are based on different methods of gathering the data. The American Community Survey (ACS) figures are typically higher than official unemployment rates, which are based on the Current Population Survey (CPS).

One of the main reasons for the [difference](#) is in how the two surveys define whether someone is unemployed.¹

Impact of High Unemployment on Schools and Children

Unemployment not only puts stress on families, but it can also cause families to lose their homes, forcing them to move and often requiring children to change schools and even districts. Students then face the double stress of reduced family income and adjusting to one or more new schools and communities.

Research on the relationship between unemployment and academic outcomes is in its infancy. However, a recent study of unemployment in North Carolina found that “job losses cause declines in test scores,” especially in the 8th grade and especially among low-income children.

More specifically, the study by Elizabeth Ananat and others at Duke University² concluded:

“Older children appear to be more harmed by job losses than younger children, either because they are developmentally more vulnerable or because families are better able to shield younger children from the effects of job losses. In addition, effects appear to differ by family socioeconomic status.”

Unemployment not only puts stress on families, but it can also cause families to lose their homes, forcing them to move and often requiring children to change schools and even districts. Students then face the double stress of reduced family income and adjusting to one or more new schools and communities.

NOTES

1 The American Community Survey (ACS) asks people if they are looking for work and available to take a job if offered one. The Current Population Survey (CPS) questionnaire, on the other hand, probes to see if people are “actively” looking for work—such as interviewing and calling contacts—as opposed to “passively” looking for work, such as reviewing want ads. The CPS counts a person as unemployed only if they are *actively* seeking work.

2 “The Effects of Local Employment Losses on Children’s Educational Achievement” by Elizabeth Ananat, et al. in *Whither Opportunity?* (Russell Sage Foundation 2011).

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

District	Unemployment Rate in 2010, by School District*	District	Unemployment Rate in January 2012, by Primary City Served by a School District**
Anaheim Union High	13.1%	Anaheim Union High	10.2%
Capistrano	9.8%	Capistrano	6.4%
Chino Valley	14.4%	Chino Valley	13.1%
Clovis	13.3%	Clovis	9.2%
Corona-Norco	12.5%	Corona-Norco	9.2%
Elk Grove	13.2%	Elk Grove	9.1%
Fontana	18.7%	Fontana	12.8%
Fremont	11.0%	Fremont	6.9%
Fresno	18.2%	Fresno	15.9%
Garden Grove	13.7%	Garden Grove	9.9%
Kern Union High	15.5%	Kern Union High	15.0% †
Long Beach	13.7%	Long Beach	13.2%
Los Angeles	13.1%	Los Angeles	13.3%
Montebello	11.9%	Montebello	13.4%
Moreno Valley	17.4%	Moreno Valley	14.5%
Mt. Diablo	11.4%	Mt. Diablo	9.6% †
Oakland	12.9%	Oakland	14.4%
Poway	9.6%	Poway	5.5%
Riverside	14.8%	Riverside	12.6%
Sacramento City	15.2%	Sacramento City	13.1%
Saddleback Valley	8.7%	Saddleback Valley	5.8%
San Bernardino City	18.6%	San Bernardino City	16.5%
San Diego	10.6%	San Diego	9.3%
San Francisco	9.0%	San Francisco	8.1%
San Jose	12.8%	San Jose	9.8%
San Juan	14.8%	San Juan	7.9%
Santa Ana	13.8%	Santa Ana	12.6%
Stockton	22.0%	Stockton	19.9%
Sweetwater Union High	13.9%	Sweetwater Union High	10.8%
Twin Rivers	18.8%	Twin Rivers	17.4%
California	12.8%	California	11.3%

NOTES

* The figures in this column are based on U.S. Census' [American Community Survey](#), 2010, the most recent figures available and the only statewide figures broken down by school district. The unemployment rate is determined by dividing the number of unemployed by the total civilian labor force 16 years and over within the geographical boundaries of a school district. The American Community Survey data are different—and typically higher—than unemployment rates reported by the state's Employment Development Department, which are based on the U.S. Census' [Current Population Survey](#). This occurs because of different sampling techniques and because different questions are asked. (See Note #1 on page 20 for a further explanation.)

** The figures in this column are based on the most recent unemployment data broken down by cities and counties, provided by the state's [Employment Development Department](#). They are seasonally unadjusted.

† The figure is based on the unemployment rate for the county where the district is located because there was no primary city.

DATA: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU'S AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 2010; CALIFORNIA EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, LABOR MARKET INFORMATION DIVISION, JANUARY 2012 PRELIMINARY DATA NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED, BASED ON U.S. CENSUS BUREAU'S CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

EDSOURCE 4/2012

CONCLUSION

California's largest school districts are coping with multiple stresses caused by the state's budget deficit and the still sickly national economy. At the same time, local educators are expected to introduce a raft of reforms within the next several years intended to help students achieve at higher levels.

Unless California addresses the underfunding of its K–12 public education system, its ability to provide core education services to students will be compromised, with long-term impacts on potentially millions of students.

Even before the current recession, California schools had to manage with fewer resources than almost any other state.

As a recent report from the American Institutes of Research found, after taking the state's higher cost of living into account, California's "cost-adjusted expenditures per pupil" have been "consistently low," hovering between 46th and 48th compared with all other states.¹

Even more disturbing, the actual dollar gap has grown more than fourfold during the past decade, according to the California Budget Project. In 2001–02, California spent \$691 less per student than the average in the United States. By 2010–11, the gap had grown to \$2,856 less per child.²

Complicating the entire fiscal situation is the fallout from a dysfunctional school finance system, shaped in part by Proposition 13, passed in 1978, which shifted the responsibility for financing schools from local communities to the state and made it next to impossible for local school districts to raise their own revenues for their schools.

Currently, parcel taxes on properties within a district—funds from which can be used to support staff and programs—require a two-thirds margin of victory for passage. In most communities, such a margin is almost impossible to reach.

Californians must also address the current inadequate funding for a wide range of child-oriented services that help ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter school, and that are essential to their success through their entire school careers. As this report has noted, schools increasingly do not have the resources to provide all the services that children need in order to succeed. That is especially the case with children from economically distressed households, who are likely to have a greater reliance on state-supported services such as pre-school programs, health and mental health services, summer employment, and out-of-school drop-out prevention programs.

In recent years, school superintendents have been asking the state to give them flexibility in how they spend state funds earmarked for a range of "categorical programs." At first glance this seems like a worthy approach. The



Photo courtesy of Lab Science Career

Unless California addresses the underfunding of its K–12 public education system, its ability to provide core education services to students will be compromised, with long-term impacts on potentially millions of students.

NOTES

1 "California's K-12 Education System During a Fiscal Crisis," American Institutes for Research, February 2011.

2 "A Decade of Disinvestment: California Education Spending," California Budget Project, October 2011.

It should be clear from the conditions described in this report that California must move to relieve its schools of some of the stresses that threaten to smother their attempts to help children succeed.

Legislature has made giant strides in this direction by eliminating requirements for how districts spend some funds previously designated for specific purposes.

Eliminating restrictions on spending may help districts manage their budgets during a time of great stress, but there is no assurance, or evidence, that this flexibility will result in better academic outcomes. In fact, with their newfound flexibility, many school districts have either abolished or significantly cut back programs that benefit students, such as summer sessions and smaller class sizes, with unknown long-term impacts on student success. Going forward, more flexibility in how they spend their revenues from the state will need to be offset by some assurances that programs essential for student achievement will be maintained.

It should be clear from the conditions described in this report that California must move to relieve its schools of some of the stresses that threaten to smother their attempts to help children succeed.

If it is unable to do so, the academic gains California schools and students have been striving for the past two decades will become an even more elusive target. In addition, major new reforms, such as the Common Core State Standards, new accountability measures, and linking schoolwork more closely to student careers, will be far more difficult to implement.

This November, voters will most likely have an opportunity to approve ballot initiatives that will either restore school funding that has been eliminated in the past few years, or will provide additional funds to supplement what the state is obligated to provide under the terms of Proposition 98, the 1998 voter initiative intended to guarantee a certain portion of the state's general fund for its public schools.

With November approaching, it will be up to civic leaders, local educators, and parents with children in the public schools to help voters understand the multiple stresses their neighborhood schools are under, and the importance of stable and sufficient education funding to the future of their communities and the state. [II](#)





Photo courtesy of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

To Learn More

Teacher Layoffs

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To Learn More continued

Fiscal Crisis

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