

Test Scores Fall, Unions Want More

California teachers want a big raise even after student reading falls again.

By The Editorial Board [Follow](#)

Feb. 6, 2025 5:46 pm ET



A kindergarten teacher helps a student with writing alphabet letters at Golden Empire Elementary School, Sacramento, Calif., Sept. 15, 2022. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

An iron rule of education politics is that the more test scores decline, the more money the teachers unions demand. So it goes in California where student test scores keep falling despite ever more money flowing to public schools.

The California Teachers Association (CTA) on Tuesday launched a coordinated collective-bargaining campaign across 32 school districts to demand more state funding, higher pay and more generous benefits. The district labor agreements expire in June, which not coincidentally is also when the state budget gets finalized.

“We are facing a crisis in our public schools,” CTA president David Goldberg declared. He’s right, but the problem isn’t a lack of money. The Nation’s Report Card last week showed a continued decline in California test scores. Only 29% of fourth graders scored proficient in reading and 35% in math. Test scores haven’t improved since 2009.

Yet state K-12 spending has increased by a third since 2019 and two-and-a-half fold since 2009. Talk about diminishing returns. Student enrollment has declined by 360,000 since the start of the pandemic. Lower-income and -performing districts have experienced the biggest declines. One reason is that Covid lockdowns and school shutdowns spurred families, especially working-class Hispanics who lost jobs, to leave the state. Some parents also started home-schooling.

Because state aid to schools is based on enrollment, many that have lost students are struggling financially as their costs have ballooned. Unions negotiated big salary increases when districts were swimming in federal Covid relief. The average California teacher made \$101,084 last school year, not including the government’s roughly \$30,000 contribution to their pensions.

As federal pandemic dollars dry up, school districts across the state are running deficits and warning of layoffs. Last week the Santa Ana Unified School District—whose enrollment has declined by nearly a quarter—approved nearly 300 layoffs.

All of which means the unions are targeting their Democratic dance partners in Sacramento for a bailout. The state is running a small budget surplus this year thanks to buoyant capital gains revenue from stock-market gains. Watch for a big payout to the unions that ignores the sorry performance of the schools they run.