

## [Money alone can't fix California's underperforming schools](#)

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Whenever progressives talk about public education, the conversation inevitably goes to the need for more money because our schools are chronically underfunded. And of course we can just tax the rich to pay for it.

That was exactly the argument presented to voters when California passed Proposition 30 in 2012, which raised sales and income taxes in response to Gov. Brown's threat of large cuts to the public education if it failed.

Since then, the state budget has provided tens of billions of extra dollars to K-12 schools with much of it directed to districts with high numbers of disadvantaged students. So what improvements to our education system are Californians getting for the higher taxes they approved? Five years later, the latest results from state testing shows that taxpayers are getting a horrible return on their investment.

For 2017, standardized tests result showed only 49 percent of students met the academic standards for English and math was significantly worse with only 38 percent meeting the mark, [according to the California Department of Education](#).

SLO County students only [fared slightly better](#) as 55 percent meet the English standards and 43 percent for math.

### [Student report cards are in — here's how SLO County districts did on the state tests](#)

It's important to note that the state revamped its standardized test in 2015 to be an online exam that is more intuitive and a better gauge of a student's actual learning ability. Despite this, the latest test results were so bad that the state Board of Education changed its methodology of how it categorizes the worst performing schools because too many fell into the classification and they also boosted the number of "top performers" as well. When the data is embarrassing, just change the benchmarks.

When we compare ourselves to other states, California ranks 32nd in the country in SAT scores, [according to test preparation company Prep Expert](#), and [US News and World Reports](#) ranks our K-12 system at 42nd.

Clearly, we have a lot of work to do.

Passed in 2013, the "Local Control Funding Formula" was supposed to be California's key to putting our public schools on a path to success by allowing more spending discretion at the local level and kicking in extra resources for low-income students and English learners. Despite extra funding for the state, challenged school districts failed to

close the achievement gap as 75 percent of economically disadvantaged students failed to meet the standards in English and math.

This year, California is [spending \\$74.5 billion dollars per year on K-12 schools](#)— an increase of \$27 billion since 2011. With the state General Fund at \$125 billion total, well more than half the budget is dedicated to K-12 schools, so why aren't our students learning more?

The greatest myth existing in education politics is that money alone can close the achievement gap. The truth is that it will take bold reforms to accomplish that. This means taking on the powerful education establishment. As someone who was the leading Republican on the State Assembly's Education Committee and a former elementary school teacher, I have observed what really drives education policy for many years.

Teachers unions and their powerful campaign war chests means they can shoot down every effort to reform public education no matter how modest. Despite their best efforts, local school districts have their hands tied by union-friendly state laws. The result has been that ineffective teachers stay in the class practically for life (lower the career trajectory of swaths of students in the process), charter schools are harassed and short-changed at both the local and state level, and an utter lack of accountability protects everyone involved.

It should be unacceptable to state leaders to know the majority of students failing to meet the most basic levels of proficiency despite all the investment we put into our schools. Our struggling public education system will have future implications on everything from the economy to crime to income inequality.

According to Georgetown University, by 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require a college degree or some level of college education. It's difficult to see how we can equip students for this future job market if only 38 percent can meet basic standards for math.

Progressives are completely wrong about public education. Our schools are not underfunded. They are poorly managed and constrained by a system that prevents meaningful accountability.

Financial resources are important, but money alone will never fix what ails California's school. Bringing real reforms that ensures a good teacher is in every classroom and gives parents options of where they send their kids are the steps we need to take.

We can continue to throw more money at a broken system, or the education establishment can wake up to reality and realize things must change. Our students are counting on us to make the right decision.

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