Who Gets What?

Per-Pupil Funding in LAUSD Amid Declining Enrollment

GPSN

CATALYZING EXCELLENCE
IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Table of Contents

Introduction

As Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) grapples with the realities of declining enrollment, a key question is how resources flow to the students who remain — and whether those resources are effectively used to sustain and grow the district's recent gains in student achievement.

Our recent analysis of enrollment trends shows how demographic shifts are reshaping the district's student population and the financial conditions under which schools operate. In a moment marked by declining enrollment, understanding how per-pupil funding is distributed and used across LAUSD's schools is critical to realizing the district's academic goals and advancing its strategic priorities.

Over the past decade, California and LAUSD have made efforts to allocate funds in alignment with student need, including California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) as well as LAUSD's Student Equity Need Index (SENI) and Black Student Achievement Plan (BSAP). Recent district initiatives, like Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho's designation of 100 "priority" schools to receive targeted supports and investments, also signal a continued commitment to this student-centered funding approach.[1]

But in practice, per-pupil allocations do not always align with what it takes to serve students well, nor do they guarantee that school leaders have the flexibility, guidance, and ability to respond to their communities' unique needs.[2] Per-pupil funding can still vary dramatically, even among similar schools with similar levels of need. In other cases, similar schools on opposite ends of the need spectrum can receive roughly the same amount of per-pupil funding. And even after funding is allocated, its impact depends on how resources are spent and the discretion school leaders have — factors that shape what reaches classrooms, what supports are available, and ultimately, the learning opportunities students can access.

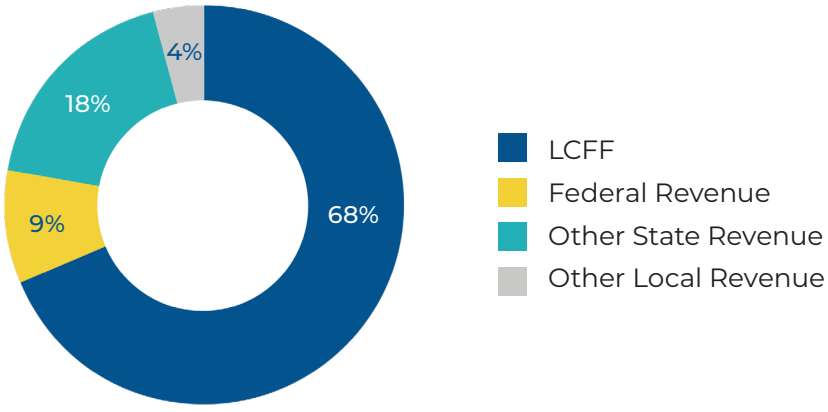
This report examines how per-pupil funding is distributed and used across LAUSD schools, building on prior studies of funding disparities and resource allocation and spending, and offering a more granular, updated view of current per-pupil allocations and spending.[3] We begin by outlining how the district funds its schools, with per-pupil funding averaging $19,217 across elementary, middle, senior high, and K-12 span schools in SY24-25. Next, we assess the relationship between funding and various school characteristics and find that per-pupil funding aligns with student need in the aggregate, but a closer look at the disaggregated data shows wide variation across schools. We then turn to the uses of funding, finding that staffing patterns, enrollment declines, fixed costs, vacancies, limited budgetary discretion, and carryover decisions can present challenges to how school leaders translate their per-pupil dollars into learning opportunities. Finally, we offer several considerations for LAUSD and state policymakers to better align the flow and use of dollars to student need.

How LAUSD Funds Its Schools

With more than 400,000 students served across nearly 800 TK-12 district schools and a budget of $18.8 billion, LAUSD operates at a scale unmatched by any other school system in California.[4] Nationally, LAUSD's budget and enrollment rank second only to New York City Public Schools, which has a budget of $41.2 billion and serves just over 900,000 students.[5] LAUSD's budget is also nearly double that of Chicago Public Schools, which has a budget of $9.9 billion and serves over 300,000 students.[6] LAUSD's size underscores its unique position as a massive urban district managing extensive resources, complex needs, and a sprawling physical footprint.

LAUSD's financial resources are sourced from a blend of federal, state, and local revenue streams. The vast majority comes from the state through the LCFF, which distributes funds to districts through a base grant for every student, plus additional dollars for high-need groups such as English learners, low-income students, and foster youth. Funds are pooled in LAUSD's General Fund (*see Figure 1*), then distributed to individual schools by district allocation systems, staffing formulas, and programmatic priorities. The largest portion of funding goes to schools as nondiscretionary staff positions rather than flexible dollars, with norm tables specifying the type of staff and number of positions each school receives based on enrollment thresholds. Norm tables, which are negotiated with the district's collective bargaining units, are designed to ensure that staffing (including teachers, administrators, clerical staff, aides, and counselors) aligns with the student population and key school characteristics.[7]

Figure 1: LAUSD General Fund Revenue Components, SY24-25

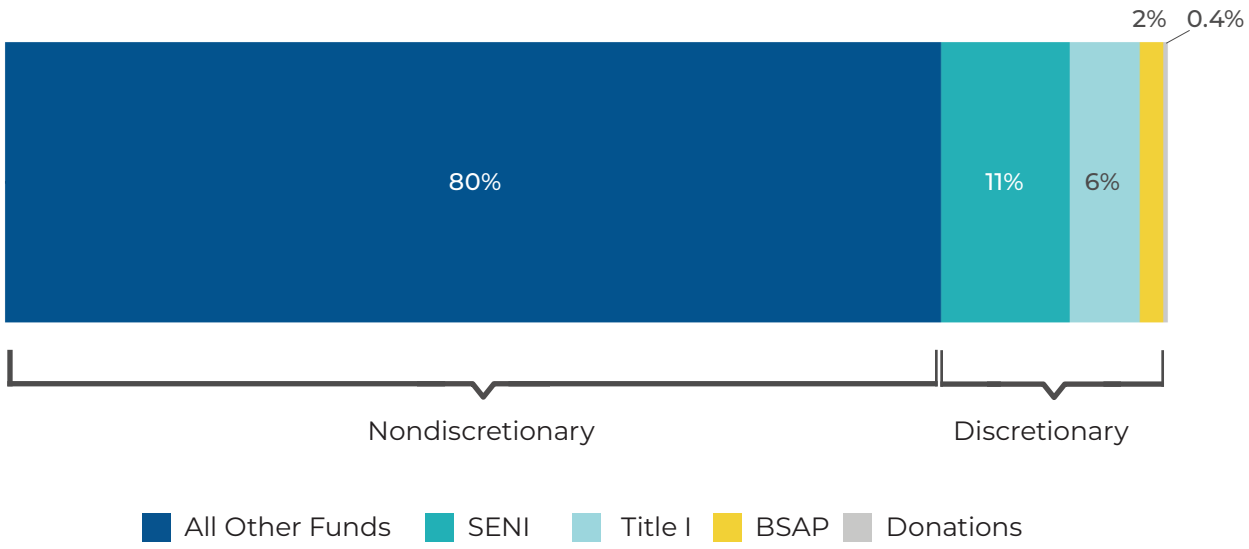


Source: LAUSD (Proposed Budget, 2024-25)

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Over the past decade, LAUSD has made efforts to increase the public's understanding of the district's financial practices, including the creation of the Budget Transparency Tool to increase visibility into how resources are allocated. Additionally, the district has launched initiatives like the SENI and the BSAP to direct additional support to the district's highest-need students. These moves are critical, especially because virtually all LAUSD schools meet the thresholds for additional resources under California's LCFF and qualify for Title I funding under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), meaning they serve a high-need student population as defined by federal standards.[8] In the most recently completed school year (SY2024–25), this flow of dollars amounted to **$19,217 per pupil per school**, aggregated across LAUSD's elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools.[9] Of this, approximately 80% was nondiscretionary and 20% was discretionary funding — namely, SENI, Title I, BSAP, and donations (*see Figure 2*).

Figure 2: Funding Sources of the Average LAUSD School Budget, SY24-25

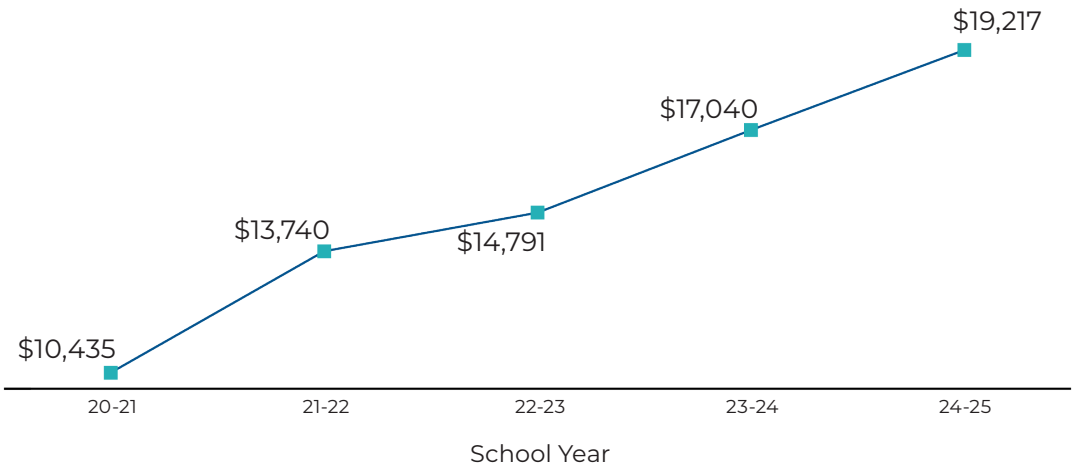


Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool)

Note: School site budget components represent average SY24-25 proportions of elementary, middle, senior high, and span school budgets. Carryover funds are not included. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding. The proportions shown are general approximations of discretionary and nondiscretionary budget components; actual school budgets may include additional discretionary and nondiscretionary elements not captured here. Additionally, not all funding sources (e.g., BSAP or donations) exist in all school budgets. For a deeper dive into LAUSD budget processes, see GPSN's Budget Insights.

Per-pupil funding has also grown over time (*see Figure 3*), up 84% from SY20-21 to SY24-25 (55% when adjusted for inflation[10]). This increase was fueled, in part, by California's strong economy, which allowed the state to direct billions more to schools through LCFF and new categorical programs.[11] During this same period, the district has seen record-breaking gains in student achievement, and the district's strategic investments have played a role in that progress.[12]

Figure 3: Per-Pupil Funding of the Average LAUSD School Budget Over Time



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool)

Note: These figures represent the average values across elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools included in our analysis, rather than a calculation based on total budget divided by total student enrollment.

More dollars per student is worth celebrating, but it is just one part of a more complex story about the distribution of per-pupil funding across schools, how funds are (or are not) spent, and whether funding is translating to improving students' opportunities and outcomes.

Per-Pupil Growth — A Closer Look

Rising per-pupil funding suggests all LAUSD schools have more resources, but the reality is more complicated. Much of the surge resulted from one-time federal pandemic aid that provided critical but temporary relief that sunset last year.[13] LAUSD's recent SY25-26 budget taps reserves, funds that the district saved from prior years and set aside for future needs or for emergencies like recessions,[14] in order to preserve and expand many of these services.[15]

Not all of LAUSD's additional dollars come with flexibility, either. For instance, California's state categorical grants, dollars earmarked for specific programs or student groups, can help address targeted challenges, but they also limit local discretion. Because districts must follow state rules on how these funds are spent, school leaders are constrained in how they use those dollars to respond to their communities' unique needs.[16]

Meanwhile, declining enrollment complicates the picture further. Per-pupil figures can rise even as overall resources stay flat, since fixed costs must still be covered. Recent changes to the state's Average Daily Attendance (ADA) formula have softened the immediate blow of enrollment losses by allowing districts to use multiyear averages, but this cushion only delays the impact rather than solving it.[17]

Per-pupil funding growth is real, but not always permanent, flexible, or adequate. How much those dollars matter for students depends on how they are allocated and whether school leaders can use them effectively.

Patterns in Per-Pupil Funding

LAUSD's funding allocations are generally aligned with student need *in the aggregate*, but those patterns look very different when *disaggregated* by various school characteristics. The next two sections explore both sides of this picture: the broad trend of more resources flowing to higher-need schools, and the significant per-pupil variation that emerges across schools.

Overall Patterns Aligned to Student Need

Broadly, LAUSD's funding patterns reflect dollar allocations aligned to student need: Schools serving higher-need students generally receive more per-pupil funding. Allocating per-pupil funding based on student need is consistent with state mandates and the goal of district funding formulas.

This pattern is clearest when looking at the per-pupil funding of schools by SENI quintiles (*see Figure 4*), which categorize schools from highest to lowest need based on academic outcomes, student socioeconomic status, and other factors.[18] Schools in higher-need quintiles receive larger per-pupil allocations overall, in part because of targeted initiatives like SENI and BSAP. These additional dollars are meant to give leaders flexibility to respond to local needs, including strategies like hiring intervention teachers, expanding mental health supports, or funding enrichment programs. On average, the highest-need schools receive $7,270 more per pupil than the lowest-need schools, enough in a 500-student school to hire more than 25 additional teachers or significantly expand program offerings like art and music.[19]

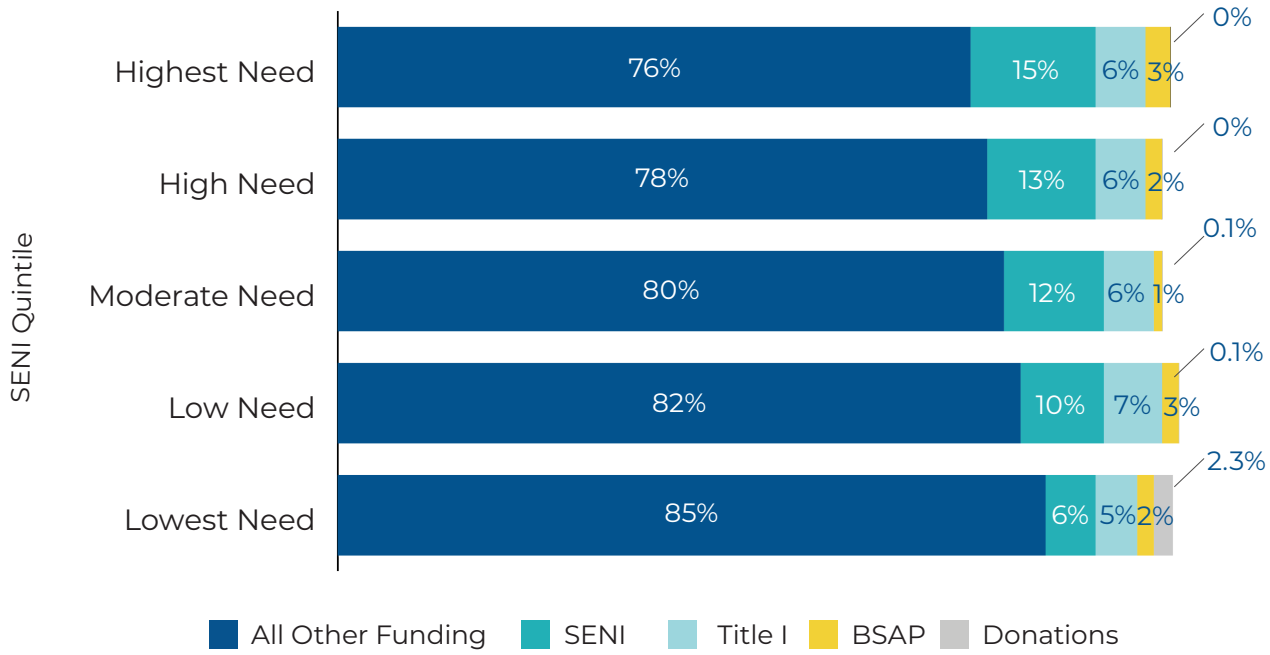
Figure 4: Average Per-Pupil Funding in LAUSD Schools by Need, SY24-25

Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were used to determine SY24-25 allocations.

A closer look at the composition of school budgets (*see Figure 5*) shows the role SENI allocations play: As the largest pot of discretionary funding, SENI makes up a growing share of total dollars as student need increases. The highest-need schools receive $3,220 in SENI dollars on average (15% of their total funding), while the lowest-need schools receive $860 in SENI on average (6%).[20] Variation across schools aligned to student need would exist even without SENI and other need-based allocations such as BSAP and Title I, as well as community and private donations, since the remaining funding is $4,000 higher for the highest-need schools than for the lowest-need schools.[21] However, SENI amplifies the extra boost that higher-need schools receive.

Figure 5: Funding Sources of the Average LAUSD School Budget by Need, SY24-25



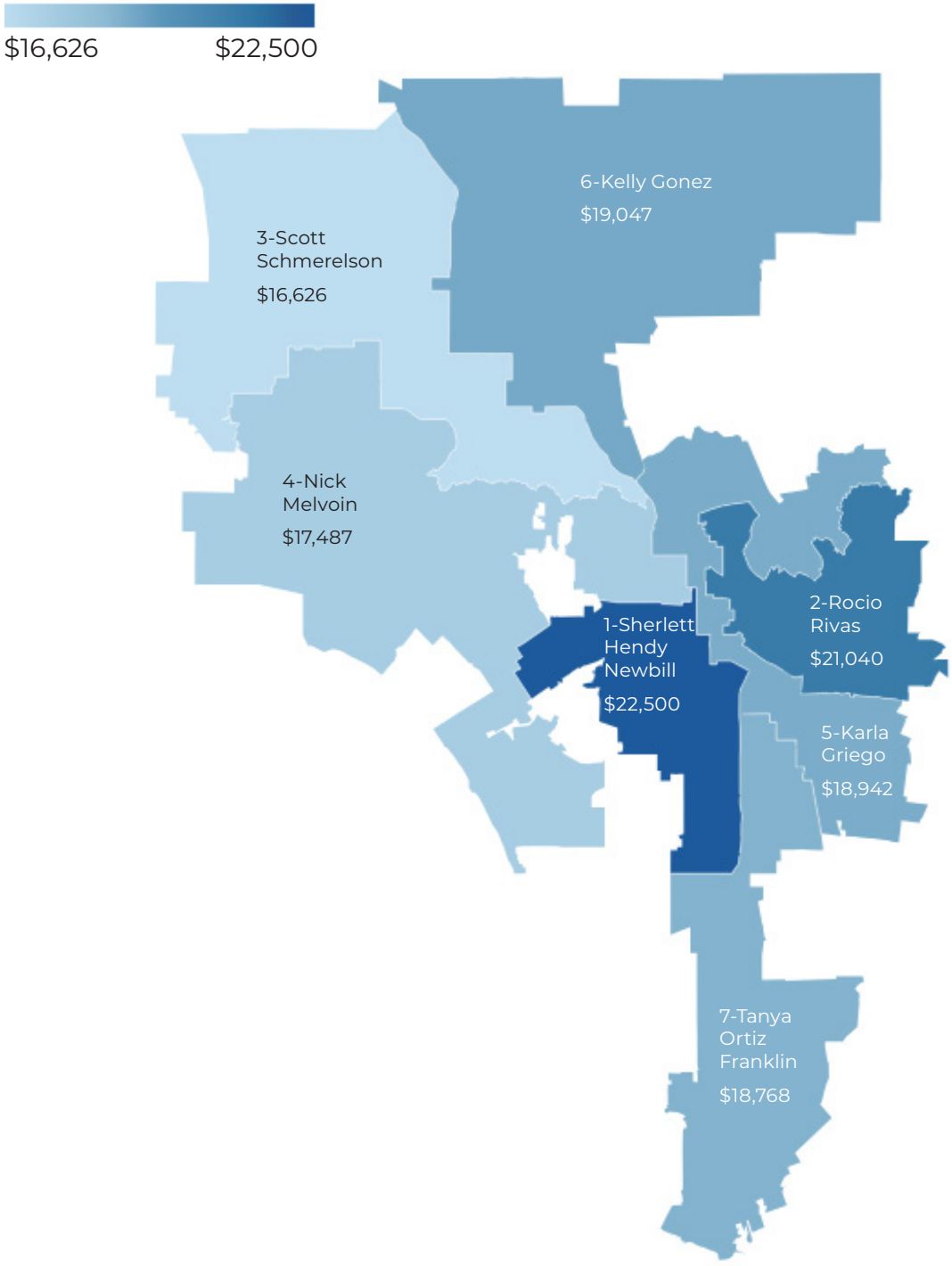
Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were used to determine SY24-25 allocations. Averages may add up to over 100% due to rounding.

Similar patterns appear when comparing Board Districts (*see Figure 6*). Board District 1, where 61% of schools are designated high- or highest-need, receives the most per-pupil funding on average.[22] By contrast, Board Districts 3 and 4, which have the smallest share of schools in these categories (16% and 8%, respectively), receive the least.[23]

While the relationship between per-pupil funding and need is less consistent in the other Board Districts, SENI allocations still generally align with student need. For example, SENI funds account for only 9% and 8% of the total budget in Board Districts 3 and 4, respectively, compared to 11-13% in Board Districts 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7.[24]

Figure 6: Average Per-Pupil Funding in LAUSD Schools by Board District, SY24-25



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; State Reporting Services Branch)

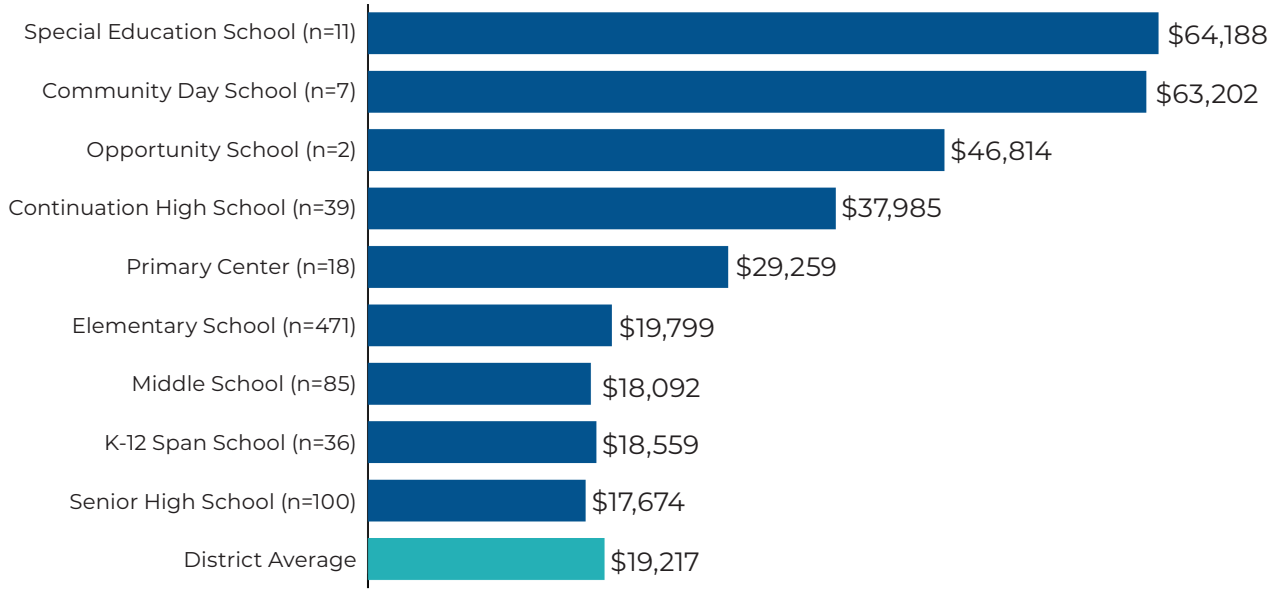
Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools.

Other measures of student need show a similar pattern. Schools with the lowest math performance or the highest rates of chronic absenteeism each receive over $5,000 more per pupil than schools that are higher-performing or have lower absenteeism rates.[25] Similar trends appear across demographics: Schools with the largest shares of students of color,[26] students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, or English learners all receive roughly $4,000 to $5,000 more per pupil than those with the fewest shares of these students.[27] Together, these trends reinforce that schools serving higher-need populations are allocated additional resources.

Funding also varies by school type in ways that reflect differences in student need (*see Figure 7*). Specialized schools, such as special education schools for students with disabilities or opportunity schools for students who have struggled in traditional settings, receive significantly more per-pupil funding due to smaller class sizes, more specialized staff, and additional services to meet student need. Non-charter district schools and affiliated charter schools also receive different levels of per-pupil funding in general, with non-charters receiving $19,550 per pupil and affiliated charters receiving $14,942 per pupil.[28] The gap can be explained by the differences in student need, as most affiliated charters in LAUSD serve lower-need, higher-income, and disproportionately white student populations.[29]

Taken together, these trends show that LAUSD's funding system is working as intended in the aggregate, with per-pupil funding generally aligned with student need. Yet when we look more closely, funding levels vary widely across individual schools.

Figure 7: Average Per-Pupil Funding by LAUSD School Type, SY24-25



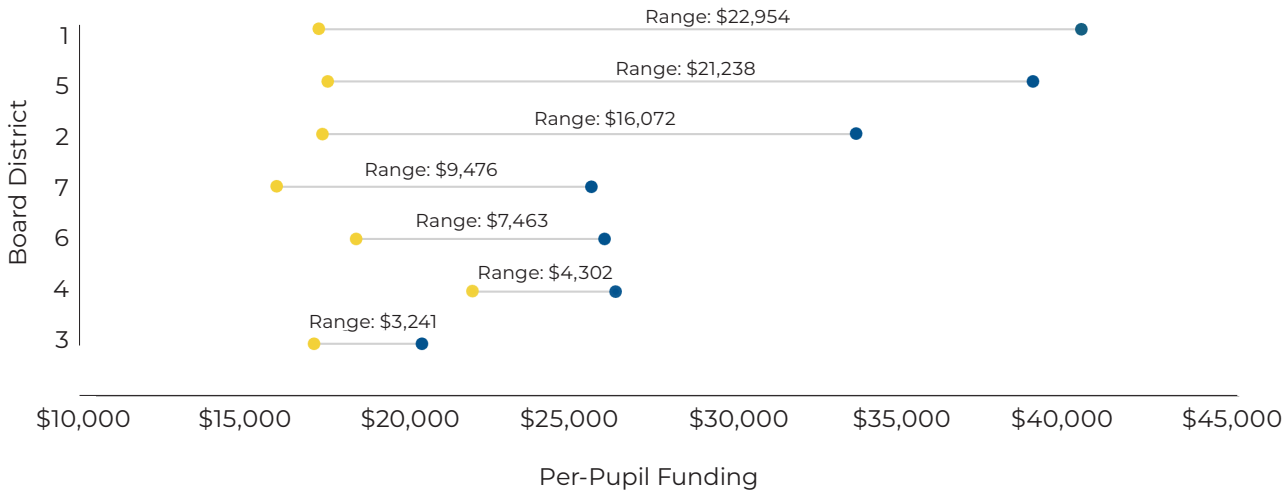
Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool)

Note: Elementary, middle, senior high, and span school values are inclusive of stand-alone magnets and magnet centers. Additionally, for simplicity, independent study and home and hospital have been excluded.

Wide Ranges in Per-Pupil Funding

Even within the same SENI quintile, schools of similar type and need level can receive dramatically different per-pupil amounts. The highest-need neighborhood elementary schools experience a wide range of per-pupil funding, with many schools receiving nearly $5,000 more or less per student than the average.[30] Even within the same Board District, highest-need schools of the same type can have wide variation in per-pupil funding, with District 1 (home to the largest share of highest-need schools) showing the greatest spread between its most- and least-funded neighborhood elementary schools, while Districts 3 and 4 (with fewer high-need schools) show the narrowest range (*see Figure 8*).

Figure 8: Range of Per-Pupil Funding Across Highest-Need LAUSD Elementary Schools by Board District, SY24-25



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25; State Reporting Services Branch)

Note: Pairings reflect per-pupil differences between each Board District's highest-need neighborhood elementary schools. The chart shows SY24-25 per-pupil figures, and SENI quintile classifications used reflect SY23-24, which were used to determine SY24-25 allocations.

Looking across Board Districts, 66th Street Elementary in Board District 7 and Holmes Avenue Elementary in Board District 1 illustrate some of the widest variations in per-pupil funding (*see Figure 9*). Both were rated as highest-need schools for the SY24-25 budgeting process, yet they had a difference of $22,767 per pupil.

Figure 9:

	66TH STREET ELEMENTARY	HOLMES AVENUE ELEMENTARY
Board District/Region	7 / South	5 / East
Grades Served	TK-6	TK-6
SENI Quintile	Highest Need	Highest Need
Percent Students of Color	99%	99%
Percent FRPM Eligible	98%	100%
Math Performance	Yellow	Red
Total Staff	69	29
Average Teacher Cost	$154,685	$141,890
Norm Day Enrollment	644	129
Enrollment Change SY20-21 to SY24-25	-16%	-26%
Instructional Vacancies	2 (4%)	4 (17%)
Discretionary Budget	36%	22%
Carryover	$1,168,259	$422,587
Donations Per Pupil	$0	$0
Per-Pupil Funding	**$16,015**	**$38,782**
Difference	**$22,767**	

Note: Chart details are based on SY24-25 data, except for performance data, which is from SY23-24 (the most recent year of data available) and staff and vacancy data, which reflect current staffing trends as of September 16, 2025. To calculate instructional vacancy percentages, we divided the number of vacancies by the total instructional roles (filled and vacant). SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were used to determine SY24-25 SENI allocations. Shaded rows align with the headers of sections where these factors are discussed in more detail (see uneven staffing patterns and expenditures; fixed costs amid declining enrollment; persistent vacancies despite staffing allocations; limited school leader autonomy; carryover of unspent funds; and donations).

In other cases, a low- or lowest-need school may receive nearly the same per-pupil dollar amount as a high- or highest-need school. Valley View Elementary School, a lowest-need school in Board District 3, and 95th Street Elementary, a highest-need school in Board District 1, differed by just $9 per student in SY24-25 despite their vastly different student populations and needs (*see Figure 10*).

Figure 10:

	VALLEY VIEW ELEMENTARY	95TH STREET ELEMENTARY
Board District/Region	3 / West	1 / South
Grades Served	TK-5	TK-5
SENI Quintile	Lowest Need	Highest Need
Percent Students of Color	52%	99%
Percent FRPM Eligible	42%	99%
Math Performance	Blue	Yellow
Total Staff	19	86
Average Teacher Cost	$150,159	$133,634
Norm Day Enrollment	151	751
Enrollment Change SY20-21 to SY24-25	-31%	-17%
Instructional Vacancies	2 (18%)	4 (6%)
Discretionary Budget	18%	39%
Carryover	$176,515	$1,513,188
Donations Per Pupil	$297	$0
Per-Pupil Funding	**$18,576**	**$18,585**
Difference	**$9**	

Note: Chart details are based on SY24-25 data, except for performance data, which is from SY23-24 (the most recent year of data available) and staff and vacancy data, which reflect current staffing trends as of September 16, 2025. To calculate instructional vacancy percentages, we divided the number of vacancies by the total instructional roles (filled and vacant). SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were used to determine SY24-25 SENI allocations. Shaded rows align with the headers of sections where these factors are discussed in more detail (see uneven staffing patterns and expenditures; fixed costs amid declining enrollment; persistent vacancies despite staffing allocations; limited school leader autonomy; carryover of unspent funds; and donations).

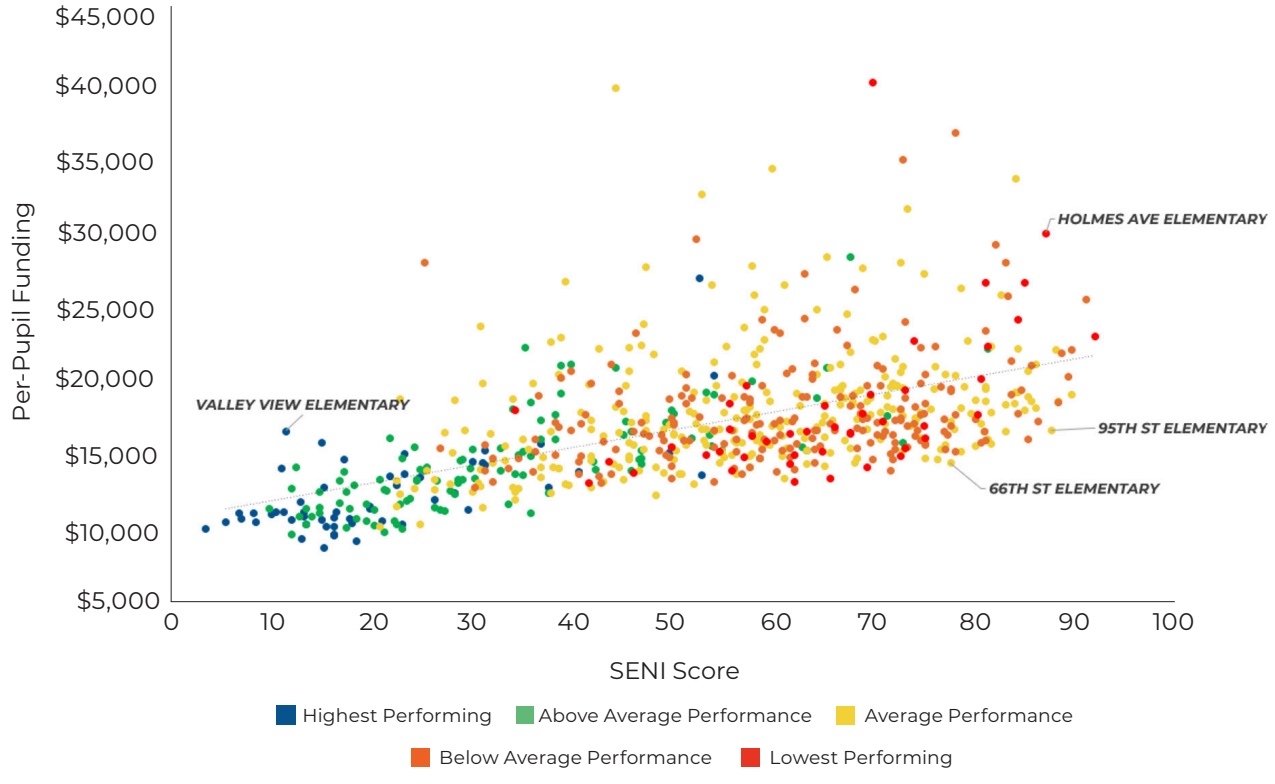
Variation like this — where schools with similar needs receive vastly different per-pupil funding, and those with opposite need levels receive the same funding — suggests that LAUSD's funding model does not consistently align resources with student need. For instance, one driver of these disparities is not *student need* but *enrollment*, with smaller schools often appearing better funded per pupil on paper. In the next section, we will revisit 66th Street, Holmes Avenue, Valley View, and 95th Street Elementaries as we take a closer look at how they use their per-pupil allocations and how factors in the tables above, including enrollment levels, shape school leader decisions.

The Uses (and Disuses) of Per-Pupil Dollars

Per-pupil allocations matter, and more resources can support better outcomes.[31] Recognizing the importance of targeting resources, LAUSD channels additional dollars to schools that are both lower-performing and higher-need through SENI, resulting in significantly greater funding on average *(see Figure 11)*.

Higher dollars, however, do not automatically translate into better experiences for students or improved academic outcomes. The extent to which funding benefits students depends on whether school leaders can *direct* and *deploy* resources in ways that meet local needs, expand opportunities for students, and support teaching and learning.

Figure 11: Average Per-Pupil Funding in LAUSD Schools By Need and Performance, SY23-24



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2023-24); California Department of Education (Academic Indicators Downloadable Data Files)

Note: Performance ratings are from SY23-24, the most recent year available for this data. SENI scores reflect SY22-23, which were used to determine SY23-24 allocations.

In this section, we focus on five major factors that illustrate the challenges school leaders face in using their per-pupil dollars: uneven staffing patterns and expenditures; fixed costs amid declining enrollment; persistent vacancies despite staffing allocations; limited school leader autonomy; and the carryover of unspent funds.

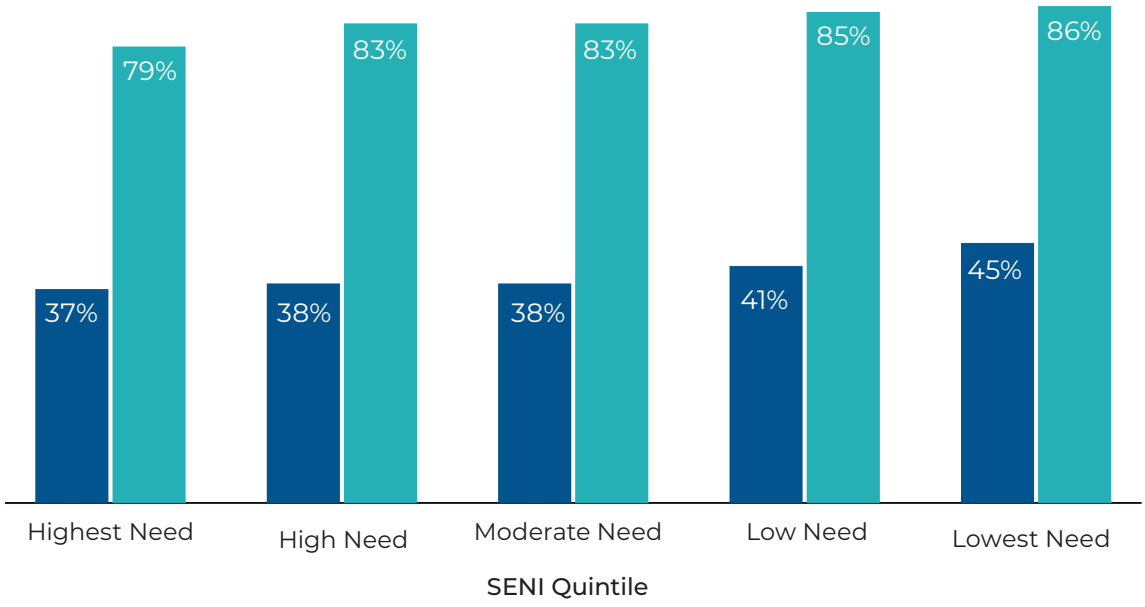
Uneven Staffing Expenditures and Patterns

Staffing policies are one factor that illustrates the challenges school leaders face in deploying school budgets to meet student need. Because LAUSD allocates positions rather than flexible dollars to schools, enrollment shifts determine which roles a school can hire or retain, and salary costs remain outside school leaders' control.

Even small shifts in student enrollment can determine whether a school keeps a classroom teacher, guidance counselor, or reading specialist — all changes that influence the range of programs and supports available to students. For instance, under the SY25-26 staffing ratios norm tables that govern these allocations, a TK-3 elementary school with 463 students is allocated 22 teachers.[32] If enrollment were to drop by just three students, bringing the total to 460, the school would lose a teacher position, even though the change in student enrollment is relatively small.[33] Because allocations are driven primarily by enrollment rather than student need, two schools serving very different populations may still be assigned the same number of positions. These dynamics can play out not only schoolwide but also within grades: Two schools of similar size and demographics can receive identical staffing allocations yet end up with very different class sizes, teacher workloads, and student experiences across grades, including blended classes (e.g., a K/1 split or 4th/5th split) or classes with disproportionately greater concentrations of need.

Schools also vary in terms of the experience and education levels of the teachers they employ, something that further poses a challenge to school leaders, directly influences school budgets, and shapes the student learning experience. Because schools receive positions rather than lump-sum dollars, their budgets reflect the actual salaries of the staff they employ, not what they might otherwise be able to afford based on student population and the revenue it generates. Lower-need schools in communities with more affluent families often attract more veteran and highly trained teachers (*see Figure 12*), whose salaries are typically higher, thus elevating per-pupil funding totals. As a result, two schools with the same staffing allocations can have very different budgets. At the same time, schools with fewer experienced teachers do not retain any "savings" from lower salary costs, leaving higher-need schools that struggle to attract veteran staff with lower overall expenditures but no additional resources to support students. Although our analysis shows that average per-pupil funding is not strongly associated with teacher experience or credentials, these staffing differences still matter as they influence students' day-to-day classroom experience.

Figure 12: Average Percentage of Teachers with 2+ Years or Master's Degree+ in LAUSD Schools by Need, SY23-24



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2023-24); California Department of Education (Staff Downloadable Files)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. The California Department of Education defines an experienced teacher as one who has taught for 2+ years. Teachers who complete two consecutive years of probationary service are granted permanent employee status, or tenure, within LAUSD.[34]

Returning to the examples of Valley View Elementary and 95th Street Elementary: Both schools are allocated nearly identical per-pupil funding amounts despite starkly different need levels (*see Figure 10*). Valley View, a lowest-need school, spends an average of $150,159 per teacher, including benefits. By contrast, 95th Street Elementary, a highest-need school, spends an average of $133,634 per teacher, including benefits. While this does not fully explain why schools at opposite ends of the need spectrum receive similar per-pupil funding, it illustrates how staffing costs can influence overall budgets.

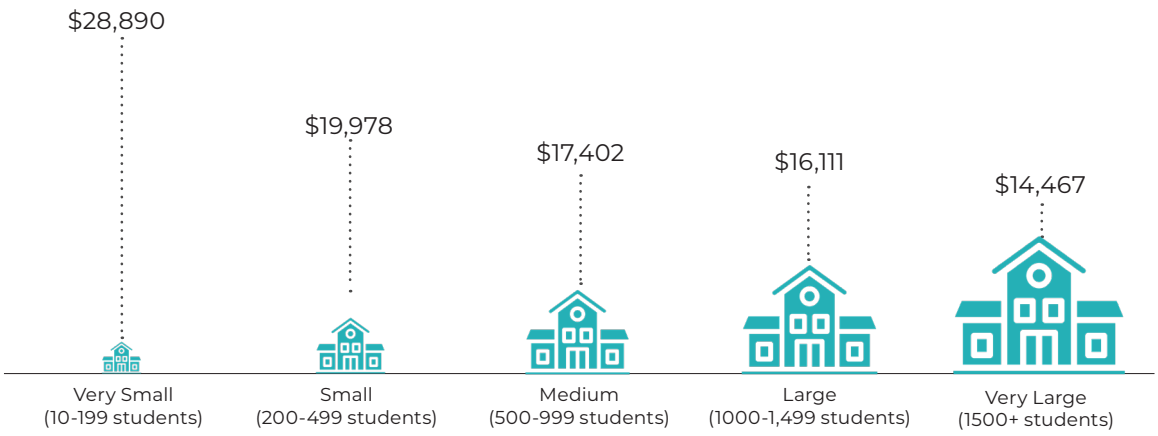
Inadequate Funding for Teachers

LAUSD's broader budget constraints also sharply limit staffing flexibility and sustainability. In its most recent budget, the district diverted money from retirement funds to prevent teacher layoffs and left future salary increases unresolved, moves strongly opposed by United Teachers Los Angeles.[35] These choices highlight a deeper challenge: LAUSD faces billions in long-term unfunded retirement and health benefit liabilities, so dollars available for staff must be balanced against obligations to future commitments.[36] Both competitive compensation today and secure retirement benefits tomorrow are essential for attracting and retaining an effective workforce, but the district's fiscal pressures force difficult trade-offs between the two. This tension can compound challenges school leaders face in hiring and retaining staff, underscoring that the district's structural budget pressures, not just school site allocation rules, shape the resources students experience in their classrooms.

Fixed Costs Amid Declining Enrollment

The dynamics around salaries and staffing costs intersect with another structural challenge: Fixed positions such as principals, custodians, and office staff remain essential regardless of school size, meaning that as enrollment falls, these roles and other fixed costs consume a larger share of per-pupil funding. Smaller schools with fewer students often appear to be more highly funded on paper (*see Figure 13*), but without the economies of scale that benefit larger schools, those higher funding totals do not necessarily mean that school leaders have more discretionary dollars to meet student need; instead, they often reflect the fixed costs of operating a school.

Figure 13: Average Per-Pupil Funding by LAUSD School Size, SY24-25



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool)
Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools.

At first glance, it might seem counterintuitive that smaller schools end up with larger per-pupil allocations. Because LCFF funding is tied to ADA, total dollars usually fall when enrollment drops. Staffing allocations are also tied to enrollment thresholds, so fewer students mean fewer funded teaching positions, which further lowers the overall budget. However, staffing costs, as well as other costs like basic equipment, do not always scale down in parallel with enrollment decreases. When those fixed and semi-fixed costs, many of which are covered by a school's general fund program dollars, are divided by a smaller number of students, the per-pupil figure can rise even though the actual dollars available for core instruction, electives, or enrichment programming to support students may be smaller than before.

For these reasons, a high per-pupil figure does not necessarily translate into more services or opportunities aligned with student need and can mean that, for many students in low-enrollment schools, fewer peers can mean fewer resources and learning opportunities. This dynamic helps explain why two schools within the same need band can have very different per-pupil figures: One may have a much smaller student body and a higher operational cost burden.

Remember the two schools mentioned earlier: 66th Street Elementary and Holmes Avenue Elementary, both of which are rated highest-need under SENI (*see Figure 9*). On paper, Holmes Avenue receives nearly $23,000 more per student than 66th Street. But the difference may be driven largely by scale: 66th Street serves

nearly five times as many students (644), with a per-pupil allocation of $16,015, while Holmes Avenue, with far fewer students (129), receives $38,782 per pupil. That does not necessarily mean Holmes Avenue students are actually receiving $22,767 more in educational benefits than their peers at 66th Street. Instead, much of the gap may reflect the costs of operating a much smaller school. A similar pattern is also at play when examining how a large, high-need school like 95th Street Elementary (which serves 751 students) can appear to have a similar per-pupil amount as a much smaller, lower-need school like Valley View Elementary (which serves just 151 students; *see Figure 10*).

This pattern is not unique to these two pairs of schools, either. Across the district as a whole, schools that have experienced the largest enrollment declines since SY20-21 (a decline of more than 20%) generally have more per-pupil dollars ($21,726) than schools that have experienced growth or no enrollment declines ($17,986).[37] Declining enrollment can make schools, like Valley View and Holmes Avenue Elementaries, appear better funded, though in practice it often leaves leaders with fewer flexible dollars to support student learning.

Figure 14: Average Per-Pupil Funding in LAUSD Schools by Enrollment Change from SY20-21 to SY24-25

Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool); California Department of Education (Census Day Enrollment; Enrollment by School (1981-2022); Public Schools and Districts Data Files)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. We define enrollment change as follows: Growth or stability means 0% decline or any increase in enrollment; minor decline is a drop of up to 12%; moderate decline is 13-20%; and severe decline is more than 20%.

The Importance of Operating Small Schools

Smaller schools often cost more to operate per student, but they also play an outsized role in their communities, serving as anchors for families even when enrollment is low. Schools are more than classrooms: They are neighborhood hubs that often provide meals, health services, after-school programs, and stability for families — roles that were especially visible during the pandemic.[38] While maintaining low-enrollment schools can present financial and programmatic challenges compared with larger campuses, closures disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color.[39] The challenge for LAUSD is to balance these trade-offs by supporting students in schools of all sizes through innovative staffing allocation models, shared services, or external partnerships without defaulting to shutting schools down.

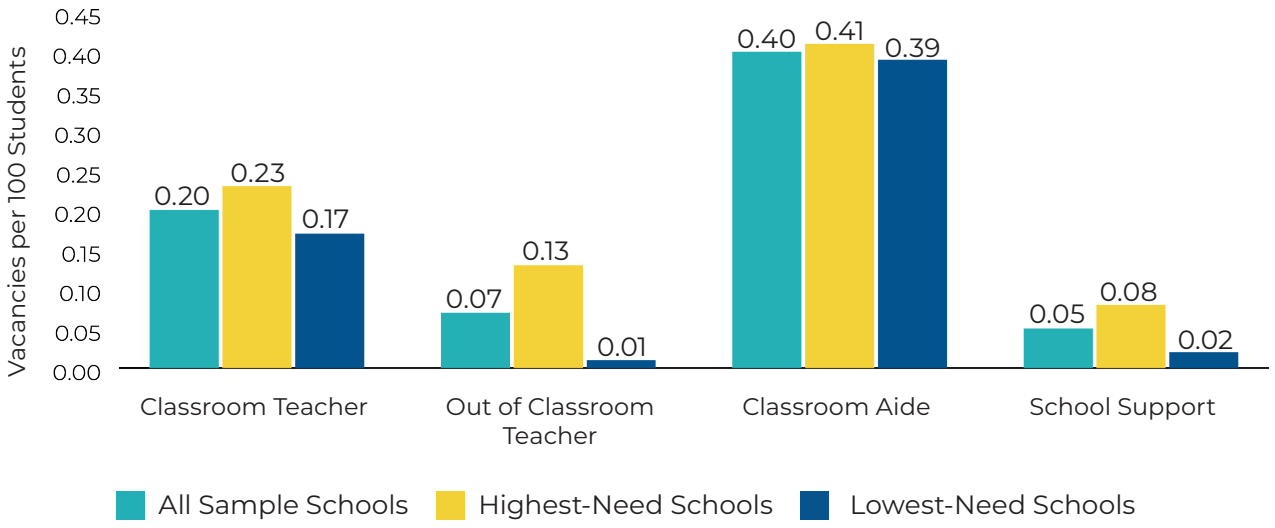
Persistent Vacancies Despite Staffing Allocations

While fixed costs, including some staffing positions, explain why per-pupil figures can appear inflated at smaller schools, vacancies highlight a different challenge — the difficulty of actually spending money allocated for staffing.

Research on LAUSD's spending patterns found that targeted funding to high-poverty schools does translate into hiring more teachers, reducing class sizes, and expanding course offerings. Yet these same schools continue to rely more heavily on probationary teachers and long-term substitutes than their lower-poverty counterparts, and many allocated positions go unfilled altogether.[40] Because staffing makes up about 80% of a typical school's budget (according to national analyses[41]), vacancies represent a significant share of dollars that never materialize as staff in schools.[42] Rather than freeing up resources for other programs, unfilled roles are often covered by lower-paid substitutes or hourly staff, leaving part of the funding unused (often ending up as "carryover," or dollars that roll into the next year instead of benefiting students in the year they were intended) and students having fewer adults and less experienced educators in their classrooms.

LAUSD budget data reveal that vacancies are concentrated in the district's highest-need schools (*see Figure 15*). For instance, in the highest-need schools, there is about one teacher vacancy for every 435 students while in the lowest-need schools, there is about one teacher vacancy for every 588 students.[43] This same pattern holds across other instructional roles, including out-of-classroom teachers, classroom aides, and school support roles. In other words, even though the highest-need schools receive more per-pupil funding than their lowest-need counterparts, gaps in hiring and retaining instructional staff remain pronounced. Dollars are allocated, but the intended instructional benefits for students do not consistently reach classrooms.

Figure 15: Instructional Vacancies Per 100 Students in Sampled LAUSD Schools



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool)

Note: This chart is based on an analysis of the 25 highest-need elementary schools and 25 lowest-need elementary schools based on SY24-25 data. This analysis only included small elementary schools (200-499 students) and does not include affiliated charter schools.

Limited School Leader Autonomy

Staffing vacancies show how allocated dollars do not always reach students, and limited school leader autonomy over spending discretionary funds presents a parallel challenge.

School leaders have some autonomy, but their spending discretion is often managed by the district and their regional supervisors who approve their expenses. In other cases, schools may also use their discretionary funding to plug holes in core operations because the district's base funding does not always fully cover essential services like custodial staff or supplies. This can be an especially difficult challenge for high-need schools that receive relatively low amounts of funding and therefore have to decide whether to pay for basic needs or instructional programming.

Moreover, navigating the district's budget rules about how to use discretionary funds is complex. While trainings and resources exist, school leaders often lack clarity on what they can and cannot do with their funding. For example, the American Institutes for Research's evaluation of SENI found that many school leaders wanted more support in strategically using discretionary funds and clearer guidance on allowable uses.[44] In some cases, fear of violating rules creates a perverse incentive

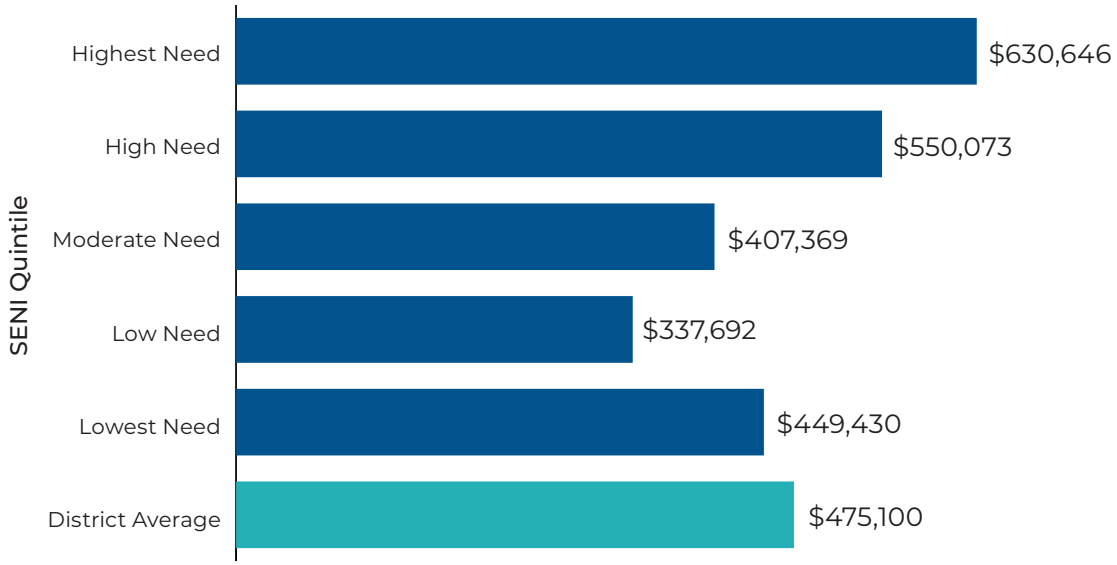
to not spend funds rather than risk using them improperly, which can contribute to a large amount of carryover.

Carryover of Unused Dollars

Carryover is where these challenges come to a head, providing a final illustration of the complexities school leaders face when deploying their budgets to meet student need. Each year, a large portion of unexpended balances carry forward from one fiscal year to the next in accordance with programmatic or district guidelines.

On average, the district's highest-need schools have significantly more carryover amounts each year than lower-need schools (*see Figure 16*), indicating that they have a more difficult time spending the dollars they are allocated. In SY24-25, for example, 95th Street and 66th Street Elementaries, both classified as highest-need, each reported carryover amounts exceeding $1 million (*see Figures 9 and 10*). By contrast, Valley View Elementary, a lowest-need school, carried over only $176,515 (*see Figure 10*).

Figure 16: Instructional Vacancies Per 100 Students in Sampled LAUSD Schools



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were also used to determine SY24-25 allocations.

LAUSD's carryover rules determine how schools manage these unspent funds. Schools with the highest needs are allowed to carry over a larger percentage of their unspent funds, up to 70% for Priority Schools and 60% for other high-need SENI schools, while lower-need schools carry over 50%.[45] Policies on carryover have varied by superintendent, and although the district has debated sweeping unspent dollars back into a central pool, LAUSD's board has consistently resisted such a policy. The result is a compromise: Schools may keep a portion of unspent funds, with higher-need schools retaining the largest share.

Sometimes, carryover is intentional. Schools might set aside funds to smooth year-to-year budget fluctuations, plan for a large future expense, or spread funds out over time to cover the ongoing cost of a position, like a coordinator.

But in many cases, especially in higher-need schools, large balances point to challenges rather than strategy. These schools often receive a much larger share of discretionary funding, sometimes nearly 40% of their total budgets, as is the case with 66th Street and 95th Street Elementaries, but complex rules on allowable uses, late allocations, unfilled positions, and bureaucratic bottlenecks can all leave funds idle even when there is a clear need and intent to use those funds.[46] For instance, carryover spiked during the pandemic as schools struggled to hire quickly enough despite a surge of federal pandemic-relief dollars.

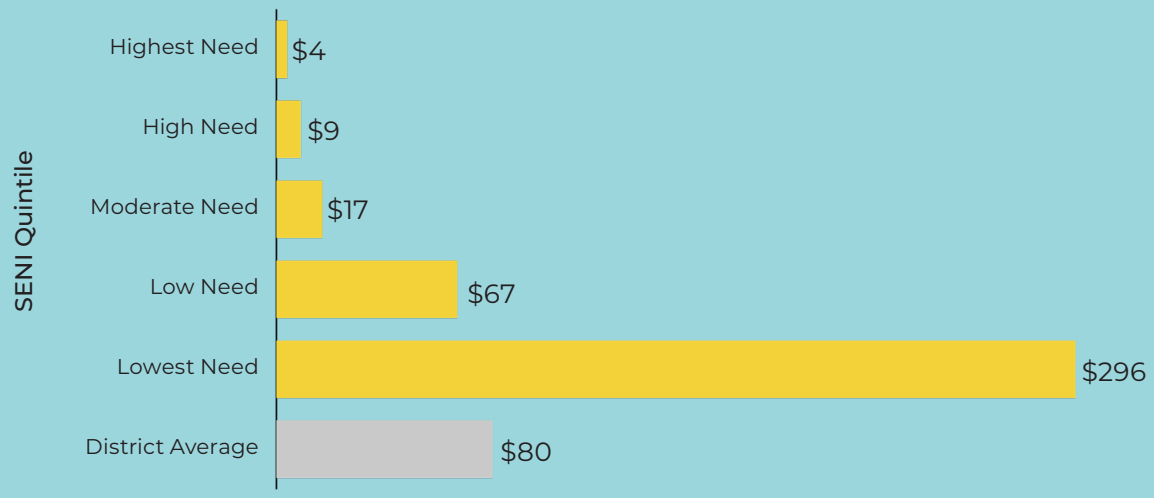
District staff review budgets quarterly, flagging under-spending, but school leaders may lack the time, support, guidance, or incentives to make those changes. The result is that dollars earmarked for the highest-need schools sometimes sit unused, reinforcing the broader challenge that more funding alone does not always lead to improved learning opportunities for students. In his Opening of Schools address, Superintendent Carvalho acknowledged the unique contexts of schools across the district and indicated that the district is considering ways to better align resources with what schools need.[47]

Donations as Flexible Funds

Parent and community donations represent one of the only truly flexible sources of funding for schools, but this money is by nature highly uneven in its distribution across school contexts. Simply put, some schools are able to raise much more money through donations than others, widening funding gaps. While donations make up a relatively small share of overall per-pupil funding districtwide (0.4%), they can represent a notable funding boost in certain schools and board districts.[48]

On average, lowest-need schools raise about $296 per student in donations each year (2% of those schools' budgets on average), compared to just $4 per student in the highest-need schools (effectively 0% of those schools' budgets on average; see Figure 17).[49] Valley View Elementary, for example, raised $297 in donations per pupil in SY24-25, right in line with the lowest-need school donation average (see Figure 10). That amounts to $44,847 of additional flexible funds.[50]

Figure 17: Average Per-Pupil Donations to LAUSD Schools by Need, SY24-25



Source: Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25)

Note: Averages represent elementary, middle, senior high, and span schools. SENI quintile classifications reflect SY23-24, which were also used to determine SY24-25 allocations.

Board District 4, which includes many of LAUSD's most affluent neighborhoods, benefits from the highest average fundraising levels, with donations accounting for 2.4% of school budgets on average.[51] Similarly, higher-performing schools tend to raise more locally than their peers, with donations comprising about 4% of school budgets, further widening resource gaps across LAUSD schools.[52]

These dollars, though small in the context of a total school budget, can have an outsized impact. Because donations are often unrestricted, they can be used to enhance or expand offerings more quickly than other funding sources. Schools able to raise significant amounts can direct these funds toward things like technology, extracurricular programs, or additional staff support, opportunities that may be entirely out of reach for schools on the lower end of the fundraising spectrum. This flexibility allows donations to punch above their weight in shaping the student experience, even if they account for a small share of total funding.

Considerations to Better Align Resources With Student Need

Ensuring that resources in LAUSD better align with student need requires targeted action from the district and state. This means sustaining investments in initiatives like SENI while giving school leaders the flexibility and support to direct dollars where they are most needed. Our review surfaced several considerations that may be useful starting points for further district and state exploration:

1 **Need-based funding is essential; LAUSD and the state can protect and strengthen it.** SENI dollars make up the largest share of school leaders' discretionary budgets, and any reductions would significantly limit their ability to tailor resources to local needs. LAUSD should maintain and, ideally, expand SENI in SY26-27. At the same time, California could explore ways to increase LCFF differentiation in districts like LAUSD, where the vast majority of students are high-need.

2 **Per-pupil funding varies widely, even among similar schools; LAUSD can examine and address the drivers.** Schools with comparable levels of need often show large per-pupil funding differences, while schools with very different student populations can appear to have the same resources. These mismatches may stem from enrollment thresholds, persistent vacancies, or underused building space, and they obscure what dollars actually mean for the student experience. To address this, LAUSD could conduct a systematic review to identify drivers of this variation and adjust funding rules or support systems accordingly.

3 **Declining enrollment often stretches resources; LAUSD can adjust more quickly to enrollment shifts, and the state can step up to support.** As explored in our *Facing the Decline* report, enrollment declines do not inherently strain budgets; it is the lack of timely response that creates pressure. That report outlines several questions for district leaders to consider as they navigate these shifts. California should also revisit LCFF's reliance on ADA, which leaves districts facing steep enrollment declines especially vulnerable to fiscal challenges.

4 **Discretionary funds often go unused; LAUSD has an opportunity to better support school leaders to effectively spend their allocated dollars.** In his Opening of Schools address, Superintendent Carvalho emphasized the importance of school flexibility in meeting community needs, highlighting the district's new *school flexibilities model,* a strategic, data-driven approach that aligns resources to each school's unique context.[53] To support school leaders and their fiscal teams in understanding what is allowable and how they can deploy funds strategically, LAUSD has already developed robust guidance and supportive materials.[54] The district

5 can build on these efforts by continuing to streamline and clarify budget rules. Additional targeted professional development, particularly in high-need contexts, can strengthen school leaders' and their fiscal teams' capacity to use discretionary dollars effectively. In parallel, the district might also consider incentives that recognize strong spending practices, helping ensure that dollars do not remain idle or contribute to large carryover amounts but instead reach students in the year they are intended.

6 **Higher-need schools struggle to attract and keep teachers; the state can continue to invest in educator pipeline improvements.** Vacancies and staffing instability, despite staffing allocations, continue to undermine student learning in LAUSD's highest-need schools. The state can play a more active role in addressing this challenge, such as expanding residency programs, loan forgiveness, or targeted salary supplements for educators working in these schools. Sustained state investment in recruitment and retention would help stabilize staffing in hard-to-fill roles and ensure that the highest-need schools do not face persistent shortages.

7 **The district faces unsustainable teacher compensation costs; the state can provide ongoing support.** LAUSD faces rising teacher compensation costs that current per-pupil funding and retirement formulas cannot sustainably cover. These pressures leave the district vulnerable to deficits and force trade-offs, including diverting funds from classrooms to meet long-term obligations, further straining inadequate per-pupil dollars in some schools. Without a sustainable plan to finance compensation, the district also risks compounding its existing challenges in attracting and retaining talent, especially in its highest-need schools. To address this, the state could create a dedicated, ongoing fund for teacher salaries and benefits, separate from retirement reserves, to ensure districts do not have to divert long-term retiree funding for short-term staffing needs. This would safeguard both current teacher quality and long-term commitments to educators, allowing LAUSD and other California districts to plan responsibly and avoid cycles of layoffs, wage freezes, or deferred obligations.

8 **Donations widen opportunity gaps; LAUSD can mitigate disparities in private fundraising.** Schools in more affluent communities can supplement their budgets with substantial private contributions, while high-need schools rarely have this capacity. LAUSD has already improved transparency around donations, and the newly launched Education Foundation has signaled its commitment to supporting high-need schools with fundraising to help close this gap. Building on this momentum could ensure that private giving strengthens opportunities where resources are most limited, rather than reinforcing existing disparities.

Conclusion

LAUSD has made noteworthy academic strides in recent years, including a strong recovery from pandemic setbacks and record-high performance, as highlighted in recent test score gains.[55] These results show what is possible when resources are aligned with need and directed toward strategies that work.

In the aggregate, LAUSD's system directs more funding to higher-need schools, as it was designed to do. In practice, however, funding levels within each need band can diverge dramatically, and school leaders often cannot use the dollars they receive in flexible or strategic ways. Too much is locked into fixed costs or nondiscretionary staffing allocations, and even the discretionary share is often too constrained to meaningfully change the student experience. The result is a high per-pupil allocation that does not always translate into real opportunities in classrooms.

The challenge ahead is not simply to allocate funds in alignment with student need, but to ensure that every dollar works harder for students. That means protecting investments that steer resources toward high-need schools while also giving school leaders the clarity, support, and flexibility to use those funds effectively.

As enrollment continues to decline and fiscal pressures mount, LAUSD has an opportunity to build on recent gains and strengthen its funding system so that progress is not only sustained but expanded. By aligning both *how resources are distributed* and *how they are used* to address student need, the district can make sure every student in every school has access to real opportunities to succeed.

Endnotes

[1] Mallika Seshadri, "LAUSD's 100 Priority Schools Show Support for Equity, but Some Say Program Isn't Enough," EdSource, August 28, 2024, https://edsource.org/2024/lausds-100-priority-schools-show-support-for-equity-but-some-say-program-doesnt-go-far-enough/718186.

[2] In the LAUSD Budget dashboard, "per-pupil cost" is defined as being "calculated by dividing the Total Budget (excluding carryover funds) by the total student enrollment." In this report, we adopt this definition but use the term "per-pupil funding" instead because the data illustrates budgeted allocations per pupil, not expenditures.

[3] This report draws upon several past explorations of LAUSD funding, including: *Worth It: Eight Ways to Prioritize Equity in LA Unified's Budget*: This Partnership for LA report focuses on SENI specifically and how LAUSD should maximize it in its next budget. While this report is from 2021, it offers essential context on SENI's successes and opportunities for continued improvement; "*Student Needs Equity Index (SENI) Documents*": This official 2021 LAUSD evaluation by AIR focuses on SENI, providing a useful summary of SENI's intended design and early impact. In our report, we reference key findings and connect this work to our per-pupil funding analysis; *Closing the Equity Gap*: This Partnership for LA report focuses specifically on staffing disparities across schools. Our report takes a broader lens, positioning staffing as one input in the larger picture of per-pupil funding and resource equity; *Budget Insights*: This GPSN budget report is an explainer of the LAUSD budgeting process, focusing on the mechanisms of funding in the district.

[4] *Facing the Decline: Building a Resilient LAUSD* (GPSN, 2025), https://gpsnla.org/resilientlausd/; "Largest & Smallest Public School Districts," California Department of Education, 2025, https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceflargesmalldist.asp.

[5] "Funding Our Schools," NYC Public Schools, https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/funding/funding-our-schools; "NYCPS Data at a Glance," NYC Public Schools, https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/nycps-data-at-a-glance.

[6] *FY2025 Budget: Chicago Public Schools* (presentation, Chicago Public Schools, 2025), https://www.cpsboe.org/content/documents/fy2025_budget_presentation_to_board.pdf; "Stats and Facts," Chicago Public Schools, https://www.cps.edu/about/stats-facts/.

[7] See, for example: "Senior High Staffing Ratios for FY 2025–26," LAUSD, 2024, https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/185/2025-2026/Senior%20High%20Staffing%20Ratios%20FY%202026%20December%202024-DRAFT.pdf; Los Angeles Unified School District-United Teachers Los Angeles tentative agreement, 2022–2025, https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/368/LAUSD-UTLA%20Tentative%20Agreement%20-%202022-2025.pdf.

[8] "Budget Insights: An Overview of the Los Angeles Public Education Budget Process for Advocates," GPSN, October 2023, https://gpsnla.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/GPSN-Budget-Insights-FINAL.pdf.

[9] Throughout this report, our analysis represents K-12 elementary (EL), middle (MS), and senior high (SHS) traditional public district schools, stand-alone magnets, affiliated charters, and community schools. Magnet center budgets are combined with their host school budgets in our analysis. Unless otherwise noted, our analysis excludes independent charters, options (opportunity, alternative, continuation, community day), primary care centers, and special education (SPED) schools. The majority of this report also uses SY24–25 per-pupil data, since SY26 figures are still being updated at time of print. We also have made sure to pair funding data with the most recent year of data available for various school traits and characteristics. For most analyses, this is SY24–25. However, when we analyze outcomes or characteristics that are only available through SY23–24 (e.g., performance data), we pair them with SY23–24 per-pupil funding to ensure the data reflect the same year. As a result, different sections of the report may reference different per-pupil years depending on the analysis.

[10] Adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, $10,435 in June 2021 (the end of the school year) translated to $12,407.27 in July 2025 numbers.

[11] Paul Beach, Carrie Hahnel, and Tanvi Kodali, *Navigating Change: Strategies to Strengthen*

California High Schools amid Declining Enrollment (Bellwether, 2024), https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NavigatingChange_Bellwether_September2024.pdf.

[12] Los Angeles Unified Students Show Highest Test Scores Ever in Reading, Math, and Science," LAUSD, October 9, 2025, https://www.lausd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=4466&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=188879&PageID=1.

[13] "Los Angeles Unified Planning for Difficult Budget Realities," LAUSD, June 17, 2025, https://www.lausd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=4466&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=187708&PageID=1; Beach, Hahnel, and Kodali, *Navigating Change: Strategies to Strengthen California High Schools amid Declining Enrollment*.

[14] "Budget Transparency Data: Glossary," LAUSD, https://budgettransparency.lausd.net/glossary.

[15] "Los Angeles Unified Approves 2025–26 Budget Without Furloughs and Preserving Services," LAUSD, June 24, 2025, https://www.lausd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=4466&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=187861&PageID=1.

[16] Indira Dammu, Bonnie O'Keefe, and Jennifer O'Neal Schiess, "How Are State Education Funding Formulas Structured?," *Splitting the Bill* no. 3, Bellwether, updated October 2023, https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SplittingtheBill_3_Bellwether_October2023.pdf.

[17] Beach, Hahnel, and Kodali, *Navigating Change: Strategies to Strengthen California High Schools amid Declining Enrollment*.

[18] "Student Equity Need Index," Catalyst California, https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/key-issues/educational-equity/student-equity-need-index.

[19] To calculate additional teachers, we assume a cost of $130,000 per teacher, including benefits.

[20] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool, https://budgettransparency.lausd.net/school-budget; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25 https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/185/2024-2025/FY%202024-25%20SENI%20Allocation%20Summary%20rev%202.22.pdf).

[21] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25).

[22] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; "State Reporting Services Branch," https://www.lausd.org/Page/7704; "SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25").

[23] Ibid.

[24] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; "State Reporting Services Branch").

[25] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool) and California Department of Education ("Chronic Absenteeism Data," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesabd.asp). While absenteeism itself reduces ADA-based funding from the state, it often overlaps with other challenges, like poverty and lower academic performance, that drive district equity allocations and increase overall support.

[26] While most LAUSD students are students of color, targeted equity investments, such as SENI and the Black Student Achievement Plan, help drive some of this difference. These programs are designed to address persistent opportunity and achievement gaps, particularly for Black students, and LAUSD plans to increase these investments in SY25–26.

[27] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool) and California Department of Education ("Census Day Enrollment Data," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesenrcensus.asp; "Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filessp.asp; "English Learners by Grade & Language," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fileselsch.asp).

[28] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool) and California Department of Education ("Public Schools and Districts Data Files," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/si/ds/pubschls.asp).

[29] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool) and California Department of Education ("Census Day Enrollment Data," "Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data").

[30] When looking at neighborhood elementary schools and in selecting school pairs for comparison, we removed stand-alone magnets, schools with magnet centers, and affiliated charter schools from our count in order to show variation among elementary schools with similar funding structures and program models.

[31] Joon-Ho Lee and Bruce Fuller, "Does Progressive Finance Alter School Organizations and Raise Achievement? The Case of Los Angeles," *Educational Policy* (2020): 1–37, https://gse.berkeley.edu/sites/

default/files/lee-fuller_-_progressive_finance_in_l.a._-_march_2020_final.pdf.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] "Employment: General Information," *District Policy Guide* (LAUSD Human Resources Division), https://www.lausd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=13733&dataid=12851&FileName=E7.pdf.

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[36] Marc Joffe, "Pensions and Retiree Health Care Costs Contribute to LA Unified's Fiscal Woes," Reason Foundation, June 13, 2018, https://reason.org/commentary/pensions-and-la-unified-fiscal-woes/; Howard Blume, "Revised LAUSD Budget Saves Jobs Today, Trims Future Retiree Health Benefit Contributions," *Los Angeles Times,* June 25, 2025, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-06-25/18-8-billion-lausd-budget-approved-over-unions-objections-to-future-cuts.

[37] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool); California Department of Education ("Census Day Enrollment Data"; "Enrollment by School (1981–2022)"; "Public Schools and Districts Data Files").

[38] *Facing the Decline: Building a Resilient LAUSD* (GPSN, 2025).

[39] Ibid.

[40] "How Money Matters: Education Funding and Student Outcomes," fact sheet, Learning Policy Institute, 2025, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-factsheet.

[41] Ibid.

[42] *Worth It: Eight Ways to Prioritize Equity in LA Unified's Budget* (Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, 2021), https://partnershipla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Worth-It-Web-Final-Jan-15-2021.pdf.

[43] Vacancy-to-student ratios were calculated by taking the number of vacancies per 100 students (e.g., 0.23 teacher vacancies per 100 students in highest-need schools) and converting it into a "students per vacancy" figure (100 ÷ 0.23 ≈ 435).

[44] "Local Control & Accountability Plan (LCAP): Student Needs Equity Index (SENI) Documents," LAUSD, https://www.lausd.org/Page/17238.

[45] "Budget Updates for School Staff," LAUSD School Fiscal Services Branch, June 2024, https://www.lausd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=78339&dataid=178891&FileName=Fiscal+Services+Publication+June+2024.pdf.

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[47] Alberto M. Carvalho, Opening of Schools address, video, July 22, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALvpWyhpQmA.

[48] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool).

[49] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; "SENI Allocation Summary Fiscal Year 2024-25").

[50] To calculate this, we multiplied SY25 donations ($297) by SY25 norm day enrollment (151).

[51] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; "State Reporting Services Branch").

[52] Author analysis based on LAUSD (Budget Transparency Tool; "State Reporting Services Branch") and California Department of Education ("Academic Indicators Downloadable Data Files," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/acaddatafiles.asp).

[53] Carvalho, Opening of Schools address.

[54] See, for example: 2024–25 Budget Development Training session, video, February 21, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEHSvA4VFfA.

[55] Los Angeles Unified Students Show Highest Test Scores Ever in Reading, Math, and Science," LAUSD, October 9, 2025, https://www.lausd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=4466&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=188879&PageID=1.

GPSN

GPSN is a nonprofit intermediary organization exclusively focused on improving Los Angeles public education. GPSN envisions a public school system in Los Angeles that prepares all students to succeed in school and to live thriving adult lives.

Guided by this vision, our mission is to bring together the Los Angeles community to catalyze the transformation of the public education system so that students of color and students living in poverty gain the knowledge, skills, and experiences to lead thriving adult lives.