

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2022

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Darling-Hammond,

We write to you today regarding the recently released and updated mathematics framework proposal current under review by the California State Board of Education. You may remember that on July 16, 2021, our congressional delegation sent you a letter discussing our concerns with the previous proposed mathematics framework that advised California schools to phase out the option for students to enter advanced or accelerated mathematics classes and require all students to study mathematics at the same level through the high school sophomore level in order to promote equity in mathematics.

Not only did you fail to respond to our previous letter, but the updated framework doubles down on concerning guidelines that prevent students from reaching their full academic potential and limits the ability of our youth to address the generational challenges our nation faces.

As we've said previously, advancing STEM education is a first order concern for our nation to build the foundations of future technological advancement and innovation. If we want to maintain our competitive edge in this field, we must allow and encourage students to learn at an accelerated pace if they have the capability to do so. These are the students that will design our nation's future infrastructure, launch rockets to new planets, and innovate the next frontier of computing technology. If California ceases to foster the next generation of scientists and engineers, then California students may not have the requisite skills or knowledge to obtain STEM-related higher education contribute to future technological advances.

The state of education in California warrants serious attention. In 2019, data sourced from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments in mathematics, reading, writing, and science found that California students in Grade 4 math classes scored 5 points below the national average with only 73% above basic achievement and 34% at or above proficient. Scores were even worse for 8th graders who again score below the national average in math with 61% above basic achievement and 29% at or above proficient. Instead of addressing the serious needs of California students in math, the Board has decided to push forward with guidelines that will further limit learning potential and widen education gaps.

Further, these guidelines have already been implemented with dismal results in San Francisco. Following implementation of similar math standards in 2014, the San Francisco Unified School District reported mixed to worse results for rates of students meeting expected math benchmarks on standardized tests for Black and Latino students. Districtwide, the gap between the percentage

of low-income students and students at large meeting appropriate math knowledge benchmarks increased by 2.5% between the 2014-15 and 2018-19 school years, meaning low-income students are increasingly falling behind in math proficiency compared to the rest of their cohorts¹

Moreover, these guidelines have generally failed to help the Black and Latino students they set out to serve. In San Francisco's O'Connell High School, which enrolls the highest percentage of Black students in the district, only 6% of the school's Black students met math standards. Following implementation of the same math standards that the state Board of Education is currently pushing, the math proficiency rate among Black students at O'Connell High School dropped to 0%.²

However, the state Board of Education has countered critics' arguments by claiming that students wishing to take advanced math classes following sophomore year can do so by taking Algebra I and Geometry at the same time. It is beyond unrealistic to expect students to balance multiple math classes at the high school level simultaneously while also expecting them to handle a regular class load, extracurricular activities, and provide for their own stability and mental health. Instead of making our students play catch-up, your math framework should allow students to have the freedom to study in accelerated math courses when they choose to do so and have the option of not double-booking classes at a consequential moment in their educational process.

We will again remind you that with the passage of the American Rescue Plan last year, California received over \$15 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding.³ Congress has a vested interest in ensuring these funds are spent appropriately to facilitate student learning and achievement, especially in STEM education, and not misspent for initiatives that stunt student growth.

While we agree that educators should experiment with new and innovative ways for students to learn their respective subjects, we do not agree that it should prevent the ability of any student to excel in a subject of their choice.

Our K-12 education system has always thrived the best when it empowers students to make their own educational choices and showcase their individuality. Imposing a one-size-fits-all model on the students of California will instead stifle creativity, free thinking, and innovation. We urge the State Board of Education to reconsider the framework before them and weigh the drawbacks of discouraging advanced learning for our students. We also request that you and the Board respond to our previous letter sent on July 16, 2021.

Sincerely,

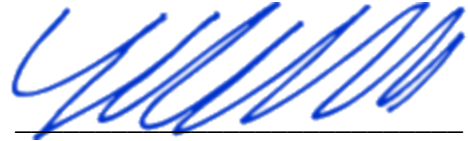
¹ Hong, Joe. "Controversial Math Guidelines Have Had Mixed Results at San Francisco Unified." *CalMatters*, 6 Dec. 2021, <https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2021/12/san-francisco-math/>.

² Hong, Joe. "Controversial Math Guidelines Have Had Mixed Results at San Francisco Unified." *CalMatters*, 6 Dec. 2021, <https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2021/12/san-francisco-math/>.

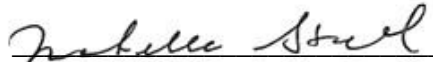
³ Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, available at https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/06/Revised-ARP-ESSER-Grant-Award-Allocation_6.25.21_FINAL.pdf.



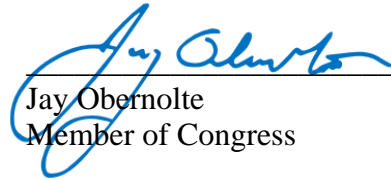
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