

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2021

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 a proposed mathematics framework currently under review by the California State Board of Education. Among the proposed guidelines, this framework advises 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. While we acknowledge the Board recently postponed consideration of the updated framework until next year, we maintain concerns about what might be included in the final product and the steps taken to arrive there.

Advancing STEM education is a first order concern for our nation in building the foundations of future technological advancement and innovation. If we want to maintain our competitive edge with the world 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.

California, in particular, is home to countless STEM-oriented companies and facilities – from the Silicon Valley, the nation's technology epicenter, to the numerous critical military installations, such as the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake and similar facilities in our state that research, develop, test, and evaluate the weapons and technology that servicemembers depend on to complete their mission when in harm's way, to the California-based commercial space industry, which is leading us back to the moon and beyond. If California ceases to foster the next generation of scientists and engineers, then California students may not have the skills or knowledge to obtain STEM-related higher education and enter these fields to keep our state on the cutting edge of technological advances.

On the matter of mathematics equity, California itself has made progress over the long term in the number of students learning algebra by the eighth grade or earlier. Data from the California Department of Education shows that only 16% of California students scored as proficient algebra by eighth grade in 1999. However, thanks to new academic core standards established in 1997—

California's first statewide set of standards for math ever—that number more than doubled to 39% of California students in 2019.¹

It is also worth noting that the biggest increases in success rates through 2013 were found among ethnic minority and low-income students, with African American students experiencing a five-fold jump in success rates and Latino students seeing a six-fold increase.²

The proposed mathematics framework comes at a time when our nation's education assessments compared to other countries are in decline. According to a 2018 survey by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to measure the performance of 15-year-old students, the U.S. average mathematics score was lower than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average score. Compared to the 77 other education systems in PISA 2018, the U.S. average mathematics literacy score was lower than the average in 30 education systems.³ The proposed mathematics framework by the California State Board of Education will damage the competitiveness of our education system and further decrease our students' math proficiency when compared to other countries.

California receives billions of dollars annually in Federal funding through Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) grants – particularly Title I, Part A grants, designed to help local educational agencies provide a quality education and related services to millions of students from low-income families in our state. These funds are provided to help ensure that “all children meet challenging state academic standards,”⁴ but we fear this proposed mathematics framework, if adopted, will lower our State's academic standards and prevent gifted students from excelling, ultimately doing them and California a disservice.

Further, with the passage of the American Rescue Plan earlier this year, California received over \$15 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding.⁵ 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.

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.

¹ *English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments*. California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/DashViewReport?ps=true&lstTestYear=2019&lstTestType=B&lstGroup=1&lstSubGroup=1&lstGrade=13&lstSchoolType=A&lstCounty=00&lstDistrict=00000&lstSchool=0000000&lstFocus=a>.

² *Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Results*. California Department of Education. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140209180427/http://star.cde.ca.gov/>.

³ NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=1>.

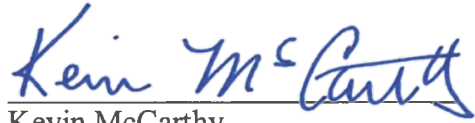
⁴ *Fast Facts, Title I*. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. [Fast Facts: Title I \(158\) \(ed.gov\)](https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158).

⁵ 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.

Sincerely,



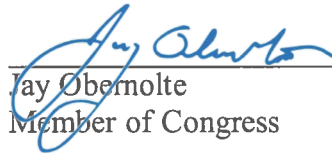
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