

OPINION

EDITORIAL

L.A. Unified failing to get kids the tutoring they need

Worse, the district doesn't know why its plan didn't work or how many students have been helped.

ONCE AGAIN, Los Angeles Unified School District shows that it's great at making ambitious academic plans but downright abysmal at keeping track of how those plans are being implemented and whether they are working.

Long before COVID-19 brought chronic absenteeism to crisis levels, the district launched an array of programs in 2016 to increase regular attendance. But by the end of the following year, attendance had not improved and the district assessed the effectiveness of only a couple of the several programs to see if they worked, and found mixed success.

"L.A. has the greatest plans in the world and probably the worst follow-through," former L.A. Unified board member Richard Vladovic said at the time.

That's still the case now that the topic is tutoring, which is a cornerstone of L.A. Unified's plan to make up for learning loss from the long months of Zoom school during the pandemic.

The district began several programs last spring and this academic year that schools could choose from to help struggling students. And there is evidence that one of them helps: Primary Promise, which provides daily extra reading and math instruction in small groups to children in the earliest grades. Research has found that kind of "high dosage" tutoring, conducted one on one or in small groups several times a week, is one of the most helpful interventions for students who are finding their lessons diffi-



LUIS SINCO Los Angeles Times

TEACHER YESENIA Gutierrez instructs students in a Primary Promise intervention program class in Wilmington on March 30.

cult to grasp.

But overall, the school board received deeply disappointing news last week about L.A. Unified's tutoring efforts. Not even 10% of students have been receiving tutoring, and the numbers are especially dismal in middle and high schools, at 4% to 6%. The district doesn't have a hard number of how many students need tutoring, but it's widely acknowledged that it's probably much higher than 10%.

And the district can't say how many students have received high-dosage tutoring outside of the Primary Promise program. Staff also reported to the board that they don't know why the numbers are so low. Is there a lack of qualified tutors? Unknown. Is

it that more students were receiving tutoring but their numbers hadn't been reported to the district's central office? Also unknown.

It's shameful that the district is unable to answer these simple questions. Once again, the district had grand plans, but little follow-through. It's a problem that apparently few students are being tutored — but a much bigger one that the district doesn't know where the failure occurred or even which tutoring efforts have been effective.

Fixing this frustrating lack of oversight is going to be one of Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho's biggest challenges because it's embedded in L.A. Unified's culture. The clumsiness and disappointment of promis-

ing big things and then not making them happen in an effective and organized way — the iPads-for-all mess and the graduation requirement, later weakened, that students must receive a C in all college-prep courses come to mind — leads the district's critics to bemoan the massiveness of L.A. Unified and call for breaking up the district.

The district also is unaccountably providing tutoring services in middle and high school mostly to students who ask for the extra help, or whose parents step in to seek it. But not all students realize that they need a tutor or that one might be available. They might be embarrassed or too shy to ask for one. Parents might not intervene for their children because of past experience feeling that the school isn't responsive or doesn't understand the extent to which their children face major academic challenges. The schools should proactively seek out the students who need the most help and get it to them first.

If this were early November, the administration might be forgiven for not having the full picture. But the school year ends in two months. The students need help now; they can't afford to wait another year to fill the academic gaps left by more than a year of remote learning. And the federal pandemic relief money provided to schools for this extra help is scheduled to dry up in 2024.

Part of the confusion over tutoring stems from the district's efforts to decentralize authority and allow more decision-making by principals and staff at individual schools. Local decision-making has advantages, such as nimbleness and better knowledge of a particular neighborhood's needs. But that does not absolve the central office of the responsibility for setting academic standards, monitoring whether its plans and programs are effective and stepping in when things are going wrong.

LETTERS



JOE RAEDLE Getty Images

PEOPLE take part in a vigil in Lviv on Tuesday for Ukrainians killed in Bucha. Besides gathering up the dead, authorities also face the task of clearing mines.

Fear Putin, or fight him?

Re "Revealing a city of the dead," April 6

HOW MUCH LONGER will the United States stand by and watch Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces commit all these atrocities against the Ukrainian people and their country?

All the sanctions and so-called peace talks have not stopped or even slowed Putin in any way from his murderous rampage. The only thing that will stop him is our courage and military intervention.

We must stand up to this bully and put an end to this horrific evil. Let us stand up with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters and send a real message of unity and strength.

What's better — to fear Putin, or fight him and defeat him? I'd say the latter.

SUZANNE RIFKIN, Oak Park

My mother was a Holocaust survivor. Unfortunately, her father, sisters and brother were not so lucky.

The U.S. did not enter World War II until late 1941 because of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's isolationist policy. Why does the U.S. response to what is happening in Ukraine remind me so much of our late entry into World War II?

The U.S. and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization need to respond with more than just money and equipment.

SHARON SHILKOFF
Woodland Hills

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So we read that President Biden and U.S. allies are imposing additional sanctions against Russia because of the atrocities in Ukraine.

Wait a minute. I thought we were already imposing maximum sanctions. Russia has bombed hospitals, destroyed buildings, violated agreements, bombed exit paths, and cut off food, water, electricity and heat to civilians.

And we are still not imposing maximum sanctions? How much more does Russia have to do before its actions warrant the full set of economic penalties?

ROBERT SCHECHTER
Los Angeles

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While I agree that Putin's actions of targeting civilian populations constitute war crimes and he should be tried on them, I have to wonder how those actions differ from dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Aren't we being hypocritical?

RON GARBER
Duarte

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The imagery coming out of Ukraine is grotesque and we all have reason to be outraged. But terms like "war atrocities" are obfuscatory qualifications.

Wars aren't fought with the etiquette of war is murdering the opposition.

Wars aren't fought with soldiers facing off on empty battlefields. War is tanks

rolling into the heart of a civilization where any man, woman or child opposing the occupying army is met with deadly force. War by its nature leads to horrendous abuses under the color of authority.

America is no moral compass here. We invaded Iraq under false pretenses. We covered up massacres in Vietnam, and more recently, former President Trump pardoned war crimes in Iraq.

Parsing war behavior presumes that some acts of war are in themselves acceptable. War is the hell that needs to be internationally outlawed. Putin committed his crime the minute he sent his war machine into Ukraine.

ROBERT FOX
Los Angeles

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Re "Evidence against Vladimir Putin," letters, April 6

A letter writer is right to be outraged that the International Criminal Court has not issued any warrants for the arrest of Russian leaders over war crimes in Ukraine.

The legal processes for holding a head of state criminally accountable for basic human rights violations without precipitating a third world war may seem frustratingly long and slow.

According to the ICC's website, chief prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan has yet to submit an Article 58 application to the assigned pre-trial chamber for warrants to be issued.

LOU HORWITZ
St. Peters, Mo.

How voters feel about L.A. safety

Re "Blame Gascón? Crime data say it's not so easy," April 1, and "Caruso spoke of a panic; here's what the voters say," April 3

I don't understand why The Times has gone so far afield to try to convince Los Angeles residents that the situation in our city is not as dire as it would appear to be.

One day we see the article on whether the data justify blaming Los Angeles County Dist. Atty. George Gascón for increased crime, and another we see a story on L.A. residents debunking mayoral candidate Rick Caruso's assertion that no one feels safe in this city.

Both attempt to paint a far rosier picture of L.A. than is justified.

Many residents of Los Angeles are scared as never before by increasing homelessness and higher crime rates. No amount of Times newsprint is going to convince readers that things are OK in our city.

KELLY DOWDY
Pacific Palisades

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As recently as the 1980s, annual tuition and fees at UC Berkeley were around \$1,000. Before turning to today's cost, consider that it costs about \$100,000 per year to incarcerate an inmate in state prison.

For some offenders, there is no better public money spent. For others, that lockup cost is nettlesome. My child has to work a part-time job and take on debt to attend a University of California or Cal State campus.

And Gascón is getting blamed for not locking up more adults for \$100,000 annually? The circumstances of such incarceration are necessarily severe. However, there are simply not very many people who require this kind of expense.

Gascón, I think, gets that.

And I do not blame him for the spectacular cost (around \$14,000 per year at Berkeley, not including housing) of sending a child to a public university.

KONRAD MOORE
San Diego

Saving water isn't profitable

Re "Paltry snow underscores conservation," April 2

Decades ago, experts started publicizing that green areas shouldn't be watered during the heat of the day. This has never been a secret.

I have been living on my bike now for six years, traveling around the West. I frequently pass houses and businesses (including government offices) where sprinkler systems or hoses are watering lawns and sidewalks in the middle of the day. This also includes public parks. The worst offenders of unnecessary water usage for lawns are churches and municipal parks and recreation departments.

This is not science. Simply put, Americans are spoiled and continue to lack any interest in treating the planet with respect unless it makes them money.

Until conserving water generates revenue, this country will continue to ignore the obvious no matter how frequently the media report on the situation.

CHERYL KLINE
Palm Desert

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Re "Will pact protect delta amid drought?" April 2

Jared Blumenfeld, California's environmental protection secretary, inaccurately said of the current devastation to the state's salmon stocks and other wildlife due to mismanagement of state rivers: "The system is collapsing quicker than the laws and regulations that exist can manage or heal that system."

That is not true. The problem is that Gov. Gavin Newsom has tied the hands of regulators to ensure they don't save salmon and the environment because doing so would upset a water rights system in place for more than 150 years.

This system was established by those who crushed the Indigenous population and simply seized the land and water as their own.

They're also crushing the salmon industry.

Not regulating to address this is akin to not regulating the state's big electrical utilities. Who thinks that's a good idea?

JOHN MCMANUS
Pacifica, Calif.

The writer is president of the Golden State Salmon Assn.

Summer school for every student

Re "L.A. Unified's rates of absence have doubled," April 3

As a former teacher and school administrator, as well as a current elementary school volunteer, I believe the Los Angeles Unified School District should address the spike in chronic absences by offering summer school to every student.

In the second-grade classroom where I volunteer, the teacher has students who went on Zoom starting in kindergarten and continued online into April 2021.

The gaps are tremendous and the learning is so very difficult for these kids. The teachers are beyond stressed and cannot keep up with the demand of each and every student.

NANCY FEIGELSON
Chatsworth

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After 32 years as a public educator, I continue to be stunned by where education has gone.

One teacher asks, "What grade do you give a student who hasn't shown up?" This was an easy question to answer at a time we no longer remember. If the student might have hypothetically passed if he or she were present, perhaps we should give him or her, say, a B. Who knows? The possibilities are endless.

Some campuses will not return to normal after the pandemic, and chronic absenteeism will continue to damage the overall quality of schools.

And teachers will continue to ask, "What grade do you give a student who has not shown up?"

STAN BROWN
Victorville

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