PACE

COMMENTARY

Moving Forward from COVID-19

Voters' Opinions on Educational Equity Initiatives in California



AUTHOR

David M. Quinn | University of Minnesota

PUBLISHED: May 4, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant school closures are affecting students in many ways, and the full impact will not be known for some time. For example, while California Governor Gavin Newsom has assured school districts that they will continue to receive funding for subsidized meals for low-income students, some school officials are concerned about the ability of districts to continue providing high-quality services under these circumstances. When it comes to academics specifically, there are reasons to expect the pandemic will adversely impact educational equity. The economic effects of physical distancing policies are being felt more acutely by families with lower incomes or unpredictable work situations. Many students' caretakers are losing their jobs, and research suggests that income has a causal effect on student learning. More broadly, the economic downturn will likely impact school district budgets when students return to school. The best evidence shows that funding impacts student learning and inequality in academic outcomes by student socioeconomic status and race (e.g., here and here). Moreover, while schools are closed, families with more resources are better positioned to continue providing academic support to their students through online learning or otherwise. When schools reopen, tighter budgets will make it difficult for educators to make up for the lost time.

As we discuss in the accompanying policy brief, educational equity is valued by Californians. Data from the 2020 PACE/USC Rossier voter poll gives insight into Californians' degree of commitment to ending racial inequality in educational outcomes, with 47% of respondents ranking this as a "high" or "top" priority and an additional 29% reporting it as a medium priority (versus "low" or "not a priority"), with 5% unsure. But to what extent do these levels of abstract prioritization translate into support for specific policies and initiatives? To find out, we polled California voters on their opinions of two current initiatives: (a) increasing the number of public school teachers of color in California, and (b) requiring all high school students in California to complete an ethnic studies course. We found that 56% of voters felt it was "somewhat important" or "very important" to increase the number of teachers of color in California. Moreover, that support was somewhat higher when we informed respondents about research on how teachers of color can positively impact academic outcomes for students of color. We also found that a majority of California voters supported ethnic studies as a graduation requirement, with 63% responding that they "somewhat support" or "strongly support" the requirement. Only 27% "somewhat opposed" or "strongly opposed," with 10% unsure.

When we begin to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be important for us to keep our attention on the disparate impacts the pandemic has had on students and to be prepared to address them. The poll results laid out in our brief suggest majority support for initiatives to end racial inequality in educational outcomes, although there is a considerable difference in responses along racial and political lines. Those disparities could potentially necessitate alternative methods to gain the most widespread support. We will need to use all policy tools at our disposal, including strategies described in this brief, in our recovery efforts and continued equity work.

Suggested citation

Quinn, D. M. (2020, May 4).*Moving forward from COVID-19: Voters' opinions on educational equity initiatives in California* [Commentary]. Policy Analysis for California Education. https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/moving-forward-covid-19

PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

Stanford Graduate School of Education
507 Lasuen Mall | Suite 205
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650.576.8484

edpolicyinca.org