

FALSE CHOICES, HIDDEN AGENDAS

Unmasking the Superintendent's "Hard Choices" Report

On June 5th, Austin Beutner released his "Hard Choices" report, based on an analysis by ERS, a paid consulting firm he hired. The report uses flawed methodology and incorrect data to justify conclusions and recommendations targeting educators and vulnerable students—including claims that educators are overpaid by 17% and healthcare costs 44% too much, and that special education student-to-teacher ratios should be increased.

APPLES TO ORANGES

This study uses **different comparison districts**, sometimes **anonymous** and sometimes not. They claim that a district with **barely 7% of the enrollment of LAUSD** (Cleveland, Ohio), and a district with **only 34 charter schools** (Baltimore, Maryland) are comparable to LAUSD—with 511,000 students and 277 charter schools. The authors compare financial information from **different (and undisclosed) years**, distorting the data using a **wage inflator that is at least 11 years old**, to make different points—whichever districts, and whatever manipulations, help support their predetermined conclusions.

BAD DATA

The study uses **incorrect numbers for basic data** such as K-12 enrollment and percentage of English Language Learners. The authors lack an understanding of **basic statistical concepts**, claiming that LAUSD is out of line with the "median" percentage of students identified for special education, when in fact they are using a mean. They inconsistently manipulate data to suit whichever claims they are making, using no less than **four different, and contradictory, amounts** for per-pupil funding.

BLAME EDUCATORS

The #1 insight ERS offers is: "LAUSD is facing a **structural deficit** due to **increasing liability for pensions** from the state and annual spend[ing] on **health and welfare benefits**." They reach that conclusion despite the fact that LAUSD's percentage of the budget devoted to employee salaries and healthcare is **well within—and even below—the range for comparable California districts**. They admit that they never analyzed the cost of charter growth—despite the fact that the **unregulated growth of the charter industry costs LAUSD almost \$600 million**. Worst of all, the authors never mention per-pupil funding as a contributing factor—despite California ranking **43rd out of 50 states in per-pupil funding**.

Here are some of Beutner's recommended "**opportunities for reallocation**."

- ☒ Increase special education student-to-teacher ratios
- ☒ Identify fewer students as special education and revise placement processes for identified students.
- ☒ Move away from investments in culture and social-emotional support.
- ☒ Cut aide staffing and compensation.
- ☒ Cut spending on instructional materials and supplies.
- ☒ Impose professional development without extra pay.
- ☒ Extend the workday without additional pay.
- ☒ Attack salary point system.

For more details, read UTLA's full response to the report by visiting: <http://bit.ly/ersresponse>