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THE CYCLE OF DISINVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: How Public School Criticism Drives Policy Disinvestment

LAUSD Charter Schools Committee

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What does your research tell us about how enrollment decline, school funding, and public investment interact to affect the long-term sustainability of public education systems?

Common Criticisms of Public Schools are Oversimplified and Overstated

01

"Public Schools are Failing"

Critiques of low test scores ignores the large influence of poverty and inequality on student performance (Cuban, 2024; Reardon et al., 2019; Wheatley, 2017). It also ignores polling data showing that most parents rate their own public schools highly (Phi Delta Kappa, 2022)

02

"Public Schools are Inefficient, Largely Thanks to Unions"

Unions help improve school working conditions and have advanced policies that benefit middle- and working-class families (Lyon, 2023; Rajendran, 2025). Further, rigorous research underscores that increased school funding and spending on instruction improves student achievement, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds (Johnson, 2023; Jackson & Mackevicius, 2024)

Common Criticisms of Public Schools are Oversimplified and Overstated

04

"Public Schools Lack Choice and Parental Control"

Some argue that the government should only be responsible for ensuring minimum standards for schooling—akin to restaurant sanitation ratings (Friedman, 1962) with expansive voucher and market-oriented solutions (Howell & Peterson, 2006). But large-scale voucher programs lower student outcomes (DeMatthews et al., 2025; Mills & Wolf, 2017; Waddington & Berends, 2019)

"Public Schools Exacerbate Inequality"

03

While tracking and disproportionate discipline policies and practices need reform (American Civil Liberties Union, 2025; Oakes, 2005; Terrin & Triventi, 2023), public education as a whole is needed to positively address inequality (Liu et al., 2022; Reardon, 2011; Rothstein, 2004).

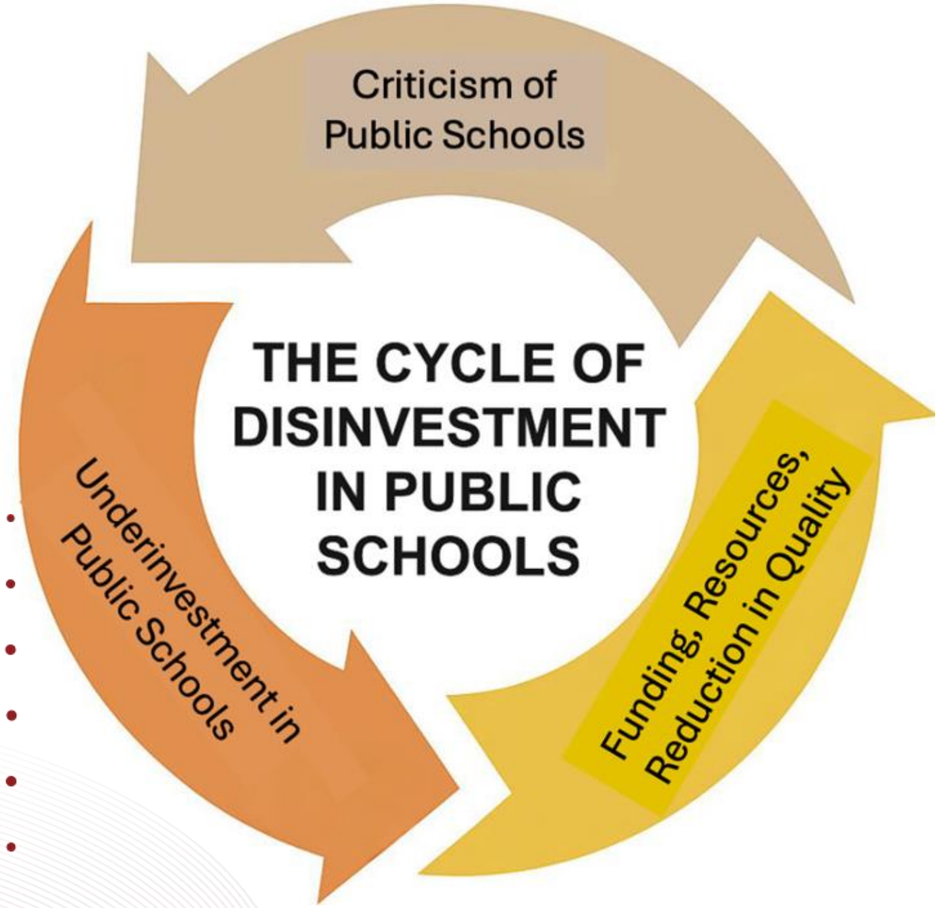
05

"Public Schools are Indoctrinating Children"

Hysteria over Critical Race Theory is used to object to accurate teaching of U.S. history (Henry et al., 2023; Pollock et al., 2022; Wallace-Wells, 2021). Most content taught is schools is uncontroversial and inclusive (Ritter et al., 2025)

How do these pressures affect districts serving predominantly students of color and immigrant communities, particularly as families face increasing uncertainty and instability?

A Cycle of Disinvestment Threatens Public Schools

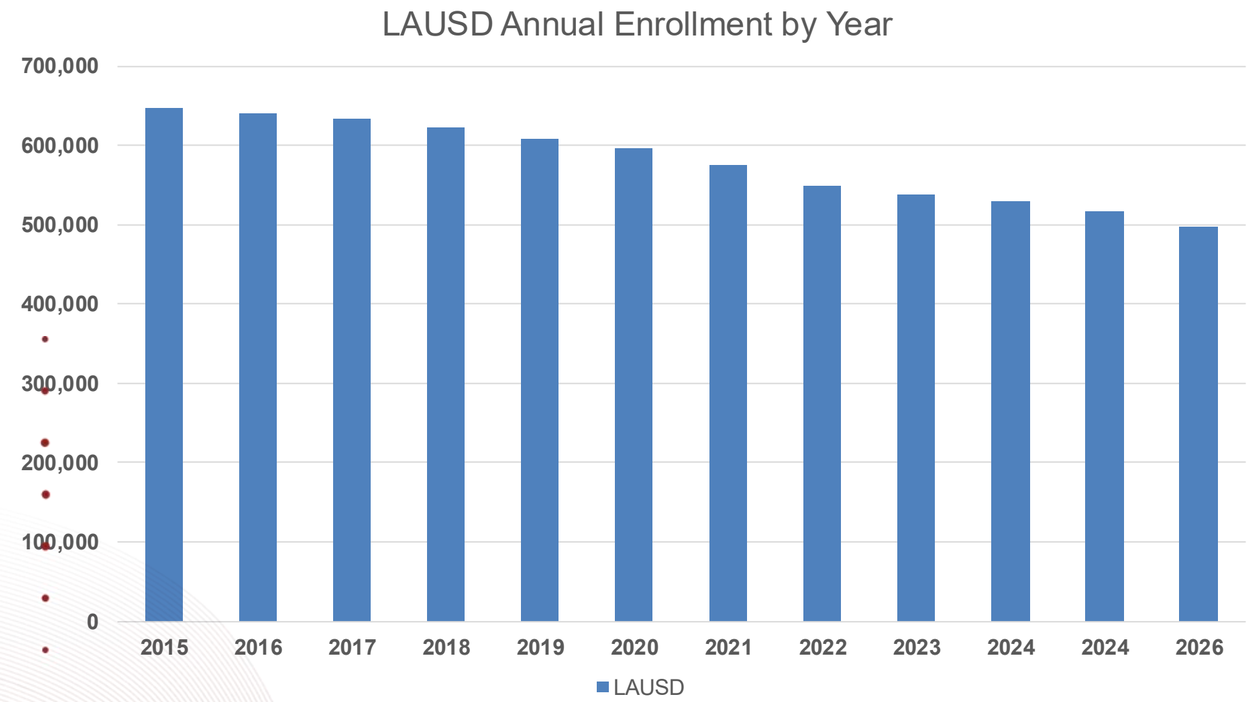


- Public schools are facing historic levels of critiques and threats
  - Federal funding cuts
  - Politicization of education policy and curriculum
  - Weaponized immigration raids
  - Attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Continued downward pressure on funding and enrollment
- Meanwhile, schools are asked to support more

Given these conditions, what should charter authorizers consider when evaluating school sustainability, ensuring equitable access, maintaining accountability, and safeguarding public resources?

What indicators or practices can help authorizers anticipate challenges before they affect students and families?

Pressures on Long-Term Sustainability



- LAUSD is facing a variety of significant pressures that impact enrollment: Rising cost of living, an aggressive deportation campaign, stricter controls on immigration, and a declining birth rate
- Because schools are funded based on a rolling average of student enrollment, these pressures reduce investments in public schools
- 23% enrollment decline over 12 years (SY 2014-15 to SY 2025-26)
- Enrollment losses can reduce revenue faster than schools can reduce costs

What to Consider When Authorizing Charters

- Avoid direct competition with traditional public schools
- Increasing the number of school amid declining enrollment adds stress to existing public schools
- Educational needs can be hyper local
- Assess known and unknown consequences (e.g., current utilization rates, shifting enrollment patterns, potential to attract new families, tradeoffs with investing in existing schools/programs)
- Closures and operator changes have educational, relational, and community costs (Enoch-Stevens et al., 2022)
- Facility use options following school closures

What Evidence Should Precede a Decision?

- Community input showing what students and families value, evidence of unmet need, and for whom
- Comparative scenarios of who benefits, who experiences disruption, and what remains uncertain
- Policies to make transition as seamless as possible for displaced students, additional supports, and creative use of public facilities/land

Implications for LAUSD

- Conduct systematic **regular polling of parents** to help understand what parents truly desire and what their critiques are of public schools, rather than relying on advocacy group narratives, and use this information to guide key decisions and counter extremist voices
- Reject policies that **privatize or otherwise undermine public education**
- **Target resources** to support students from low-income backgrounds
- Prioritize spending on **effective instructional programs and strategies**, including small class sizes and salaries that recruit and retain great teachers
- Adopt instructional materials and programs that have a sound research base, including **ethnic studies programs and other types of culturally relevant pedagogy**
- Close opportunity gaps and improve educational outcomes by counteracting the effects of poverty through **alignment of education policy initiatives with housing, health and economic policies**, such as community schools and expanded access to childcare and early education

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THANK YOU

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