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LAUSD continues to let students down

Not even half the students in the Los Angeles Unified School District's Class of 2019 are on track to be eligible for the state's public universities, according to an analysis published by LA School Report. As of March, 49% of prospective graduates were projected to pass their required courses with Cs or better, the minimum needed for admission to the UC/CSU systems. And only 78% of the Class of 2019 are on track to graduate at all, with 22% failing to achieve the minimum Ds needed to receive a diploma.

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The district reports its graduation rate in two ways — eligible to apply to a state university or not — because of the “Realizing the Promise for All: Close the Gap by 2023” resolution, adopted by the school board in June 2018. “We can't simply celebrate our rising graduation rates without holding ourselves accountable for the 44% of students in the Class of 2017 who graduated from high school ineligible to attend an in-state college or university,” said then-board Vice President Nick Melvoin.

It turned out that there was even less to celebrate. A 2018 report by the United States Department of Education's Office of Inspector General found problems with the self-reporting of data by California school districts and also forced a change in how officials counted students who completed high school.

Under the old formula, the state counted students as graduates if they transferred to adult education classes or completed a high school proficiency exam, but under the new formula only students who complete the graduation requirements are considered graduates. That dropped LAUSD's graduation rate from over 80% to just 76.1%.

So what is being done to help low-performing schools become better? “That's the piece we haven't heard about,” said Katie Braude, executive director of Speak UP, a parent advocacy group working with the district to improve tools to evaluate school performance. So far, we've heard LAUSD demand a new parcel tax of 16 cents per square foot of homes and commercial buildings in the district without any promised reforms, and we've heard the school board ask for a moratorium on new charter schools, thereby reducing options for parents unhappy with the performance of traditional public schools. That's a failure.