

**INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE**  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
Independent Analysis Unit

**INFORMATIVE**

**TO:** Members, Board of Education  
Austin Beutner, Superintendent

**DATE:** June 21, 2021

**FROM:** Glenn Daley, Director, **Independent Analysis Unit**  
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**SUBJECT: A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING THE PATH TO RECOVERY PLAN**

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to the Board regarding the District’s plans for spending approximately \$5 billion in one-time recovery funds provided in the wake of COVID-19. To do so, we offer a framework that can be used to evaluate line-item expenditures in the *Path to Recovery Budget Plan* in terms of their coherence and alignment to Board priorities. This framework will also be useful later for monitoring how well the investments perform in boosting student outcomes.

This memo utilizes two primary sources to construct a picture of the District’s recovery effort: The *Path to Recovery Update* (presented to the Board on May 25, 2021) and the *Path to Recovery Budget Plan*. Both documents categorize all investments into four “pillars:” health and safety, acceleration of learning, mental wellness, and supports for specialized populations. This memo includes example analyses of items from the “acceleration of learning” pillar.<sup>1</sup>

Using this framework to evaluate items in the Path to Recover Budget Proposal, **we found that in many cases proposed expenditures lacked information that would allow the Board to determine whether the investments were aligned with District priorities or coherently connected to other investments and overall District strategy.**

We recommend each line item of the acceleration of learning, supports for specialized populations pillars, and mental wellness pillars be evaluated in terms of this framework.

## **A Framework for Evaluating Alignment of Recovery Interventions to Student Outcomes**

We begin with the principal of *allocative efficiency*, which is one objective that can be used to evaluate investments and states that expenditures should be based on District priorities and on effectiveness of programs.<sup>2</sup> The budget system should spur reallocation from lesser to higher priorities and from less to more effective programs. Since the Board’s primary priority is to

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<sup>1</sup> The “supports for specialized populations” and “mental wellness” pillars can also be evaluated using this framework to assess alignment to student outcomes. Arguably, the “health and safety” pillar could also be evaluated using this framework, though we did not create the framework with that pillar in mind.

<sup>2</sup> Allocative efficiency is one of the basic elements of Public Expenditure Management (PEM), which is method to improve budgeting of public agencies and governments. (Source: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/739061468323718599/pdf/351160REVoContemporaryOPEM1book.pdf>)

improve student outcomes, to ensure that expenditures are based on District priorities, Board members should determine whether:

- **Line items are *aligned* to measurable student outcomes.** *Alignment* means that the connection between any individual investment and the ultimate student outcome is made explicit. Alignment answers the question: how does this investment lead, through a series of logical intermediate steps, to a specified student outcome? When the District provides an explanation for how expenditures are aligned to goals, it also facilitates eventual evaluation for effectiveness by making implementation and outcome measures explicit.
- **Expenditures represent *coherent* strategy.** *Coherence* means that any line item in a proposed budget should be consistent and coordinated with other items, the goals of other investments, and, District and state priorities. One way to represent coherence in a budget proposal is to present initiatives or programs as single items with multiple expenditures, all of which fit into to a single implementation strategy.

To evaluate the allocative efficiency of each investment outlined in the Path to Recovery, we propose a basic model of how successful investments can accomplish District priorities. The model represents a logical sequence of events: 1) someone receives money to implement a program 2) the program includes activities that are designed, directly or indirectly, to ultimately affect students in some explicitly stated way, which 3) results in improved student outcomes.

This model represents interactive relationships among the investment itself (the “what” and “who” of a resource, intervention, or program), what the program does to affect students (the “how it works” component), and student outcomes, which could be test results, graduation rates or any other measure of student academic, behavioral or social-emotional outcome.

Each component is designed to test a proposal for different kinds of information, but, for the purposes of budget evaluation, the information does not need to be exhaustive. The proposal just has to contain enough detail to help decision makers determine basic alignment and coherence.

### An Opportunity to Further Develop Objectives and Criteria to Evaluate Tradeoffs

In addition to allocative efficiency, other objectives and criteria can be used to evaluate proposed investments. With further development, these objectives can be used to identify impacts and resource requirements and highlight important policy trade-offs for the Board to consider.

Once these objectives and criteria are finalized, initiatives could be compared in terms of how well they meet each objectives’ criteria. Possible objectives and example criteria include:

**Increase equity:** # of students with special educational needs served, # of students with increased access to resources/ services, # of students in specialized populations with improved academic outcomes

**Increase short-term efficiency:**  
Minimize time for implementation;  
Minimize time to impact

**Minimize long term cost:** Start-up cost; Annual operating cost; # added certificated staff

**Increase sustainability:** Share of initiative that is designed for short-term benefits; Share of initiative that is designed to build internal capacity for improvement

**Maximize administrative feasibility:** Program capacity (# of students that benefit); Program efficiency (ratio of staff involved/added to students affected); Minimize burden; Likelihood that schools’ annual budget will change substantially year-to-year

In an ultimate evaluation of the effectiveness of an investment, we would also be interested to test for actual improved student outcomes, but for the purpose of fiscal stewardship, we can use this framework for a rough evaluation.

**Figure 1.** Framework for Evaluating Alignment

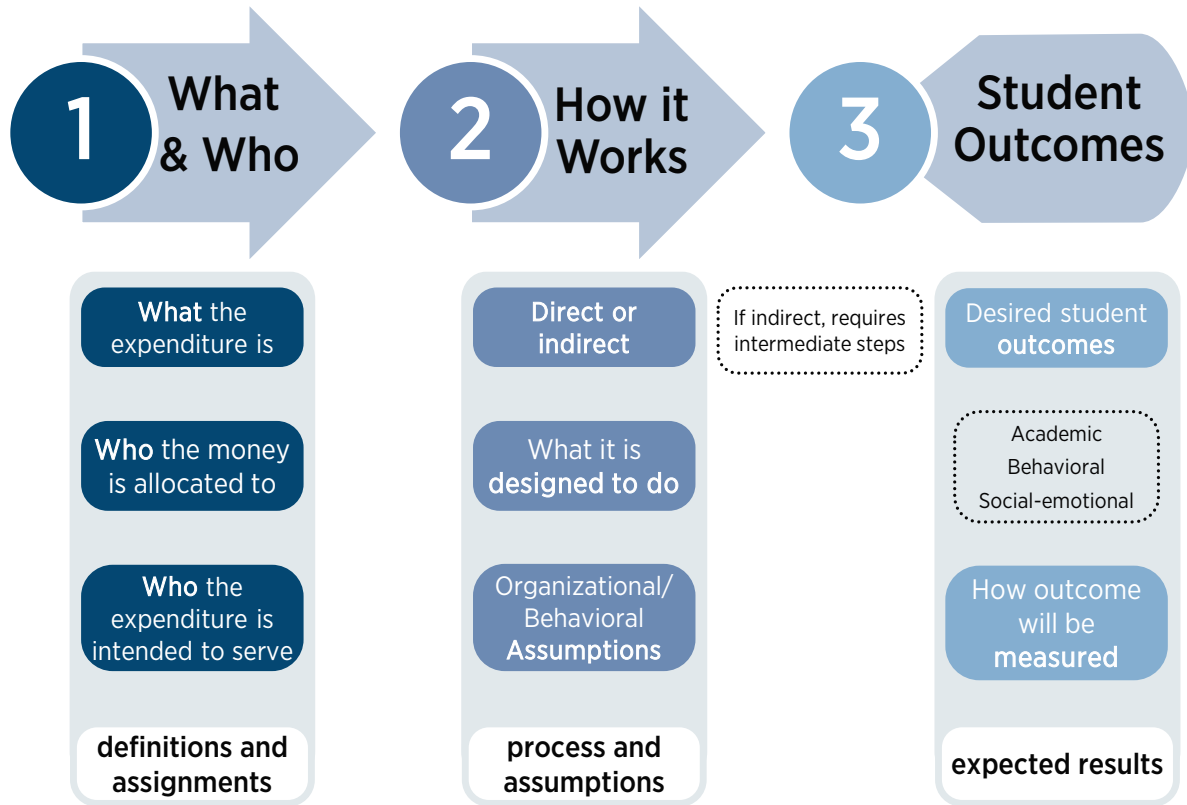


Figure 1 shows three steps as components of a proposal. For each step, we can ask a set of questions. The answers to these questions describe how an investment is designed to lead to a desired outcome and allow us to assess whether it is a prudent investment aligned to priorities, coherently connected to other investments, and with a chance of success.

<p><b>Step 1. What &amp; Who</b></p> <p>In the “what and who” component, questions are meant to elicit an understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What the expenditure is</b> - for example - is it a resource, program, support service, new personnel, or other investment?</li> <li>• <b>Who is responsible for spending the money</b> (e.g. schools, CoS, facilities division)</li> <li>• <b>Who the expenditure is intended to serve</b> – for example – is it a direct service provided to students, or a resource provided to teachers that indirectly impacts students? Ultimately, all expenditures should be linked to students through a coherent strategy that may include several intermediate steps.</li> </ul>
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Once the “what or who” component of an initiative has been identified, then we can turn to step 2 of the process—what happens with the resource, program or personnel and how is it intended ultimately to affect students? We refer to this as the “how” component.

### Step 2. How

In the “how” component, questions are meant to elicit an understanding of:

- **Is it direct or indirect?** - Initiatives that affect students directly – e.g., a student intervention such as summer school – are more easily related to student outcomes than initiatives that affect students indirectly. Initiatives that are intended to affect students indirectly – e.g., professional development – require an explanation as to how the initiative affects student outcomes through intermediate steps.
- **What it is designed to do** (e.g. math coaches train teachers who develop skills and apply them in the classroom.)
- **Whether it can reasonably be expected to work** – here, a budget proposal does not provide enough detail to assess the feasibility of an initiative or its dependencies. However, we can ask, given the information provided and our experience, whether we can reasonably assume it will be implemented effectively and achieve its desired outcomes. Some assumptions are: skilled staff will be available, there will be enough time, or, other necessary resources are available. Being explicit about the assumptions helps decision makers roughly evaluate the chance of success. In the “Additional Considerations when Evaluating Proposals” callout, we briefly discuss the impact District policies and practices might have on the effectiveness of an initiative.

**The final component of the framework—step 3—entails the identification of the expected results of an initiative.** These results should be stated in terms of measurable student outcomes that can be reasonably linked to the implementation of the program or investment. Outcomes do not need precise specification, but they do need to be linked logically to the expenditure and made explicit. For instance, elementary math coaches may be expected to affect fifth grade CAASPP scores in mathematics, but not necessarily attendance. In a proposal, outcomes should be stated at this level of specificity.

Presentation of each recovery effort investment should include answers to all these questions. **Any unanswered question prevents Board members from evaluating how an investment aligns to student outcomes.** Below, we demonstrate how the framework can be applied to several recovery effort initiatives to identify gaps in alignment to student outcomes and offer suggestions for how initiatives can be improved to facilitate alignment.

## Applying the Framework to Recovery Interventions to Identify Gaps in Alignment to Student Outcomes

The following tables demonstrate how the framework can be used to tie descriptions of budget proposals to components of the framework. We apply the framework to three initiatives under the “acceleration of learning” pillar. For each initiative, we provide a brief summary of the proposal from the *Path to Recovery Budget Plan*; links to the specific page in the budget plan are also provided.

## Application Example 1: Hotspots

<p><b>Budget Initiative: Hotspots</b></p> <p>An “acceleration of learning” initiative that allocates \$35 million for hotspots (pg. 15).</p>
<p><b>Description.</b> Annual service for 225,000 hotspots and 25% annual refresh; Annual cost of monthly connectivity service (\$33M) for students relying on District provided internet from off campus; Annual cost of a device buffer (\$2M) to provide immediate replacement devices for those that are lost, malfunctioning, or obsolete in order to minimize lost instructional time</p> <p><b>Impact.</b> To ensure that no students lack internet connectivity off campus, which is necessary to participate in remote and hybrid learning programs.</p> <p><b>Allocation Methodology.</b> LTE service / internet connectivity is provided to schools as requested based on student needs.</p>

**Table 1.** Applying the Framework to the Hotspots Initiative

	Component	Questions
WHAT & WHO	What is the expenditure?	An instructional resource
	Who responsible for spending the money?	Not stated
	Who is the investment intended to serve?	Students via their schools, based on student need
HOW	Does it affect students directly or indirectly?	A direct resource to students
	What is it designed to do?	Hotspots provide students access to internet when off campus to improve access to and participation in remote or hybrid learning.
	What assumptions about effectiveness are built into the proposal?	Assumes that improving access to remote learning will lead to improved participation in remote or hybrid learning.
OUTCOME	What are the desired student outcomes?	No specified student outcome. However, proposal specifies a desired output - to improve student participation in remote and hybrid learning programs.
	How will improvement be measured?	Not stated
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> Improve coherence and alignment with student outcomes by: (1) clarifying who is intended to spend the allocated \$35 million, (2) folding the proposal into a broader, more coherent initiative such as “Education Technology Integration,” with the intent to integrate education technology into a teacher’s toolkit to transform teaching and learning to improve a specific student outcome e.g., content mastery.</p>		

In Table 1, we apply the framework to the District’s proposal to allocate \$35 million for hotspots. Descriptions of the proposal clearly state what the proposal is and who it is intended to serve, however, there is not enough information to determine who is responsible for spending the money. Moreover, embedded in the proposal is a major assumption that increasing access to connectivity will improve participation in remote or hybrid instruction rather than being a first step in improving participation among students who experience barriers to remote instruction. Lastly, the expressed impact of the proposal is aligned to an expected *output* rather than a student *outcome*. Improving participation is an output that can help facilitate improvements to student outcomes,

e.g., content mastery. To improve the proposal’s coherence and alignment with student outcomes, we recommend (1) clarifying who is intended to spend the allocated \$35 million, and (2) folding the proposal into a broader, coherent initiative such as “Education Technology Integration,” with the intent to integrate education technology into a teacher’s toolkit to transform teaching and learning to improve a specific student outcome - e.g., content mastery in a specific subject.

## Application Example 2: Summer school operations

<b>Budget Initiative: Summer school operations</b>	
An “acceleration of learning” initiative that allocates \$120 million to fund support positions to operate summer school during the summer of 2021 (pg. 21).	
<b>Description.</b> Summer programs to support K-12 schools, including virtual and on-campus options. Support positions funded include paraprofessionals, clerical support, campus aides, supervision aides, and transportation. Programs offered include: Community of Schools (TK-8) - <i>191 schools</i> , Beyond the Bell (Title I, TK-8) - <i>349 schools</i> , High School (9-12) - <i>73 schools</i> , Extended School Year (K-12) - <i>59 schools</i>	
<b>Impact.</b> High-quality summer programs increase students’ readiness for the upcoming school year by providing expanded learning time in academics and embedded enrichment.	
<b>Allocation Methodology.</b> All TK-8 Title I schools (Beyond the Bell), 190 elementary/ middle (CoS), credit recovery/ grade enhancement (high school) and other students (TK-8) based on data	

**Table 2.** Applying the Framework to the Summer School Operations Initiative

	Component	Questions
WHAT & WHO	What is the expenditure?	A program
	Who responsible for spending the money?	Unclear, but presumably Beyond the Bell, specific Communities of Schools, and specific school sites to fund support staff positions
	Who is the investment intended to serve?	Students attending Title I Schools via Beyond the Bell, students attending other CoS participating schools, students with demonstrated need for credit recovery or support (number of intended participating students unclear)
HOW	Does it affect students directly or indirectly?	Investment funds support positions—an indirect resource to students that allows for the operation of a direct resource to students (additional learning time)
	What is it designed to do?	Support staff facilitate the operation of expanded learning time.
	What assumptions about effectiveness are built into the proposal?	Emphasizes importance of “high-quality” program to improve student outcomes without detail re: how it intends to ensure high-quality
OUTCOME	What are the desired student outcomes?	To increase students’ readiness for the upcoming school year. Lacks specificity; how is readiness measured.
	How will improvement be measured?	Not stated
<b>Recommendation:</b> Improve coherence and alignment with student outcomes by: (1) clarifying who is intended to spend the allocated \$120 million, (2) providing descriptions for how the District plans to ensure summer program is of a “high-quality,” and (3) providing more specificity in the readiness goals such that improvement can be measured.		

In Table 2, we apply the framework to the District’s proposal to allocate \$120 million to fund support staff positions for summer school operations. Descriptions of the proposal clearly state what it is and who it is intended to serve; however, there is not enough information to determine who is responsible for spending the money (i.e., Beyond the Bell, specific CoSs, or specific school sites). Moreover, the proposal emphasizes the importance of a “high-quality” program to improve students’ readiness without specifying how it intends to ensure summer programs are high-quality. Without additional details, decision makers would have difficulty assessing the likelihood of this initiative succeeding at its stated goals. Lastly, though the impact of the proposal is on “readiness,” which is a student outcome, the proposal does not indicate how readiness will be measured. Without more specificity, it is difficult to understand how this initiative is designed to work: what outcome is this summer school initiative designed to improve?

To improve the proposal’s coherence and alignment with student outcomes, we recommend (1) clarifying who is intended to spend the allocated \$120 million, (2) providing descriptions for how the District plans to ensure summer program is of a “high-quality,” e.g., screening teacher participants in summer school or allocating funding for professional development or other supports to ensure improved instruction, and (3) providing more specificity in the readiness goals such that improvement can be measured.

### Application Example 3: Primary Promise – Focus on Literacy

<p><b>Budget Initiative: Primary Promise – Focus on Literacy</b></p> <p>An “acceleration of learning” initiative that allocates almost \$100 million to fund various components: various staff, professional development and coaching, evaluation, extended time (pg. 19).</p>
<p><b>Description.</b> Beginning in 2021-2022, Primary Promise supports will extend beyond the initial 226 focus schools. Resources will be used to: Provide intensive support with a focus on foundational literacy skills and application through connected text; Schedule daily acceleration of learning instructional support; Provide targeted direct instruction to small groups each day; Use a data-driven instructional approach</p> <p><b>Impact.</b> The primary impact is to ensure students’ strong foundation in literacy and critical thinking, in addition to building schools’ capacity to effectively engage in cycles of improvement that result in accelerated literacy progress for all learners.</p> <p><b>Allocation Methodology.</b> Schools were identified using DIBELS data for kindergarten through second grade, as well as SENI ranking and Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement</p>

In Table 3, we apply the framework to the District’s proposal to allocate almost \$100 million to fund various aspects of the Primary Promise – Focus on Literacy program. Descriptions of the proposal clearly state what the proposal is, who it is intended to serve, and who is responsible for spending the money. The proposal adequately describes how it is intended to affect students while also addressing assumptions about effectiveness by intentionally integrating evaluative components. Lastly, the proposal is aligned to specific and measurable student outcomes.

**Table 3.** Applying the Framework to the Primary Promise Literacy Initiative

	Component	Questions
WHAT & WHO	What is the expenditure?	A program
	Who responsible for spending the money?	Primary Promise schools
	Who is the investment intended to serve?	Students in grades K-3 with lowest DIBELS performance band
HOW	Does it affect students directly or indirectly?	Investment funds direct and Indirect services. Indirect services are utilized by adults to improve direct services (expanded learning time)
	What is it designed to do?	Intervention teachers and aides receive literacy-focused training to provide intensive support to students with focus on foundational literacy skills and application through connected text.
	What assumptions about effectiveness are built into the proposal?	Assumptions about effectiveness of investments are addressed through the cycle of improvement and research evaluation components
OUTCOME	What are the desired student outcomes?	To ensure a strong foundation in literacy and critical thinking.
	How will improvement be measured?	Partially measured by the percentage of students scoring Benchmark and above on DIBELS and by zone of growth data from BOY to EOY DIBELS.
<b>Recommendation:</b> Use proposal as a model to improve the coherence and alignment of other proposals to student outcomes.		

The Primary Promise – Focus on Literacy initiative is a coherent strategy with multiple, related expenditures, that can help improve student outcomes in literacy. Thus, we recommend using this proposal as a template to improve the coherence and alignment of other proposals to student outcomes.

### Additional Considerations when Evaluating Proposals

When evaluating the effectiveness of an initiative, there is value in assessing the policies and practices in place that might impact an initiative’s inputs and outputs, and - by extension – its outcomes. Below are questions for consideration.

**1. What District policies or practices impact the accessibility of adult interventions?**

For example, if a key feature of an initiative involves an adult intervention like professional development or instructional coaching, then what policies dictate how teachers are identified for those opportunities? To be effective, instructional supports should be equitably distributed across the District such that where there are concentrations of need (e.g., concentrations of inexperienced teachers) there proportionally more resources available to support the need.

**2. What District policies or practices impact the accessibility of student interventions?**

For example, if students are identified for accelerated learning opportunities based on 2018-19 SBAC data, will some students who faced barriers to learning during remote instruction be overlooked for the opportunities? To be effective, the District should be confident that student interventions are accessible to students who would benefit from them.

**3. What District policies or practices impact the ability of adults or students to actively engage in interventions?**

For example, given that teachers and students are under immense pressure to make up for lost time, how is the District preparing for the burnout teachers and students are likely to experience in the coming school year(s)? To be effective, teachers and students must be able to actively engage in a teaching or learning intervention – a component that is threatened by fatigue.



## Recommendations

We applied our framework to several Path to Recovery Budget Plan proposals and found that many of the proposals included in the Plan lack information that allows decision makers to determine if they are aligned to student outcomes or coherently connected to other investments and expenditures. We recommend that the Board approve the plans with an expectation that staff:

1. Use this framework for allocative efficiency to identify proposals that are not aligned to student outcomes, to revise them accordingly and to combine expenditures as appropriate into initiatives that are internally and externally coherent, and
2. Report back to the Board with descriptions of proposals written in the terms outlined in the framework and possibly also evaluated based on how well they meet other objectives that the Board identifies.