

PARTICIPANTS

Nancy Albarrán is the superintendent of the San José Unified School District (SJUSD). Previously, she oversaw the division of curriculum and instruction as assistant superintendent. In that role, she worked to increase the instructional capacity of over 1,600 teachers, 60 instructional coaches, and 42 school leaders through professional development and continuous improvement efforts aligned with SJUSD's strategic plan. She also served as director of curriculum, instruction, and English Learner services, preK–5; director of bilingual education and special programs, K–12; and manager of elementary bilingual and English Language Development programs. She was principal of Lowell Elementary, which under her leadership received the California Association for Bilingual Education Seal of Excellence award for exemplary bilingual program. She began her teaching career in the Oakland Unified and Los Angeles Unified school districts. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and social welfare from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master's degree in education, administration, and supervision from San José State University.

Niu Gao is a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, specializing in K–12 education. Her areas of interest include math and science education, digital learning in K–12 schools, and students' transitions from high school to college. Prior to joining PPIC, she worked as a quantitative policy analyst at Stanford. She holds a PhD in educational policy and an MS in economics from Florida State University.

Laura Hill is a policy director and senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California. Her areas of expertise are K–12 education and immigration. She is currently researching English Learners in California schools, special education, and ESL students in community colleges. Her recent publications examine student achievement on the state's K–12 assessments and the link between language reclassification policies and student success. Prior to joining PPIC, she was a research associate at the SPHERE Institute and a National Institute of Aging postdoctoral fellow. She holds a PhD in demography and an MA in economics from the University of California, Berkeley.

Hilda Maldonado is the superintendent of the Santa Barbara Unified School District. She took over during one of the most challenging periods in the history of the district as the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to transform teaching and learning almost overnight. She began her career as an educator in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as a bilingual teacher, rising to the role of associate superintendent. Under her leadership in LAUSD, she helped expand dual language programs, increased Seal of Biliteracy awards, and improved results for English Learners. She has supervised school principals, developed policies and programs, and led multilingual and multicultural education. She has also taught summer programs focused on literacy and language as part of the California Reading & Literature Project at the University of California, Los Angeles. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Los Angeles, and is currently completing a doctoral degree in social justice leadership at Loyola Marymount University.

Dr. Ed Manansala is the county superintendent of schools for El Dorado County. His tenure has been marked by strong collaboration with education and community leaders to increase achievement and equity, and to successfully implement the California Statewide System of Support. He is the vice chair of the State Board of Education's California Practitioners Advisory Group and serves on the California Special Education Finance Study Technical Advisory Committee. In 2018 he was president of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association and served on Governor Newsom's Charter School Task Force. He started his career in the public school system as a coordinator of learning support services with the Sacramento Unified School District and then became principal and superintendent of St. HOPE public schools. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees at California State University, Sacramento, and his EdD in educational leadership from the University of California, Davis.