



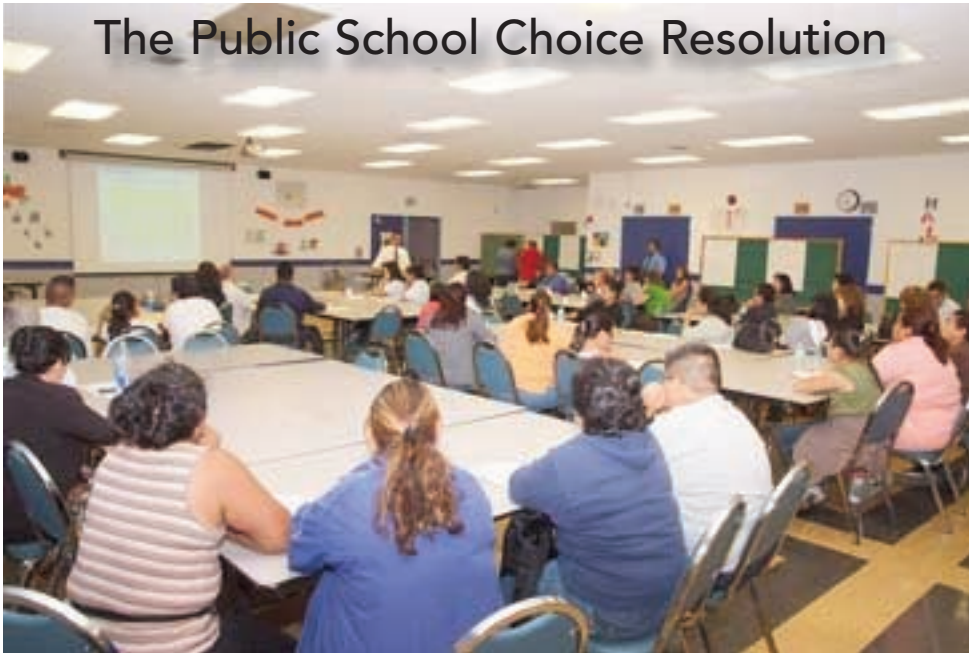
the Parent press



The Newsletter for LAUSD Parents Vol. 14, No. 1 • Winter 2010

The Crucial Need for YOUR Voice

The Public School Choice Resolution



At dozens of orientation meetings like this one over the last three months, LAUSD parents received information and asked questions about how the Public School Choice process will work for their students and schools.

In 2010, LAUSD parents are being asked to be informed and vocal with a new intensity.

As the district implements the Public School Choice (PSC) process and seeks to close a \$1.2 billion budget gap, the urgency for parent participation increases. "This is a crisis for our children," says parent Bill Ring. "They need us to watch, listen, and speak up about the dramatic changes that are being made to their schools and instruction."

The school choice resolution will enable outside groups or newly designed existing schools to operate public schools. Twelve underperforming schools and 24 newly constructed schools that will open in September 2010 have been selected for this process. Applications for PSC came from 219 different groups: charter school organizations,

non-profits, redesigned school staff proposals, and other independent groups who propose new education models. Public advisory meetings were held at these sites to share details and get input from parents and community. Veteran parent leader Zella Knight says, "Superintendent Cortines says he wants parent participation. For the sake of our kids, we should understand what Public School Choice means and make sure our choices are heard." Extensive information about the Resolution and public meetings is available on at www.lausd.net, click on Public School Choice.

For the first time in memory, the LAUSD budget plan is open for all to see, including particulars of budget cutting such as further reducing staff at the central and local district level and making deeper cuts

Message from
Ramon C. Cortines
Superintendent of Schools



We're Number One

Did you know that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) ranks first in Google searches in Los Angeles? According to Google's annual year-end list, LAUSD was the No. 1 local search term.

The top ranking indicates enormous interest in the nation's second largest school district. I am sure those seeking information include many parents and guardians of the 688,138 students who attend kindergarten through the 12th grade in our 885 schools. We welcome your interest. Ranking first in local Google searches may be worth noting. We want to be No. 1 with you, too.

The Public School Choice initiative is also attracting a great deal of attention. Applications to run new schools and existing low-performing campuses were reviewed internally. Community engagement meetings allow parents and others to express their opinions. For more, go to www.lausd.net and look in the 'News and Events' area.



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message from

Christopher Downing, Administrator, Parent Community Services Branch



Parent Input, Parent Preparation

This could be a banner year for parents of LAUSD students.

As the effects of more than \$1.2 billion budget cuts are implemented, new plans call for moving funds to local schools. Across the district, parents are getting ready for that decision-making responsibility. This fall, I personally participated in nearly 40 different trainings where parents, and other campus leaders elected to school site councils (SSC), studied strategies of budgeting. Superintendent Cortines has asked parents and SSC teams to make local decisions regarding more than \$500 million of categorical funding (state and federal monies) and positions including teachers to reduce class sizes, nurses, psychologists, literacy and

math coaches, custodians, librarians, and attendance counselors. I'm confident that our school site councils will be ready for the task.

We are also busy strengthening the work of our parent centers via the new Parent Engagement Tool Kits. In 2010, the centers will be the hub for meaningful parent education and support. More training will be provided based on parent feedback we received from conducting Listening Tours across the District to discuss improving parent engagement. Parents talked about what LAUSD could do to train parents to help their children in concrete ways. Ask about the Tool Kit trainings in your school. The Toolkit will help schools operate improved parent centers and conduct classes for caring, involved parents who want to support the academic achievement of their children. ●

Parent Center As Campus Hub



The new parent center at Denker Elementary School has quickly become the gathering spot on campus for those who volunteer, seek information, learn academic skills, and network with other parents.

“We are visible, accessible, and, most of all, very busy!” reports community representative Della Matsumura about the parent center at Denker Elementary School.

For the first time, parent activities are housed in a bright bungalow located in a central area of the campus, and the impact is measurable. “Our parents know it’s for them, and involvement is growing,” says Principal Cindy Ahn. “Parents are bringing

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A Tool Kit to Build Student Achievement



Parent educator Charlotte Castagnola (standing) prepares parent center directors to roll out the 2010 Parent Tool Kit, a program that teaches parents how to help students build academic skills at home.

The New Year's Resolution at parent centers across the Los Angeles Unified School District is a powerful one.

Parents will be welcomed and encouraged to learn how to build the academic achievement of their children. An extensive program—The Parent Engagement Tool Kit—has been rolled out to every school in the district. The Tool Kit provides curriculum and trained leaders who will conduct workshops to connect parents and instruction. “We believe that all parents can help their kids. If we teach them, they can and they will,” declares Charlotte Castagnola, veteran parent education leader in Local District 2.

Hundreds of parent facilitators and parent center directors are being trained to instruct parents from the Tool Kit, a compilation of parent education designed and tested by Mrs. Castagnola. Instruction includes workshops such as Kindergarten Curriculum, which teaches parents how to build language arts and math skills with make-at-home game boards and projects. High Frequency Words presents techniques to help kids increase fluency and compre-

hension of the English words used most often. The Tool Kit aims to fire up parent learning in every parent center as it has in Local District 2. “Last year, we documented that 19,000 workshops were held in our parent centers, attended by 149,762 parents,” reports Sandra Caulkin, LD2 Parent Ombudsperson.

The Tool Kit itself is a binder more than two inches thick with lesson plans and best practices. The projected impact should be much larger. It is not to be put on a shelf somewhere. Parent center directors should be ready to begin this parent education early in 2010. Ask when the classes start. Your child's success can't be kept waiting. ●

Your Voice, from page 1

in district-wide services. Funding is particularly important to parents because more than \$500 million will be given to local schools to oversee and allocate. “Moving resources and decisions to the schools is in the best interest of our students,” said Superintendent Cortines. Budget plans are also at lausd.net, link to Budget Solutions. ●



The KLCS staff readies the set for *The Parent Connection*, which is televised monthly.

Lights! Cameras! Parents!

A new television program for parents has premiered on KLCS, Channel 58. Featuring parents, school officials, and LAUSD instructional leaders, *The Parent Connection* is designed to help parents build effective strategies to help their children improve academic achievement and life skills.

The debut program was broadcast on December 23rd at 7:00 p.m. and aired on three other dates and times. “The program grew from parents asking for it,” explains Christopher Downing, Administrator of Parent Community Services Branch who hosts the program. “They want to know more about how to help their kids, their schools, and how to be involved in school governance. Now they can learn from home.”

The broadcast includes video features about effective parent centers and innovative schools, plus discussions among LAUSD parents and community leaders. “This program can bring strong, useful information into thousands of homes,” says KLCS producer Barry Kibrick. The Parent Connection, a monthly broadcast, welcomes suggestions from parents for future programs. To find the date and time that the program airs, go to www.klcs.org or call the TV station at 213-241-4000. ●

14th Annual Parent Summit

Saturday, April 24, 2010, 8:00 am.–4:00 pm.

Los Angeles Convention Center

Join thousands of LAUSD parents and community members for the day-long opportunity to share strategies and experiences that can better serve our children and our schools.

Be a part of this valuable conference and meet nationally known authorities in education and child development, local

district officials and Board Members, dozens of exhibitors, and LAUSD's finest student entertainment.

For more information, call Parent Community Services 866-669-7272 or go to www.lausd.net and click on families.

GRAD Nights for Families

No, this is not an invitation to Disneyland for an evening in June. This GRAD Night is a monthly event at Monroe High School for students and their families with its purpose explained in the title: **Get Ready to Achieve Dreams.**

"We want to help parents and their students understand how to graduate from high school, apply to and succeed in college," says Maura Draheim, director of the program.

The whole family is encouraged to attend—even the little kids for whom child-care is available. About 90 parents have become regulars to the evening meetings. "Getting into college is not only a four-year effort for current Monroe students. It's an eight-year project for parents and younger children. Each meeting focuses on a different topic such as the financial aid segment called "Got Money?" and explanations of standardized tests like the SATs or ACE. Not familiar with them? Don't worry. That's what GRAD Nights are all about.

The Monroe program features small interactive seminars. "Workshop leaders understand our families. They were the first generation in their families to go to college," says Ms. Draheim. "So they help clarify the process. And remind everyone how attainable those dreams are."



Monroe High School students and their families learn how to become college-ready.

Denker, from page 2

other parents. It makes a big difference."

For several years, the Denker Parent Center was actually a tiny area adjacent to a faculty restroom. "We made it work," Ms. Matsumura recalls. "However, with more space for more activities, I estimate almost 50% of our parents are now active on campus. They are here in our new center before, during, and after school."

New space means more opportunities for Denker families. ESL classes are forming for them, along with computer training groups. Workshops are held to teach parents how to help their children in math and other sub-

Your School Report Card

A valuable tool for parents that provides a picture of how their child's school performed last year has been compiled by LAUSD. The School Report Card summarizes data about each school's performance so that families and the community can assess how well their local campus is serving students. This is the second year for the Report Cards.

The 2008-2009 School Report Cards, released on January 19, 2010, provide accurate pictures of the effectiveness of over 600 individual district schools. The information gathered during the past year includes:

- Results of state test scores from the California Department of Education.
- Local data from LAUSD, such as graduation rates at high schools and how English learners are progressing toward proficiency.
- Survey results from parents, students, and school staff members.
- Reports on the learning environment and student groups at each school.
- Gains on many indicators since 2007-08
- How the school's performance compares to the LAUSD school average.

School Report Cards were distributed to elementary school parents by their schools. Middle and high school Report Cards were delivered to families by US Mail. They are also available at www.lausd.net/reportcard.

jects. The weekly schedule for helping teachers is larger than it's ever been as more volunteers sign up to assist with instructional materials and in classrooms. A lending library is up and running where children's books, DVDs, and parenting literature can be checked out. And, of course, there's the ever-brewing coffee pot and conversation. "Our parents feel welcome here," says Ms. Matsumura. "And our students benefit. When parent involvement increases, standardized test scores go up. Our school community is stronger, and student achievement improves."

Real Power to School Site Councils



As more decision-making moves to local schools, the stakeholders elected for that responsibility such as these in Southgate study intensely for that role.

As part of an effort throughout LAUSD to move school governance closer to local campuses, more than 5000 men and women—about one third were parents—attended training this fall to learn the rules and skills of school decision-making.

The extensive instruction was held for members of school site councils (SSC), the parents, teachers, and administrators elected by individual school communities. These SSC workshops aimed to make decentralization (moving governance closer to local schools) a reality in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

School site council members from nearly every school in the district participated in the half-day sessions. Important issues such as school budgets, teacher staffing, and using student data were part of the training. As the state funding crisis gets worse, said Superintendent Ramon Cortines in a message to the SSC members, “We must all make tough choices. Most decisions will be yours this year.”

The school site council is a decision-making body, not an advisory one, emphasizes Christopher Downing, who led the workshops. That authority is spelled out in the California Education Code. “The playing field is leveled by this training,” he said. “Stakeholders elected to their home school councils now have the rules and knowledge to decide what’s best for their school. No longer can parents take a passive role and let the principal make all the decisions.”

Feedback from the SSC members at each training was sent directly to the Superintendent. They generally applauded the power moving back to campus decision-making. “No one knows the needs of the school more than those on the SSC,” wrote Roxana Faber-Ansari of Hale Middle School. Many participants also called for more transparency using the Internet so that parents and community as well as LAUSD employees can access information such as budget proposals. “Decentralization should have been done years ago,” cheered parent Seymour Amster. Parents across LAUSD should be able to see the new governing authority at work in their school site councils as 2010 begins. ●

Honor Roll

Six LAUSD schools have been honored as 2009 National Blue Ribbon Schools. Chosen because they are academically superior or demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement, only 314 U.S. schools received the national award.

**Clifford Street Elementary
Danube Avenue Elementary
Delevan Drive Elementary
Hamlin Street Elementary
Solano Avenue Elementary
156th Street Elementary**

“These Blue Ribbon Schools have shown that all children can learn with appropriate support,” said Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education. “They are places where improved teaching and learning benefits each student.” Representatives from the honored LAUSD schools received the awards in Washington, D.C.

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For more than fifty years, the Monterey Jazz Festival stands out as the venue for the world’s most talented jazz musicians. It also welcomes the best high school talent in the nation to compete for the opportunity to entertain on the same program with greats like Dave Brubeck and Chick Corea. Attended by more than 40,000 music fans, this year’s Festival program featured a performance by the **Hamilton High School Academy of Music Vocal Jazz Ensemble.** The Hamilton HS group was selected from an international array of young talent who competed in the Next Generation Festival in the spring. “The very best of those musicians were offered spots in the September event. Hamilton was one of them,” explained Tim Orr, the Festival’s Communication Director.

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Alvan Burton, a loyal volunteer to LAUSD’s Parent Community Services Branch and to the district’s Athletics programs for more than thirty years, has died. He served in countless ways to help improve academic achievement for all students and to ensure that student athletes participated in safe, competitive, and ethical sports programs. ●

Spotlight on Parent Involvement

Parents Increase Safety for Teens

Arriving at West Adams Preparatory High School in the morning used to be a challenge for many students and the parents who were dropping them off. Teens ran across traffic. Parents chose to park illegally or dart across lanes. Congestion delayed teachers getting into the parking areas. It was an obstacle course that was unpleasant, and more importantly, unsafe. That is until September when parent volunteers changed the system.

“The congestion was awful,” remembers

Maggie Vasquez, whose son is a West Adams senior. “We parents decided to do something about it.” Their action was a team of safety valets, a group of parent volunteers who set up cones to divert traffic toward the proper school entrances and then who open car doors to quicken the pace of moving kids from car to classroom. “It’s working,” says Ms. Vasquez, the leader of the team of 30 safety valet volunteers. “At the beginning, some parents grumbled about being redirected. We smiled and told them that we were doing this because your child is special.”

West Adams Prep is the first high school in LAUSD to use this parent-staffed system.



Early apprehension about how adolescents would react to having doors opened for them evaporated. “The kids like it. They seem to appreciate the safe exit and the positive greetings they hear from safety valets,” reports Principal Susan Allen. And teachers are no longer late for class because of traffic jams at the parking structure. Further proof is in the statistics from LA School Police: 75% decrease in traffic jams, 90% reduction in traffic citations, and dramatically fewer tardies.

Free Computer Classes

It was a message that made computer instructor Luis Trejo smile. “I won’t be able to attend class anymore. I got a job,” it said. “That’s why we’re here,” he says, referring to the free computer instruction he provides. Open to all LAUSD parents, the three-hour class, held twice a week in the office of Parent Community Services Branch (PCSB), has a two-fold purpose: provide valuable training and build job skills for adults.

The class also teaches parents how to help their children with their homework. Parents can be frustrated when students get assignments that require a computer or research online. Nearly all LAUSD students daily attend schools with computers in classrooms, labs, and libraries. That could partly explain why the adults enrolled in the classes at PCSB are so intent on mastering the technology. Or, as Mr. Trejo explains, “Many are looking for a better job or trying to keep the one they have that requires computer skills.”

The class is open entry/open enrollment, which means parents can enroll any time. Students learn every-

thing from how to turn on a computer to Word, Excel, Windows, and PowerPoint. “They don’t have to know how to type or speak English,” explains Mr. Trejo as he walks around the classroom. “Everyone progresses at their own pace.” He’s been teaching in adult education since 1999 and enjoys watching the progress of his students. “Many start out super scared. But once they try it, they are hooked.” For more information about the classes, call PCSB at 866-669-7272.



What's For Lunch?



Their questions ranged from concerns about prepackaged food to tastiness as Lanai parents discussed school cafeteria issues with representatives of the district's Food Services Division.

The people responsible for feeding your children at school want to talk to you: about the choices in the cafeteria, about how to serve fresh fruit, about the time available for students to eat, dozens of aspects that make up the huge challenge of serving more than 120 million meals a year to LAUSD students.

"We need parents and kids to talk to us about the direction we are taking," says David Binkle, Deputy Director of Café LA, the district's Food Services Division. Which explains why he and other Café LA officials are out of their offices and cafeterias a lot these days. If parents don't come to them, they are going to parents.

Safe and recyclable food packaging was a concern when Café LA met with parents at Lanai Elementary School. Lanai's cafeteria switched to reheated, prepackaged food this year "Parents worried about the safety of

eating food microwaved in plastic," reports parent Lisa Liss. "They also asked about a better way to recycle all that soiled packaging." Lanai parents seemed satisfied that Food Services is working to develop more environmentally sound containers and that reheating is safe. They aren't as satisfied with the meals themselves. As Ms. Liss explains, "More kids choose to bring lunch from home now instead of buying prepackaged ones."

It's the kind of feedback Mr. Binkle wants. Student participation is the crucial measure for Café LA. "Meals increased by 12 million last year," he says. Yet he's still not satisfied. Student focus groups regularly are asked to evaluate recipe and menus. A Cafeteria Improvement Committee for parents meets monthly just for parent input. "When parents asked for more fresh fruits and vegetables last year, we added \$7 million to our produce budget. When kids said they wanted to eat oranges but not whole ones, we sectioned the fruit," he adds. "We have to be responsive." ●

If you'd like a Café LA team to meet parents at your school, contact your cafeteria manager or call David Binkle at 213-241-1765.