



# the Parent press



The Newsletter for LAUSD Parents Vol. 14, No. 2 • Spring 2010

## What Parents are Saying



### Parents and Public School Choice

Parental voices were heard in and around the months-long process of Public School Choice (PSC), the reform proposal that seeks to bring academic success to 22 failing LAUSD schools and 8 new campuses. More than thirty community forums were held to explain the reform designs proposed at each school. In many cases, it was standing room only as parents, teachers, and activists crowded into auditoriums to hear the applicants promote their proposals for improving student achievement. Ultimately, it's estimated that 38,000 students will be enrolled in PSC schools.

**A**t a recent School Board meeting, parents — noticeably dressed alike in t-shirts that read, *Parents and students are the constant in education* — heard Superintendent Cortines outline more drastic budget cuts, required by the \$640 million shortfall for the 2010-2011 school year.

“There is simply not enough money in Sacramento to support the educational needs of our students,” he said. School Board member Yolie Flores reported, “I hear everyday from parents who are angry. You are right to be angry,” she said. “You must continue to speak up.” Ofelia Perez, whose daughter attends Webster Middle School, was one of the parents in the Boardroom. LAUSD parents are becoming more vocal, she contends, and the flow of information must keep up. “Schools are our partners. We must all know what’s going on,” she said. Around the District, parents like Perez are paying more attention and making their presence and opinions more apparent.



*Thousands of LAUSD parents expressed their preference for instructional reform in their schools during the Public School Choice advisory vote.*

In February, more than 6500 LAUSD parents cast ballots for the reform programs they favored for their campuses in the PSC advisory vote. Parent Vanessa Maldonado had attended the information sessions before she went to Hazeltine Elementary School to make her voice heard. “It’s important to my kids’ future,” she explained, echoing what hundreds of other parents felt as they trudged through rainstorms to get to the balloting.

See **WHAT PARENTS ARE SAYING**, page 4

*Message from*

**Ramon C. Cortines**  
Superintendent of Schools

### Getting Personal



**May I get a little personal?** How does your child learn? What are his or her interests? What are his or her needs in the classroom?

These are important questions. Their answers help our teachers tailor instruction to the specific learning styles and needs of individual students.

Personalized learning, knowing each student as a learner, is important to help teachers make real connections with students. Parents are a child’s first teacher and we know that they have valuable insights into the way their child learns and plays and discovers. It is important that teachers and parents communicate and share information regularly because this exchange of information is critical for personalized learning to happen.

A personal touch is always appreciated. As we work together to help all students do their best, it is time to get a little personal.

## Education Parcel Tax on June Ballot

**Facing a budget deficit of \$640 million for the next school year, a majority of the Los Angeles Board of Education voted to place an education**

See **PARCEL TAX**, page 8



## LAUSD BOARD MEMBERS

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*Chair: District Advisory Council*  
Roberto Fonseca

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## NEW ADDRESS

All inquiries should be sent to:  
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<http://sfpc.lausd.k12.ca.us/pcsb>

Translated by  
LAUSD Translations Unit

Photography:  
James Rees

message from

**Christopher Downing**, Administrator, Parent Community Services Branch



**It's no exaggeration that the current budget crisis, caused by huge funding cuts from the state, is the most serious assault on the Los Angeles Unified School District in decades.**

Parents — active and informed — have never been more necessary to the solutions. I am proud that so many are stepping up and speaking out.

The challenges are enormous. The budget deficit continues to grow. Currently, LAUSD needs to cut an additional \$640

million before the end of this school year. When instructional programs are delayed, teachers laid off, employees furloughed, school counselors and nurses reduced, and class sizes increased, all parents are needed to help with schoolwork at home, volunteer in school, and support funding solutions for the good of our children.

This year's Parent Summit on April 24th has been planned with those goals in mind. The day's events will provide important training and information so parents can build capacity to support their children's education. More than 40 workshops offer best practices that you can use to help your student succeed. It's always a great experience to participate with thousands of other committed parents. Please join us!

## 30 LAUSD Schools Earn Title I Academic Achievement Award

**Given to only 238 schools statewide, the California Department of Education recognized Title I schools that have made significant progress by doubling the achievement targets set for them for two consecutive years.** Title I schools are those with at least 40% of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Of the state's 9000 schools, more than 6000 qualify as Title I campuses. State Superintendent of Education Jack O'Connell praised the efforts of the honored schools. "By working together, administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents have raised student achievement and narrowed the achievement gap," he said.

**The award-winning LAUSD schools are:**  
Amanecer Primary Center  
Arroyo Seco Museum Science Magnet

Apperson Street Elementary  
Brentwood Science Magnet  
Burbank Boulevard Elementary  
Commonwealth Avenue Elementary  
Delevan Drive Elementary  
Fifty-Fourth Street Elementary  
Franklin Avenue Elementary  
Hamlin Street Elementary  
Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy  
Harvard Elementary  
Charles H. Kim Elementary  
Latona Avenue Elementary  
Lemay Street Elementary  
Maywood Elementary  
One Hundred Eighty-Sixth Street Elem.  
One Hundred Fifty-Sixth Street Elem.  
Park Western Place Elementary  
Paseo del Rey Natural Science Magnet  
Plummer Elementary  
Reseda Elementary  
Rio Vista Elementary  
Rosewood Avenue Elementary  
Seventh Street Elementary  
Seventy-Fourth Street Elementary  
Short Avenue Elementary  
Solano Avenue Elementary  
South Shores/CSUDH Visual and Performing Arts Magnet  
Stagg Street Elementary

## When You Succeed, Your Child Succeeds



Some of the members of the adult education and GED prep courses offered specifically for parents at Victoria Elementary School. L-R: Teacher, Ms. Karla Ek; Rufina Ocampo; Manuel Fierros; Teacher, Ms. Julie Park; Maria Elena Soto; Pedro Fernandez.

### **A** new program for LAUSD parents offers classes designed to prepare them to earn a General Education Development certificate, better known as a GED.

The GED is viewed by many employers as an equivalent to a high school diploma; it can also be a part of a program of classes for the diploma. "A GED opens the door to a better job, to college, and to being able to help your children with their school work," says Danna Escalante, program director. "It sets a powerful example for our kids."

This parent-centered program provides classes in English as a Second Language, math (in English and Spanish), reading and writing skills, and GED Exam preparation. The classes are free and held at local schools across the district by the Division of Adult & Career Education (DACE).

Adela Castellanos is an example of the power of this adult education. A few years ago, she was a single mother of three children with limited job prospects and, as she recalls, "low self-esteem. But I always want-

ed to improve myself." She started with ESL classes, went on to math, and GED prep. "My kids see me doing homework, and they work harder." While continuing to prepare for the GED, Adela got a new job as a DACE outreach advocate.

*"A GED opens the door to a better job, to college, and to being able to help your children with their school work"*

At Victoria Elementary School in Southgate, more than 40 parents attend the adult classes four mornings a week. "The interest in these classes is big," reports parent representative Sandra Ponce. "Our parents want to move forward to learn to help their kids and themselves. Having classes on campus made that easier."

**For information about these classes for parents, call: 888-730-3276.**



### **El Camino Real High School State Champ, Again**

The 2010 California Academic Decathlon was dominated by LAUSD high schools. El Camino Real High School earned the state title at the competition held in Sacramento in March scoring 50,590 points out of 60,000. El Camino has won the national Academic Decathlon five times before and will compete for its sixth win in Omaha, Nebraska in April.

LAUSD schools swept the top three spots this year. Marshall High School placed second in the competition with 50,029 points, and Granada Hills Charter placed third with a score of 49,120. Marshall won The Super Quiz, the only public event of the competition that included sixty-two teams from around the state. Also from LAUSD, Franklin High School, in its first-ever Academic Decathlon, placed 27th with 40,846.8.

El Camino Real won the national championship in 2007, 2005, 2004, 2001 and 1998.

## What Parents are Saying, from page 1

The groundbreaking parent advisory vote was not the only input used by Superintendent Ramon Cortines to make his recommendations.

### Parents at the Table

Prior to the final PSC decisions, parents also played a role on two review teams, constituted to provide a range of opinions on the dozens of applications submitted for this program. The larger Initial Review Team had 44 members; two were parents. Their mission was to evaluate all the plans submitted by groups vying to operate the 30 PSC schools and make recommendations to the Superintendent. Roberto Fonseca was one of those parents. He's president of the District Advisory Committee, a group of parents authorized by the state to advise the District on its use of Title I funds. "I spent three to four hours studying each plan I was given to review. Often the language was very technical and described what they wanted to accomplish, but not how the programs would be implemented," he said. "If parents are to have a meaningful role in reform, all information must be dissected so that everyone can understand how each step will work for students."

A smaller group of advisors in the Public School Choice process, called the Superintendent's Panel, counted four parents among its twelve members. This team reviewed the plans recommended by the Initial Review group and then took its own votes. Steve Bagby, an active parent volunteer from LD District 3, served on the panel. He said his group could have used more time for consideration. But he praised the proportion of parents on the team. "There were more parents on our panel than any other single group," he says. "We were listened to. The whole team discussed every plan before a vote was taken. And sometimes a plan was questioned because it didn't have a strong parent engagement component."

### Parents On the National Scene

In Washington, D.C., five LAUSD parents attended a meeting called by the US Department of Education's "Race to the Top" program, which could award \$4.35 billion to school districts across the country. The forum invited the "public and experts" to discuss better methods for assessing student work and better ways to hold high schools accountable. LAUSD parent activist Bill Ring submitted a question to the experts: Is there a role for parents in these new models? Bill reports that the answers were disappointing. "Not one expert included parents in their proposals, although several responded that they should be," he recalls. "Had I not asked the question, an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of parents to the process would likely have been omitted from the entire day's discussion."

Walter Richardson, who has been active in LAUSD parent activities for more than a decade, also was part of the LAUSD delegation. "The panel was not diverse, and there was no discussion about closing the achievement gap," he reports. "Forty-one states were represented. Yet the experts never spoke specifically about students of color. So I spoke up about the importance of considering the diversity of our student population. And the panelists began writing." The Washington experience affirmed Ring's opinion about the challenge for parents nationally and locally: "If parents want a place in decision making, we're going to carve out that place ourselves," he said.

### Parents and Arts Education

More than 1000 parents and community members have sent letters to the Los Angeles School Board asking that they protect the District's arts education program from the drastic budget cuts dictated by the \$640 million deficit. "LAUSD's ten-year

Arts Program has become a national model. It's an arts education pioneer," explains Tara Stafford, Advocacy Manager for the non-profit Arts For LA that advocates for comprehensive arts education as part of core curriculum in districts across Los Angeles. "The current proposal, a cut of 50%, will decimate elementary school arts education. K-5th graders might receive only half the arts opportunities they have now, and it could be even less."

Art teachers were hit hard by the lay-off notices that were sent out on March 15th; 173 got pink slip warnings. "That could mean that one teacher would be stretched between twice as many schools as they have now," Ms. Stafford explains. The letter-writing campaign is designed to let parent and community voices be heard by the superintendent and school board members who vote on budget decisions. Information, including the sample letter to board members, can be found at [www.artsforla.org/groups/LAUSD](http://www.artsforla.org/groups/LAUSD) or by calling 213-225-7526.



Photograph courtesy of Inner City Arts.

# Military Children's Program

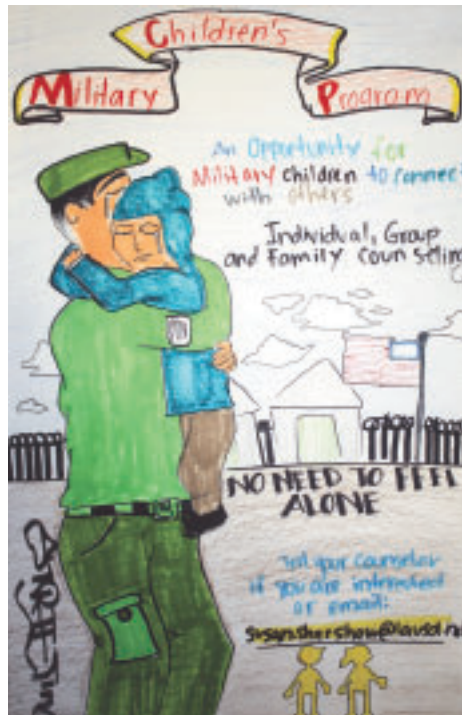
**A**ndre looks much younger than his ten years. His big brother Marcus is preparing to leave for a second tour in Afghanistan, and Andre is scared.

The first time Marcus was deployed, Andre thought he'd be gone for just a few weeks. When those extended into many long months, Andre remembers how sad and confused he was. His mom and dad and relatives seemed anxious and worried, especially when the evening news broadcast events from the Middle East. Andre's mother cried whenever he asked her when Marcus was coming home. Andre learned to keep his feelings of despair to himself. Now as his brother gets ready to deploy again, Andre feels that fear return. But this time, he will find help in LAUSD's Military Children Program.

More than two million U.S. children have parents or relatives serving in the military. "The reality is when parents serve in the military their children make sacrifices, too," says school social worker Susan Shershow. The district's Military Children's Program is here to help them. "We provide support and counseling to Los Angeles children who are struggling with the challenges that arise when a parent or relative is deployed and away from home."

The Program offers school-based activity groups, counseling, resources, and referrals for military-connected students and their families. Training is offered to teachers and school staffs so they can better understand the needs of military-connected children. Nearly 100 LAUSD students and families are part of the program. "The problems don't usually show up in a major meltdown. Kids might begin to have trouble sleeping or doing homework. Even when children appear to cope well, parents are encouraged to contact us for support," LAUSD Social Worker Deborah Hayes explains.

Students are the main focus, but military families – especially National Guard and Reserve families – are included, too. The



This cover for the brochure about the Military Children's Program was drawn by a student at Hamilton High School.

parent who is at home might struggle with being the sole caregiver. "We offer resources to parents to support their needs too," adds Ms. Hayes.

**For more information, call: 323-750-5167  
or email: [susan.shershow@lausd.net](mailto:susan.shershow@lausd.net)  
[deborah.j.hayes@lausd.net](mailto:deborah.j.hayes@lausd.net)**

## Tune in to *Your TV Program*

*The Parent Connection*, a monthly broadcast about parents and education, has a regular time slot on **KLCS-TV, Channel 58**. The program features panel discussions between LAUSD parents and district officials plus news segments from campuses around the District that highlight the projects, problems, and successes of parent involvement.

### **The Parent Connection will air:**

Wednesday, April 14	7:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 18	7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, April 20	12:00 noon

## The 14th Annual Parent Summit And InfoTech

**Education is Everyone's  
Homework!**

Saturday, April 24, 2010  
8:00am – 3:00pm

Los Angeles Convention Center  
1201 S. Figueroa St.  
Los Angeles 90015

Keynote Speaker

**Dr. Victor Rios**

"Homeboy Goes to Harvard"  
Productions.

**Dr. Rios** grew up in Oakland, California in a single parent household, in poverty and on welfare. He joined a gang at the age of thirteen; by sixteen, he had dropped out of school and had been incarcerated several times. After witnessing the gang murder of his best friend, Dr. Rios hit a turning point and made the decision to transform. With the support of educators and mentors, he returned to school to eventually acquire a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Dr. Rios will speak about his personal transformation, the support that teachers and education programs provided him, and how these efforts can be replicated.

- All LAUSD parents and guardians are invited.
- Lunch and parking are free.
- Dozens of opportunities for parents to learn how to support the education of their children at home:

- Parent education classes, including new workshops on special education
- Dialogue with district officials and school board members
- Showcase for LAUSD's best classroom technology by students and teachers
- Previews of new academic programs
- Top-rated student entertainment

The Summit is planned by parents for parents and is generously supported by TARGET.

**For registration and information, call:  
866-669-7272.**

## Spotlight on Parent Involvement

**Parents at Gault Street Elementary School couldn't be silent any more. They wanted the world — or least LAUSD — to know what they thought of their principal, William Albion.**

So, they wrote a public letter asking that Mr. Albion receive special recognition for "being extraordinary." Parent Center Director Rosalva Waterford explains. "I noticed that our parents were always talking about how effective he was. So I decided that I better take notes."

In the letter that grew from those notes, Mr. Albion is praised because "kids are always first" with him; his door is open to students, parents, and staff. Gault parents

described him as "fair and impartial, constantly encouraging students and volunteers." The letter was sent to the District office without Mr. Albion's knowledge. So it was a surprise when the Superintendent called to congratulate him.

Mrs. Waterford describes Mr. Albion's reaction to the recognition, "He was in shock," she says with a smile. Mr. Albion didn't disagree. "I really, really believe in the value of parent engagement," he says. "Our parents do so much here." Apparently, parent praise goes both ways at Gault. And that's no secret.



L-R: Parents Esmeralda Navarrette, Emma Cifuentes, Rosalva Waterford, and Principal William Albion.



Superintendent Ramon Cortines congratulates *Reflections* winner Max Potruch, a second grader at Cowan Elementary School, and his family. Max's musical composition went on to win an Award of Excellence in the state contest and is in the National *Reflections* competition.

**At a time when schools are wrestling with a critical budget crisis that threatens to eliminate or shrink student arts programs, the Tenth District PTA hosted an arts contest that inspired more than 1200 students to enter their creative projects.**

## PTA Brings Out Student Artists

The *Reflections* competition, for entries in photography, literature, music, art, video, and dance, invited work based on the theme "Beauty is...."

At the gala *Reflections* exhibition on February 28th, LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines paid a surprise visit. "It was meaningful that he would take personal time to come and appreciate the work of our children," said Ilene Ashcraft, President of the Tenth District PTA. "He thanked us for promoting public awareness of arts in education at this time."

The PTA *Reflections* Program is a national arts recognition program that provides opportunities for students to express their creativity.

## New Kindergarten Program Planned



**C**hildren who turn five between September 1 and December 1st are sometimes not quite as developmentally ready for kindergarten as are their older peers who have birthdays in the first nine months of the year.

To accommodate the needs of these younger students, a transition kindergarten program will be offered in September 2010 at selected schools across the Los Angeles Unified School District. The pilot project will provide a two-year program to these younger kindergarten-age children who could benefit from the extra time and focused curriculum.

The transition kindergarten year can help build a strong foundation for learning not only in kindergarten, but also the primary grades and beyond, according to Ruth Yoon, an Early Childhood Education Administrator. In addition to a focus on language, pre-literacy and math skills, the program will address the development of social and emotional skills that are important to school success.

This pilot program will begin in at least one school in each local district. “The interest is already high,” reports Ms. Yoon. “Parents are calling our office asking where the transition kindergartens will be offered.” The goal is for all schools eventually to offer transition classes. It’s estimated that about 25% of kindergarten-age children will be eligible to attend. Parents will decide if they want the transition year for age-eligible children.

Manhattan Beach schools have had transition programs (They call them developmental kindergarten) in place for several years. “In our experience, it’s valuable for many younger kids,” says Kim Johnson, who is the Director of Children’s Programs for Manhattan Beach School District. “They continue to grow their motor and social skills, learn pre-literacy skills, and have time to play. When they enter regular kindergarten, they move forward quickly.”

For information about September’s transition kindergarten pilot program, ask your school principal. ●

## Budget Alert for Parents

### No Easy Solutions

**The budget disaster continues for LAUSD. Declining student enrollment (120,000 fewer students since 2003) combined with continued reduction in funding resulted in a \$640 million gap for the upcoming school year.**

There are no good or easy choices left to balance LAUSD’s budget for 2010-2011. Following are some of the proposals. Those labeled Shared Solutions represent possible reductions to employee work schedules and salaries, plus community action such as a parcel tax. Program cuts represent reductions that would impact school staffing and instruction.

#### Shared Solutions

- Employee salary cuts that range from 1% to 10%
- Shorter work year (B-basis) – employees’ schedules would mirror the ten-month school calendar
- Furlough days for employees
- Temporary limited parcel tax

#### Program Cuts

- Shorter school year by one week
- Reduce number of librarians, aides and nurses
- Increase class size in grades K-8 by two to five students
- Reduce arts program by 50%
- Increase student to counselor ratio to 1000 to one in middle school; 800 to one in high school
- Layoffs of 11% – 6344 employees received notice of possible layoffs in June ●

## Hooray for Volunteers!

### As the school budget crisis gets worse, the parents at Fairburn Elementary School get busier.

Walk around campus and you'll see examples everywhere of parents working with and for students. Reading Buddies matches parents and students who read with and to each other during lunch. Parents of English Language Learners volunteer in the EL classrooms bringing their skills in another language to reading instruction. "Our parents are an integral part of our learning community," explains Principal Elizabeth Abramowitz. "They contribute in concrete ways to the success of our students."

That success is considerable. Fairburn's 2009 API is 957. The parent component is growing as school resources diminish. "When money for intervention programs was cut, parents figured out how they could help," says Ms. Abramowitz. The parent center is another example. The school's parent center shares space with the science lab. "The school didn't have room for both," explains Michelle Goodman, who has two children at Fairburn. "Parenting workshops,

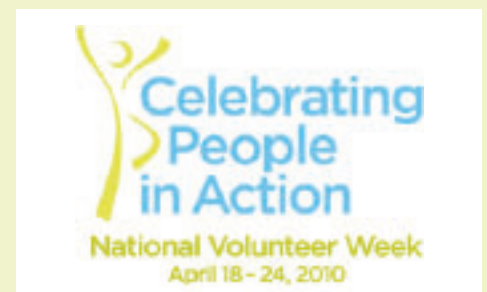
meetings, and resources are available in the room. During school hours, teachers teach science classes there. Students set up experiments and can leave them overnight or

*"Our parents are an integral part of our learning community ... They contribute in concrete ways to the success of our students."*

longer for careful observation. That classroom/parent center enriches learning."

Ms. Goodman says effective parent involvement took off when Fairburn's E-Mail Train was created. Nearly 95% of parents have signed on, and receive almost daily messages about what parents are doing at school and what is needed. Parents access email at work, at home, or at a library. "The e-mail train is four years old, and it really works," reports Ms. Goodman. She recalls a transportation problem for the school's "Turn Off TV on Tuesday Nights"

program in which teachers visit students at home to "catch them reading." Ms Goodman says, "I sent out an email. In ten minutes, 20 parents volunteered to drive our staff to nearly 100 Fairburn homes to surprise our readers." ●



*The 2010 National Volunteer Week is from April 18 to 24, 2010. LAUSD would like to thank each and every parent, community member or staff member who donates their time to support schools and the education of our children.*

### Parcel Tax, from page 1

#### parcel tax before voters on the June 8, 2010 ballot.

Superintendent Ramon Cortines described the "Emergency Neighborhood School and Teacher Retention Measure of 2010" as "a last resort. There is no other choice to save teachers and to save jobs in our schools," he said.

The parcel tax is temporary. It will cost property owners \$100 per year for four years: that's \$8.33 a month. If approved by the required two-thirds majority of voters,

the tax would raise about \$92 million per year. That emergency money would be used to help save the positions of teachers, counselors, nurses, and police officers, stop further increases in class size, and to keep campuses clean and safe. None of the parcel tax would be used for administrators who work in the district's headquarters.

If voters approve the parcel tax on June 8th, the levy would appear on property tax bills in the fall of 2010, and funds would be available to the district in the spring of 2011. ●