

REIMAGINING NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

The Promise of Community Schooling

There is a nationwide epidemic of public school closures. Researchers who study school closures in urban communities attribute them to structural racism, divestment in Black communities, deindustrialization, and market-based school choice policies (Green, 2017). This brief describes the national epidemic and shares a local example of a neighborhood school struggling to stay open and reimagine itself as a community school in partnership with a local public university. Policy and advocacy resources are outlined at the end to inform local, state, and national action.

The Epidemic of Urban School Closures

1,737 PUBLIC elementary and secondary schools across the nation closed in 2014—a 46% increase from 2000 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). In urban communities, school closures disproportionately affect Black students and students living in poverty (Urban Institute, 2017). In some cities, the problem is acute. Detroit, for example, has closed 200 schools since 2004 (Pedroni, 2011) and Chicago closed 50 schools in 2013, the largest district-based set of school closures at one time in US history (Webley, 2013). Research has documented, that school closures destabilize local communities and disrupt students' lives—adding to the many other challenges experienced by students of color living in poverty. An increasing body of research focuses on what communities are doing in response. In this brief, we describe how the 90-year history of a middle school in a South Los Angeles sets the stage for reimagining a neighborhood community school.

What is a community school?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends.



Partnering So Students Learn and Thrive

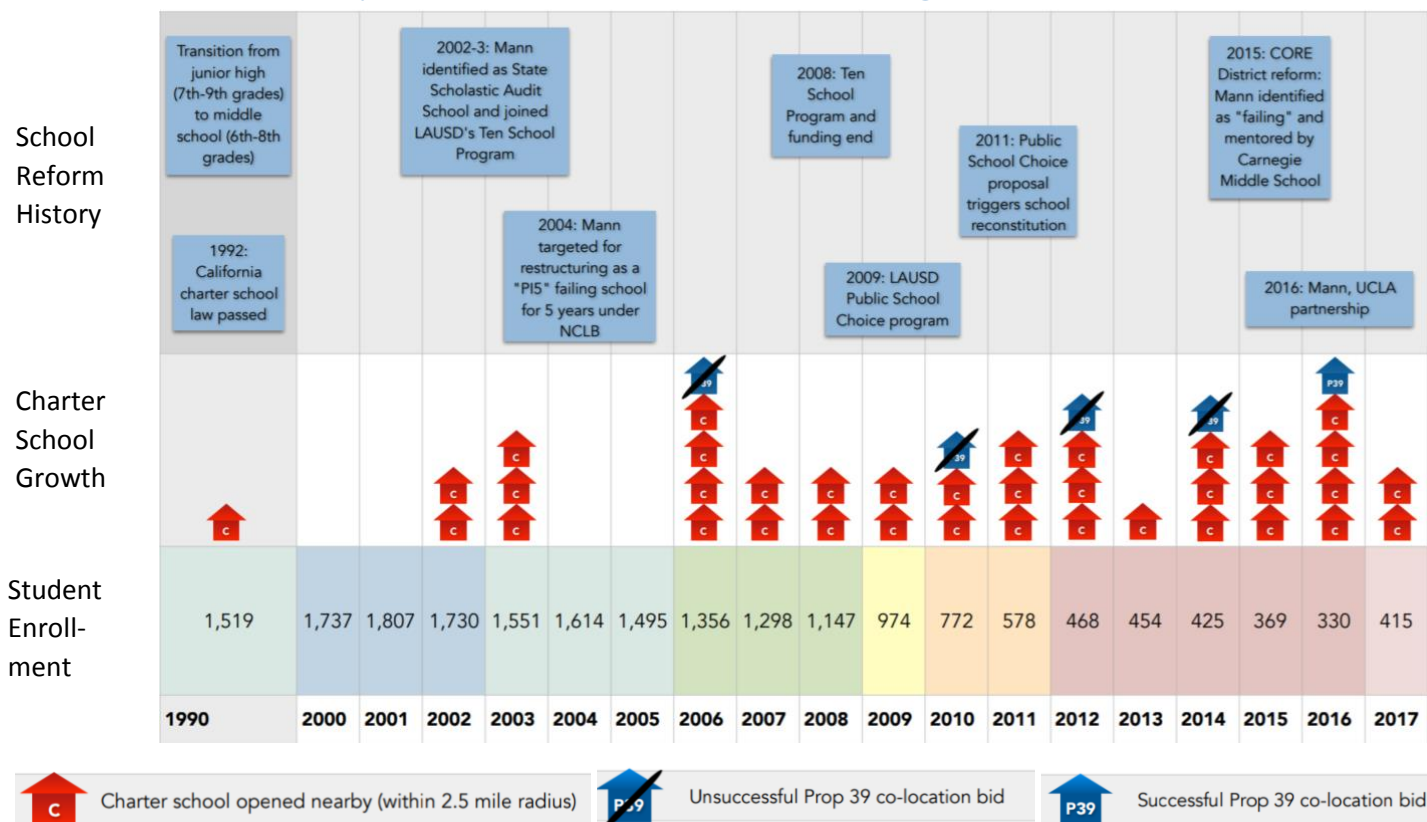
www.communityschools.org

Horace Mann Junior High School opened in 1926 as a “pioneer” in modern education and has witnessed almost a century of social change. The school has been shaped by the racially restrictive housing covenants of the 1930s and the 1950s post-war employment boom. In the 1940s enrollment peaked and students were bused to Mann from other communities, yet by the 1970s parents started putting their children on buses in search of a good education elsewhere—a legacy fueled by agency that continues today. From 1960 to 1970, the student population changed from White to Black, and then in the 1970s on, to increasingly Latino—a reflection of its changing neighborhood and city. Marguerite LaMotte, Mann’s principal in the 1980s started an honors program and was celebrated as a civil rights hero: “*she was right out of Brown vs. the Board of Education,*” recalled a district board member. Today, the student population is half Black and half Latino, charter schools have taken center stage, and Mann is working hard to compete.



The timeline below describes how the school’s enrollment has plummeted over the past 16 years as the number of charter schools within a 2.5 mile radius has swelled to 37. Attempts to improve the school during this time have been many, including a tumultuous reconstitution in 2011 that “*hurt the school and chased away good people,*” according to one teacher. In 2016, UCLA partnered with Mann to help reimagine the school as a K-12 community school, building on the strengths of the community as well as the success of the Robert F. Kennedy UCLA Community School in Pico Union/Koreatown. This effort is part of a larger national effort to establish full-service community schools in partnership with universities—tied deeply to the democratic traditions of collective problem solving and equal educational opportunity.

Repeated Reforms and Declining Enrollment



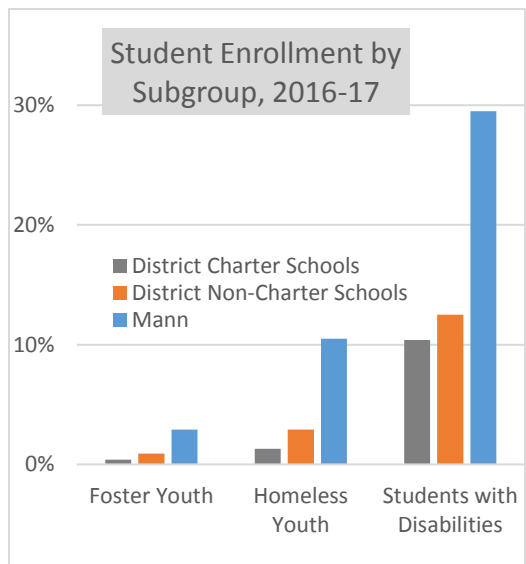
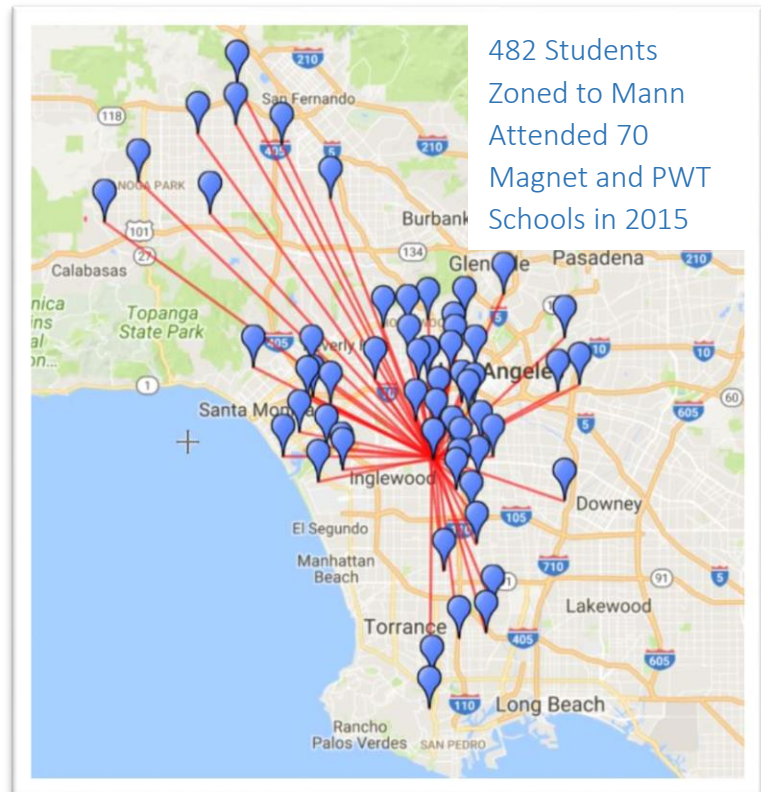
A History of Leaving: *"It's just a mindset, I've got to go someplace else."*



Reimagining Mann as a vibrant community school must consider the school's reform history before charters. During the 1970s and 1980s, reform was dominated by attempts to integrate schools and advance equal educational

opportunity. These included **magnet programs** in which specialized curricular programs drew diverse student bodies and an opt-in busing program that transported students to schools outside their neighborhoods called **Permits With Transportation (PWT)**.

Many parents of children in schools such as Mann chose to participate in the magnet and PWT programs, selecting schools that they believed to be safer and higher quality. By 1983, 21,000 students participated in transfers out of inner city Los Angeles schools (Alkin et al., 1983). Over time, however, this pattern of busing had a detrimental



impact on the

young people who were left behind in neighborhood schools. Information on participation was hard for families to obtain and the process was opaque. Students who participated in the program tended to be those whose families had the greatest abilities to navigate the system.

Today, families in Mann's attendance boundary have a staggering number of choices: magnets, PWT options, and charters. A 2015 district analysis of local enrollment patterns revealed that 812 students who had not moved to "independent" charter schools were zoned to Mann, yet only 328 attended. The remaining 482 neighborhood students attended 70 other district schools, including non-charter traditional schools, magnet schools, and a handful of "dependent" charters developed at longstanding LAUSD sites. As a result of this history of leaving, the school's population includes a disproportionate number of foster, homeless, and special needs students.

Asked to reflect on Mann's declining enrollment, a local pastor commented, *"I think the challenge is for parents to feel that the schools in their neighborhood are the best schools."* Yet there are many within the community who feel very invested and committed to making Mann a great school. As one staff member put it, *"It's important that they stay within their neighborhood because we are the people they are going to grow up with."* A local resident elaborated: *"Good schools make the surrounding communities feel good about themselves."*

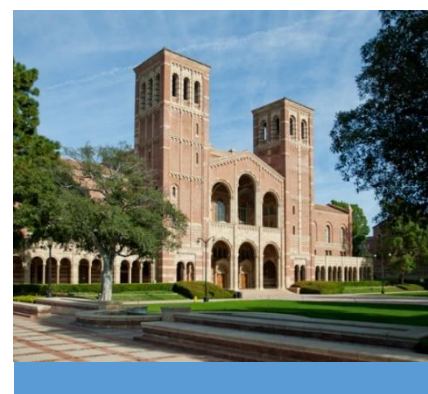
Mann has always been on the front lines of the civil rights movement, living the struggle for racial equality, safe streets, economic stability, and good schooling. It is this democratic struggle that defines the best of its past and sets the stage for its future.

Call To Action



There is a growing national movement to reimagine and revitalize neighborhood schools in urban communities. For example, Journey for Justice (J4J) is an alliance of 36 grassroots community, youth, and parent-led organizations in 21 cities across the country, working for community-driven school improvement as an alternative to the privatization and dismantling of public school systems. www.j4jalliance.com

UCLA and LAUSD joined forces in 2007 to establish the first UCLA Community School in Pico Union/Koreatown. Based on its success—with 100% of graduates college-bound—a second site was proposed in 2016, in partnership with Horace Mann Middle School. Here are some of the actions taken to date:



ABOUT THIS RESEARCH, PRACTICE & POLICY BRIEF

The UCLA Community Schools are committed to advancing public scholarship on a broad range of issues facing educators. This brief is one in a series that brings together researchers and practitioners as co-authors to share research, practical experience, and policy resources to inform the work of educators and communities.

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For more information, visit manncs.gseis.ucla.edu & cs.gseis.ucla.edu

Policy Resources

Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement*. Aurora, IL: Great Lakes Center.

Urban Institute (2017). Subtracting Schools from Communities; <https://www.urban.org/features/subtracting-schools-communities>