

# Community Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: June 16, 2021  
Chairperson's Name: Lisa Mosko

## Meetings/Trainings attended:

05/26/2021 Officer Planning Meeting  
06/02/2021 Committee of the Whole - CAC Comments  
06/14/2021 Logistics Meeting  
06/14/2021 Legislative Ad Hoc Meeting

Dear Membership:

Welcome to our final CAC meeting for the 2020/21 school year! I think I can speak for everyone when I say that this year has challenged us in ways we never could have imagined. And yet, we've made it through, and are now find ourselves navigating the aftermath of a year and a half of distance learning, returning to school in person, and creating the new "normal".

As I reflect back on this year and a half, I have to tell you, I am amazed. I am amazed at the grit that the members of this committee and that of our larger LAUSD community - the students, parents, teachers and administrators - displayed. We've survived this year. We are worn out, and we have grieved the loss of loved ones, and are battle scarred by the struggles we have faced, but we've made it through.

But I am also amazed by the astounding lack of support that our students with (dis)abilities received this year, despite that fact that the IDEA and SB 98 guaranteed them. I am shocked that despite the fact that other districts, both near by and across the country, offered in-person services for their highest needs students almost immediately after school closures began, LAUSD did not do so until a full year later. I am astounded that even though Governor Newsom immediately set aside extra funding at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that students with (dis)abilities would receive appropriate delivery of services, that LAUSD still held back from utilizing these funds effectively, and those students, OUR kids, languished. And I am dismayed to see that now that schools are reopening, the district is actively instructing school personnel to reframe the idea of "compensatory time" as *recoupment* in their conversations with parents. This is a cynical exercise in depriving our most vulnerable kids much needed services and saving LAUSD money, even though the district has now received an unprecedented windfall of federal and state funding.

What astounds me the most is that even though this committee and so many other organizations and advocates raised their voices and said "This is not ok!", even though there were countless news articles about the issue, and even though currently, the federal Office of Civil Rights is investigating LAUSD for its failure to deliver on Free and Appropriate Public Education during the pandemic, the District is still enacting policies that fail students with exceptional needs.

But why am I surprised? The systemic issues that have plagued our special needs kids this past year have always been there. COVID 19 only intensified the situation, much like a giant splash of gasoline on a slow burning fire,

All of this makes me so sad. Frustrated. Angry. And I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. When I was a kid, I remember watching the movie "Stand and Deliver". The film was about Jaime Escalante, the famed LAUSD math teacher who shook up the status quo by leading a group of underestimated Latino kids from an underserved community to great academic success. Mr. Escalante maintained that in order for these kids to succeed, you need high expectations and *ganas*, a willingness or desire to make it happen.

So where is the *ganas* to make sure our students with exceptional needs have the supports they need for equitable access to a high quality education? Where is the *ganas* to even do the bare minimum and actually comply with the federal and state laws that support special needs kids?

Today, we will receive a presentation on Incarcerated Youth. According to a 2016 survey of incarcerated individuals by the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, 38% of state and federal prisoners have at least one (dis)ability. What if these individuals had received proper support in school? Would they have been leading productive lives and thriving, instead of languishing in prison? I hope you ask some hard questions today about what LAUSD is doing to prevent more of our kids from ending up in jail. Ask: *What are their policies and programming, and how are they implementing them? How are they overseeing them to ensure that they're being carried out on the ground at every last school site? How are they allocating funding to ensure proper support? How are they supporting and training teachers and administrators to ensure a strong academic and social emotional foundation for our kids? And how is LAUSD demonstrating, embodying and insisting that every last stakeholder have the "ganas", the urgency and the willingness, to fully support every last student with exceptional needs?*

It was questions like these that led me to join the CAC four years ago. I came here with the idea that if enough people get involved and push for change, it will happen. And I still believe it can. I take hope in the positive culture shift I have witnessed over the past few years at the Office of Parent and Community Services. I've seen a real push towards empowering parents as leaders, and want to give a big shout out to Mr. Antonio Plascencia and his team for leading the way on this major paradigm shift.

It is this kind of cultural shift that I'd like to see all over the district, especially as it pertains to families of students with exceptional needs. Instead, what I have seen is a commitment to maintaining the status quo. I have seen a real dedication to avoiding any systems of accountability and to sweeping major systemic issues under the rug.

This is my last meeting with the CAC, and I am so grateful for the four years I've been able to serve. I am thankful for all of you, my fellow advocates. Thank you to PCS for supporting our work, to Mr. Plascencia, Dr. Dixon, Ms. Porter, and the rest of the team. Mr. Aguilar, Dr. Luna, Mr. Tolj, Ms. Moran, thank you for attending our meetings and answering what questions you can, and thank you to Ms. Valladarez for connecting all of the dots for us. I urge the Division of Special Education to raise expectations for students with special needs, disrupt the status quo, and think creatively to give these kids what they absolutely need to thrive.

I also want to give a huge shout out to all of the members of the CAC for all of your sustained advocacy, and to my fellow officers for thinking big, and working with so much heart and urgency. As I close out this year and this chapter, I urge all of you: Work together and don't let up. Ask *why*. Ask *why not*. Ask *how*. Ask *when*. Push the district to not only introduce clear systems of accountability and communication but to lean into a real willingness and *ganas* to support students with exceptional needs. I promise you, only good things will happen if you do.

Sincerely,

Lisa Mosko