

LAUSD Parent Advisory Committee

Chairperson's Report

February 18, 2021

Hello, colleagues:

"To know and not to do is to not yet know."

This quote, from the ancient Indian philosopher, Gautama Buddha, 2500 years ago, is as true today as it was when The Buddha first wrote it. When we say we "know" something that requires action, but we don't act on this knowledge, we are no better off than if we had never learned it.

So much is on our plates and on our minds this past year: the COVID-19 pandemic, the ups and down of "distance learning," uncertainty over our economic situations and how we will survive this awful time, a new presidential administration recently in office, and now a debate on how soon schools can safely reopen. Even without all those things going on, it's hard enough to stay focused on our role of creating comments on the draft LAUSD LCAP. So here we are, once again, continuing our work and coming closer to drafting those LCAP comments. As your Chairperson, I don't pretend to have all the answers, and I'm still not an expert on how to craft that "perfect" LCAP, one which will magically erase generations of achievement gaps among our children. All I can do is surround myself with colleagues who are smarter than me, in the hope that together we can come up with a set of LCAP comments that are well informed, thoughtful, and actionable.

Our PAC has tremendous potential to advocate, strongly and over time, for the implementation of programs and services which students desperately need. Yes, some may say, "Wait a minute, the only thing we're supposed to do is generate LCAP comments. That's it, nothing else." While I understand this position, with much respect, I disagree. We are parents, after all, our kids attend District schools or charters, many of us serve in governance roles at these schools, and sadly, more than a few of us have seen firsthand the problems that come up when a principal, AP, teacher, or other staffer does not understand the true meaning of "parent engagement" or, worse yet, does not *want* parents at a school site to be engaged. This is clearly unacceptable.

We've all heard the horror stories: Principals or Title I designees run School Site Council or ELAC meetings rather than the elected chairpersons of these groups; parents don't receive any real training on their responsibilities as members or officers; meeting materials are not distributed in advance or not at all; meeting times seem to be scheduled only for the convenience of staff and not also for parents; and meetings feel rushed to get everything done too quickly — far too many principals say to everyone in the room, *"I will get you out of here in an hour!"* — among others.

Some parent leaders who have been doing the difficult, thankless work of increasing parent engagement know the root cause of this systemic disregard for parents is the fact that we have never seen a workshop, seminar, orientation, or other session on the rights of parents. It's almost as if LAUSD believes that informing parents of their rights to be involved in their children's education is not in the District's interest. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth.

Our five standing subcommittees held their second round of meetings last Thursday. The groups continue to discuss concerns among their members, and are beginning to strategize on what they want to accomplish by the end of this school year. Next meetings are set for Thursday, March 11th, and they may decide to hold these sessions twice per month in order to accelerate their work in the less than four months remaining in the 2020-21 school year. If you've signed up for one or two of these subcommittees but not yet attended a meeting, please do so. We need you!

Also, put it on your calendar to attend and participate in your Local District LCAP Study Groups. These bodies were created three years ago specifically to address concerns brought up by our PAC that parents at school sites did not have any knowledge of, or connection to, the work we do. When you show up at your LCAP Study Group meetings, what you say about our Committee helps parents, many of whom don't know we exist, to understand the importance of what we do.

In closing, I'd like to recognize one of our own who is moving on to bigger and better things. Sharnell Blevins is the new Family and Community Engagement Director for Board Member Tanya Ortiz Franklin of Board District 7. Sharnell, a longtime former member and past chairperson of the CAC, a second-year PAC member, and recent Parent Engagement Coordinator with Speak UP, has also worked at Local District West as a Community Rep, as well as school-based Community Rep. A mother of six children, Sharnell is a strong, knowledgeable advocate for Black students, special-needs students, and has been a tireless promoter of authentic parent engagement in schools and throughout LAUSD. Please drop her a line at sharnell.blevins@lausd.net to say hello.

Here is another quote to keep in mind, this one by the late author and speaker, Maya Angelou:

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Kudos to you all for doing your best as PAC members. I pray that you and your families are well.

At your service,

Paul Robak

Chairperson, 2020-2021
LAUSD Parent Advisory Committee
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