

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

In order to attract and retain students and families, the Los Angeles Unified School District must create welcoming environments and implement policies that support family involvement. In addition to current parent engagement initiatives, the District can demonstrate increased responsiveness to parent concerns particularly in the way it receives, responds to, and manages parent complaints.

The following PAC recommendations highlight key areas to improve upon existing parent engagement efforts within LAUSD:

- Streamline the handling of parent complaints by establishing a central Office of the Parent Advocate, with a designated website and hotline;
- Improve the process for issuing, investigating, and revoking Disruptive Person Letters on a consistent timeline to provide greater transparency and equity to parents;
- Ensure that each school site has a designated staff member or volunteer Partnership Action Team that participates in trainings and provides resources to parents;
- Include at least one parent on all hiring committees when principals are to be hired at school sites.

PAC RECOMMENDATION: Establish a Central Office of the Parent Advocate

The Los Angeles Unified School District asserts that it views parents as equal partners in the education of its children, yet it is an entity that is often bewildering, intimidating and difficult for parents to navigate.

A school district committed to Restorative Justice is one that will ensure that a fair, accessible process exists in which complaints can be addressed in a consistent and timely manner.

Previously, LAUSD Parent Ombudsman positions existed at each local district office, but these were eliminated at the onset of the recession due to limited funding. Now, with new LCFF dollars and the LCAP focus on Parent Engagement, the PAC recommends that this position be restored but reconfigured into one central Office of the Parent Advocate operating District-wide. This office should administer:

- A website to provide parents with clear information. The website should include links to Local District and PACE offices, workshops and trainings, other resources of interest to parents and a flow chart to help parents:
 - understand the steps to take before an official complaint is registered, and
 - register a complaint with the right department. (For example, CRU,UCP, etc.)
- A hotline operated via the Virtual Counselor Network¹ or a similar program. This will help ensure that:
 - calls are addressed in a timely manner;
 - parents are transferred to a source that provides assistance;
 - information on the hotline remains updated; and
 - complaints are handled appropriately.

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- The Office of the Parent Advocate must operate in a neutral, independent way to ensure that the concerns of parents/guardians and administrators/staff are heard and weighted equally. Establishing an independent position will help deflect parental fears of retaliation at school sites. This office will:
- Establish consistent protocols for lodging complaints;
- Provide direction to parents about the steps to follow and estimated timelines;
- Ensure that proper procedures, laws and mandates are followed and upheld;
- Involve other departments, outside agencies or entities as needed;
- Ensure that the complaint process is transparent, consistent, and provides greater public accountability.
- Establish a parent engagement monitoring unit (as recommended by the Parents As Equal Partners Taskforce) to 1) review how well schools are meeting engagement goals; 2) recommend corrective action for schools that are not; and 3) encourage parents and community members to help monitor school compliance.

The creation of a centralized office of the Parent Advocate will improve the collection of data to identify trends and patterns within the District. This information should be reported to the Superintendent and to the Board of Education annually. Ideally this will lead to improvements in the provision of District services to families and students.

PAC RECOMMENDATION: Improve Procedures for Issuing, Investigating and Revoking Disruptive Person Letters

A school district committed to Restorative Justice will ensure that in cases where school site administrators consider lodging a formal complaint against a parent, the proceedings will be carried out consistently and in

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accordance with established rules and principles so as to prevent unfair, arbitrary, or unreasonable treatment of any individual.

Before a Disruptive Person Letter is issued:

- the parent will have an opportunity to discuss the complaint, explain their point of view and hear the viewpoints of others;
- ideally a meeting will be held with the parent, the staff member with whom there is a dispute, and the staff member's supervisor, so that all parties can seek to understand how the behavior impacts others and attempt to work towards a resolution.

Once a Disruptive Person Letter is issued, a clear timeline delineating the observation period and stated behavioral expectations or other conditions a parent must meet before an appeal review can be scheduled will be provided to the parent. At the conclusion of the observation period, a neutral party will determine whether or not the conditions have been met and whether the DPL might be revoked. These functions can be overseen and coordinated via the Office of the Parent Advocate.

PAC RECOMMENDATION: Identify a Designated Staff Member or Partnership Action Team at Each School Site

- Schools without a Community Representative or Parent Center Director will form Partnership Action Teams (one staff, one administrator and parent volunteers).
- PATs will have access to all Local District Parent Center Director trainings, even if the PAT member attending the training is a parent volunteer;
- PATs/Community Representatives/Parent Center Directors will be encouraged to elicit parent input each year about 1) the types of workshops, trainings and resources parents are interested in; and 2) the best times to hold trainings or meetings at that school site.

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- Schools will be encouraged to provide a parent bulletin board or other area as a “parent communication hub;”
- Parents should be informed about available resources at meetings that parents are most likely to attend: i.e.: New Parent Orientation meetings, Open House, Back to School Night;
- A brief training for parents and teachers should be held at a time when a majority of parents are most likely to visit the school site; for example during Open House.

PAC RECOMMENDATION: Include a Parent Member on all Hiring Committees when a Principal Search is Underway

When a new principal is to be hired at a school site, the school’s Instructional Director will convene a hiring committee. The committee will review resumes, draft a list of interview questions, and interview and select applicants. As a consistent practice District-wide, at least one parent should participate on every such hiring committee. In the event that a job offer is made to an applicant who was not considered by the committee, all committee members should be notified.

¹ Virtual Counselor Network: <http://virtualcounselornetwork.org>

<http://www.dailynews.com/opinion/20140715/how-la-aims-to-use-technology-to-better-serve-the-public-guest-commentary>