Parents as Partners:
A Community Assessment of LAUSD’s Welcoming Environments for Parents and Guardians

Executive Summary
This report seeks to inform LAUSD of the opportunities to improve parent engagement and establish priorities for the investment of Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) dollars.

When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in schools, stay in school longer, and enjoy school more.
Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) parents and guardians from a number of parent-led groups and community based organizations, including Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE), InnerCity Struggle, Padres de Sur Este, Parent Partnership for Public Education, Valley Education Action Committee and Watts Century Latino Organization, partnered with the United Way of Greater Los Angeles to conduct an assessment regarding how parents and guardians are treated at LAUSD schools. A consortium of parent/guardian-leaders developed the guidelines for the school monitoring visits, as well as designed and conducted an LAUSD parent survey. Parents and guardians visited 68 schools and collected over 1,200 surveys assessing the quality of parent engagement across LAUSD.

From December 2013 to March 2014, these LAUSD parents and guardians made site visits and calls to a cluster of schools called “feeder patterns” in each LAUSD school board district. A feeder pattern consists of a high school, the middle schools that graduate students into that high school and the elementary schools that “feed” into those middle schools. The feeder patterns selected were located around Dorsey (Board District 1), Garfield (Board District 2), Grant (Board District 3), Venice (Board District 4), Marshall (Board District 5), San Fernando (Board District 6), and Banning (Board District 7) high school.
During these site visits, parents and guardians asked for a copy of that school's School Report Card (SRC), a school academic progress tool that all schools should have available to parents, a description of the school curriculum, and a school tour. Parents took note of whether they were able to get a copy of the SRC, whether they were able to get answers to their questions about school curriculum or receive any follow up via a phone call, and whether they were able to schedule a school tour.

In addition to the site visits, parents collected 1,214 surveys which represented 204 LAUSD schools sites. The questions ranged from their feelings and attitudes about their school’s parent engagement program to how they felt about the Los Angeles Unified School District. Based on the name of the school, each response was assigned a marker tied to one of the seven LAUSD school board districts. To ensure confidentiality, however, no individual schools are identified in the report.

Of the parents surveyed, 65.4% had a child enrolled in elementary school, 20.5% had a child enrolled in middle school, and 14.1% had a child enrolled in high school. The ethnic breakdown of those surveyed was 51.3% Latino/Hispanic, 26.1% White/Caucasian, 7.7% Black/African American, and 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. In terms of representation, District 7 provided the largest set of surveys, at 23%, followed by District 4, at 22%, and District 2, at 21%. Unfortunately, parents only collected four District 6 surveys and should be considered a limitation of the study.
Overall, resources for parents and guardians are less readily available in lower-income than higher-income communities. Specifically, parents and guardians who visited schools in South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and Wilmington had a more difficult time obtaining School Report Cards (SRC), going on tours, or having their questions addressed. Parents and guardians who visited these schools also experienced being “bounced around” by multiple school personnel and school offices. The map on Page 5 shows concentrations of poverty throughout the district.

In most low-income communities, school reports cards were not available at the school site. Schools in South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles and Wilmington were less likely to have SRCs readily available for parents and guardians or have staff who knew about the SRC. All board districts had at least one school where parents and guardians were not able to get a SRC, but this occurred more often in Districts 1, 2, and 7. Staff in these districts seemed unaware of the SRC or unprepared to provide information about the SRC. Also, many parents were told to go to the LAUSD or school website to find the SRC, but were not specifically told where to go on these websites to find the SRC.
Parents in low-income communities are more often asked to provide their address for verification before their questions are answered. They were also more likely to be asked for their ID’s before entering schools than in higher income communities. When parents, particularly those in low-income communities, went to the school offices they were asked to provide their address so that the school site staff could determine whether this was their child’s designated school. When parents clarified that they were prospective parents who were moving or interested in moving into the community, some school site staff still asked for an address, or for the parents to return when the address could be provided. Specifically, in South Los Angeles, Northeast Los Angeles and the East Valley parents and guardians were asked for identification before being allowed to enter the school site.

Across the District, school staff were not able to fully address questions about the content of the school’s curriculum. When asked about the curriculum, most school personnel referred parents and guardians to the website or did not address the question. Many school site staff members redirected parents and guardians to other staff, who were unavailable at the time, to address their questions. When parents and guardians did follow up with the school site staff to whom they were directed, the parents and guardians did not receive a call back the majority of the time. In a few cases, parents did receive a call back and were able to get their question answered, usually by a principal.
Overall, parents and guardians were seen in a timely manner. Parents and guardians who went to the office were addressed within five minutes of arrival in all school feeder patterns. School staff was generally friendly and courteous.

The accessibility of school tours were mixed across the districts. Most schools in Districts 3, 4, 5, and 6 indicated to the parents that they would be able to provide a school tour or that they would be able to schedule a supervised tour. Schools in Districts 1, 2, and 7 were less likely to indicate they had school tours or stated they did not have one available.
Overall, the data collected indicates that a majority (80%) of respondents feel that their school provides them with positive parent engagement and creates a welcoming environment for parents. However, three topics appeared to be of significant concern for parents within the LAUSD:

Just over half (51%) of parents and guardians indicated that they felt that they were equal partners with the LAUSD school district, while just under half (48%) indicated that they feel that they not are equal partners with LAUSD.
Key Findings: Surveys

Although the majority (73%) of parents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were equal partners with their child’s school, there was a disparity between the attitudes of parents-of-color and white parents. Just over one-quarter (27%) indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are equal partners with their child’s school. However, a significant portion of Latino parents (32%) were more likely to feel that they were not equal partners with their child’s schools when compared to their white counterparts.

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<td>15%</td>
<td>69%</td>
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“Overall, I feel that I am an equal partner with my child’s school”

Only 59% of parents felt that school site councils were an effective form of engagement, and 15% did not know what a site (or governing) council does.

“My School Site Council (or Governing Council) is an effective way to engage parents”
Research supports that when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning; children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy school more. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides an opportunity for the LAUSD to invest in the development of a robust parent engagement program that can ensure parent representation at the school site and provide a standard level of parental support. This report seeks to inform LAUSD of the opportunities to improve parent engagement and establish priorities for the investment of LCFF dollars. The results of the survey and monitoring campaign demonstrate that in order to provide a standard level of service the Los Angeles Unified School District must:

1. **Invest more resources to train school site staff on how to engage and partner with parents.**

   We recommend that the District increase its emphasis and resources to increase training for school site personnel including administrators, office staff and other personnel who interact with parents and community members so that there is a designated liaison on campus at all times. We strongly recommend these personnel receive more training to support authentic parent engagement, and that more should be done to connect the LAUSD School District to parents.
2. Revise address verification and identification policies.

The District must assess the disparity between how low-income and higher-income communities treat their parents, starting with address verification and identification policies. Address verification should not be needed to ask questions about how schools are academically progressing. Asking parents and guardians for their identification as a prerequisite for access and information creates more challenges than opportunities for parent, school, and community partnerships, especially when parents or guardians may be undocumented. Specifically, parents and guardians should receive school identification cards when they enroll their children in school. This will ensure schools are both safe and welcoming.

3. Develop a central location for parent communication and distribution of report cards.

Currently, parents and guardians often are told to go to the school website or LAUSD website when they have questions about the School Report Card, or the school’s curriculum, ignoring the fact that there is a digital divide between lower and higher income communities. More in-school spaces are needed for communicating with parents, including parent and community bulletin boards and newsletters.

4. Create a parent engagement monitoring unit.

The district should follow through with the recommendation of the Parents As Equal Partners (PAEP) Taskforce Report to create a monitoring unit that reviews whether schools are effectively meeting engagement goals and ensuring accountability. Parents and community members should be invited to help monitor school sites.

5. Enforce existing guidelines to ensure parental rights are met, as outlined in the LAUSD Parents’ Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and the PAEP Taskforce Report. More importantly, the District should recognize schools that have successful models for parent, school, and community partnerships as examples to emulate for an effective parent-partnership culture.