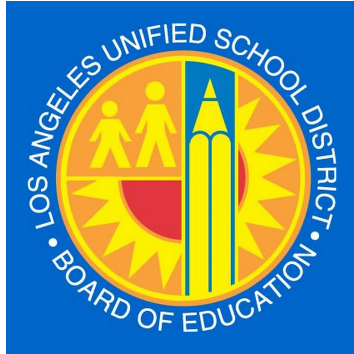


Foreward by Steve Zimmer



All I know is Public Schools. Ok, well maybe a little bit about fantasy baseball and 1980's alternative rock. But mostly I know schools. I started teaching three weeks after I graduated from college at Jefferson High School in 1992. Exactly 20 years ago. My first day of student teaching was the first day the school reopened after the devastating unrest following the Rodney King verdicts. It was also my first week in Los Angeles. The lingering smell of the fires and the sight of national guard troops outside was a mismatch for the hope I found in the hearts and dreams of the students I met in Jefferson's classrooms. I have carried their stories with me ever since.

I had the incredible honor of being a classroom teacher for 17 years. After student teaching at Jefferson, I landed a job as an ESL teacher at Marshall High School in Silver Lake. At Marshall I taught ESL, English, Social Studies, Life Skills and anything else I could convince them to let me. It was then and will always be my dream job. In addition to my teaching role I became a counselor for at risk students. In 1998, I was able to put these passions together and start a teacher education program for students interested in pursuing teaching careers. The Marshall Teacher Career Academy was the precursor of a district-wide career ladder program that sets high school students on a career pathway to become LAUSD teachers. In that role I spent every Thursday in local elementary schools with my students. I got to know elementary schools much, much better over the next ten years.

Today, I am the only classroom teacher serving on the Los Angeles Board of Education. I am humbled to represent over 650,000 constituents and over 100 LAUSD schools. My district extends from East Hollywood to the Ocean. The public schools in my board district are some of the most diverse in the nation.

When you visit our schools it is not hard to believe in public education. You will see teachers and students and parents working together and dreaming together. You will see engaged classrooms and innovative instruction. You will see an invigorated family participation that has an energy that is contagious.

It is this energy that Fiona Whitney captures in these pages. I am so pleased that Fiona who has been a guidepost for parents choosing Los Angeles Independent Schools has turned her well trained eye on our public schools. She has selected over 60 schools to review and offer insights about in this latest of her informative Parent Guides. The schools in these pages represent some of the best public education options in the greater Los Angeles area. I am proud that she has selected over 40 LAUSD public elementary schools to be part of this book. I thank the Principals, teachers and families who spoke with her as part of this effort. And I thank Fiona. This guide could not come at a more important time.

The economic crisis has prompted families to look again at their neighborhood public school. Simultaneously, LAUSD's Bond supported building program has completed over 100 new schools, changing the landscape of our city and ending the cap receiver busing program that forced children onto buses to attend schools away from their community. The end of forced busing has also created an opportunity for us to re-invest in neighborhood schools.

Choice and the reform movement have forced LAUSD to think outside the box in terms of both instruction and governance. Community stakeholders, parents, teachers and school leaders have led these transformations in LAUSD. Far more decisions are made at the school community level than ever before. At almost every school, school leaders and teachers are chosen by a committee of stakeholders. Parents and teachers have more control over budget and curriculum than I could have imagined even five years ago.

I can't lie to you. I can't tell you that the bureaucracy doesn't exist. I can't tell you the devastating budget cuts haven't hurt our teachers and our school communities. I can't tell you "the system" isn't frustrating sometimes. Just check the blogs. Or read the headlines.

But I also know that the change is real. I see it in remarkable teaching and learning at the new Melrose Technology Magnet. I see it at the parent meetings that have transformed West Hollywood Elementary. I see it in the amazing school gardening programs throughout my district. I see it when I meet with parents at Fairburn or Grand View or Hancock Park as we try to develop instructional pipelines and programs that will serve our kids from Pre-K through graduation. None of these changes happened at the LAUSD Central Offices. The tipping point in each and every case has been leadership. Parent leadership, teacher leadership and Principal leadership. Authentic and community based. That's more powerful than any bureaucracy.

I invite you to be part of this transformation. This moment is the most important moment of our generation for public education. There has never been a moment of more promise. But it is a precarious promise. Actualizing this promise will take all of our investment.

I know that your son or daughter is sacred. And I know that your choice about their elementary school is one of the most important ones that you will make. This book is one important asset in your journey. Fiona's information and observations are a critical starting point. But you will need to do more.

I encourage you to visit our schools. I welcome you to our classrooms. I urge you to talk with our teachers, parents and our school leaders.

Thank you for considering L.A.'s public schools for your child. I am honored to be a small part of the great institutions covered in these pages. I am grateful to Fiona for the opportunity to introduce you to our schools.