



New Directions for Education

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As the second largest public school system in the United States, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) houses over 750,000 students from the multicultural and multilingual communities in Los Angeles County. Unfortunately, over 52% of the LAUSD students entering Kindergarten are likely to drop out and fail to complete the course of studies required to receive a high school diploma. As a result, the existing school system is inadvertently fostering the development of an underclass of poorly educated residents who find themselves unqualified for decent employment and well-paid work opportunities as more and more unskilled and low-skilled manufacturing jobs leave the region. Additionally, the growth of the number of poorly educated in Los Angeles is being felt in the social, intellectual, economic, and political arenas. Crime is on the rise, gangs are growing, community health is negatively impacted, and numerous publicly supported community benefit programs are required to meet the needs of its poorly educated, underserved, and marginalized citizens.

To meet the challenges presented by an underperforming school system located in a highly diverse, multicultural region, the following recommendations are presented for consideration to promote a better performing public educational system.

- ★ Reengineer the current educational system that is still based in an agrarian, industrial-age mindset to more effectively address the demands of the 21st century and an ever-expanding global economy.
- ★ Transform the educational system from a traditionally structured, rigid, and insular based model into a more open, multidisciplinary, and creative process orientated model. This new model should support the development of a student's international awareness, core knowledge, portable skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaborative social skills, problem solving abilities, etc.
- ★ For those in Kindergarten through fifth grade, focus on a highly structured learning environment that is supported by technology and emphasizes a strong foundation in the core basic skills. Support this with a curriculum that stresses the quality of knowledge learned versus quantity of material presented and memorized.
- ★ For those in the sixth through twelfth grades, develop a highly flexible and fluid learning-environment that is supported by technology and moves beyond a highly compartmentalized and timed teaching/classroom schedule. Allow students the time they need to learn which will be faster for some than for others.
- ★ Train teachers to become "counselors," "agents," "advocates," and "system integrators," who guide and monitor students who participate in a learning environment that promotes high levels of participation in problem solving, group collaboration, cross-disciplinary research, and proficiency in several languages including a very high proficiency in English language skills and reading comprehension.
- ★ Introduce goal specific "contracts" or "agreements" between parents and/or caregivers and the local schools in order to promote strong adult involvement and support for regular dialogue between themselves and their child's teacher. This will foster better overall student progress and ongoing participation in school.
- ★ For those parents and/or caregivers who do not participate in a goal specific "contract" or "agreement," the school system will provide students with a school sponsored "case manager" who will act in a surrogate role for the student and work with their assigned child's teacher. These "case managers" would also facilitate access to services from organizations that collaborate across diverse service

sectors. This will again foster better overall student progress and ongoing participation in school.

- ★ In addition to retooling the system to lower the drop-out rate, schools would also develop models and vehicles that promote the goal of insuring 70% of the high school graduates pursue some form of post-secondary education (e.g., trade schools, community colleges, universities, etc). Additionally, those graduates who come from homes that have incomes under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level would be

provided subsidy opportunities to help fund their post-secondary pursuits.

- ★ Finally and to support the 30% of the high-school graduates who choose not to pursue post secondary education, the school system would sponsor various training programs to help those students enter the workforce. These training programs would be conducted through public private partnerships with various public benefit organizations, local businesses, etc. and would be six to eight months long.