



May 28, 2014

Superintendent John Deasy
Members of the Board of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 South Beaudry Avenue, 24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

RE: OPEN LETTER TO THE LAUSD SCHOOL BOARD

Dear Superintendent Deasy and Members of the School Board:

AT THIS CRITICAL MOMENT, LAUSD SHOULD INVEST MORE IN EARLY EDUCATION.

During the coming month, the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education faces a series of critical decisions that will set the district's spending and educational priorities for years to come. By the end of June, you will need to approve a budget for the 2014-15 school year and, much more importantly, establish your combined spending and educational priorities – a merging that never before has been a part of California's public school policy making.

This change comes as a result of the state's landmark new school funding formula. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) fundamentally realigns how districts receive state money, doing away with dozens of "categorical funds" and replacing them with a system that directs more money to students who need more help and gives local districts more flexibility to spend money. Because LAUSD educates a large number of low-income students, English learners and foster youth, it will be receiving tens of millions in additional funding once LCFF is fully implemented in 2020-21. And under LCFF, you, our school board members, will have more say and influence in how that money is spent than ever before.

You also will be more accountable than ever for how you decide to spend this money – an absolutely critical piece of this new funding system. The first major milestone comes this June, when you must approve the district's initial Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), a three-year plan that details your educational priorities and how your spending will enable the district to meet those priorities. After receiving input from parents and community stakeholders, Superintendent John Deasy in his proposed LCFF budget has provided a glimpse of what he believes to be the district's most pressing problems as well as, we suspect, what he thinks you consider the district's top spending priorities.

It is difficult to argue with what are clearly the district's most urgent needs: increasing graduation rates, particularly among African-American students; creating better campus environments, especially at middle and high schools; and raising teacher retention at schools with high turnover rates and high-needs students. Unfortunately, although LAUSD has been headed in the right direction lately, with improvements to graduation rates and other benchmarks, many challenges remain. Our concern is that in a rush to solve these problems, LAUSD will miss the opportunity LCFF offers to begin actually curing them. A cure won't come in a day, or a week or even a few years. It will require a longer-term horizon and an understanding that we need to invest wisely today in order to solve these problems in the years to come. From our perspective, it means investing in high-quality early education.

A growing body of research shows that high-quality early education programs are among the most effective, and most cost-efficient, ways to address LAUSD's key educational priorities: improve graduation rates, increase student enrollment, improve test scores, and even increase parental engagement. These programs are particularly effective with the students that LCFF is intended to help the most. Knowing the many and lasting benefits from early education, we were disappointed that the Superintendent's first proposed LCFF budget includes no additional funding for early education programs. We aren't unrealistic. We don't expect every new dollar to go to early learning. But we believe that LAUSD needs to think boldly and long-term and invest some of this new money on preventative programs. We are confident doing so would both benefit the students and prove a wise investment.

Take just one line of the proposed LAUSD budget: special education. By the district's measure, it is spending about \$470 million each year on 71,000 special education students, or roughly \$6,600 per student – nearly 80% of whom are low income, English learners or foster youth. But research shows that early education programs can reduce special education placement by 40% or more. Even if we are conservative and chop that figure in half to 20%, we could realistically expect the number of special education students to fall by about 1,500 annually in the years ahead – potentially freeing up nearly \$10 million the first year that the total number of special education students fell. This projected savings would be \$20 million the second year, \$30 million the third, and so on.

We know that is a rough estimate, but it also illustrates the final reason why we urge the you to invest in early education programs and make sure early learning is among the district's LCAP priorities: its benefits begin early and continue throughout a student's academic career and life. LCFF is meant to be a bold change that brings equity to California's public schools. No investment will better ensure that than early learning.

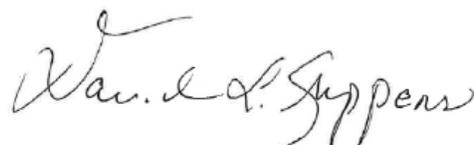
Sincerely,



Kim Belshé
Executive Director
First 5 LA



Antonia Hernández
President and CEO
California Community Foundation



David L. Crippens
Chairman of the Board
LAUP