

MINUTES OF PRESIDENTS' JOINT COMMISSION ON LAUSD GOVERNANCE

August 11, 2005

MWD Headquarters

Attendees: David Cunningham, Maria Casillas, Robert Barner, Ed Burke, Yvonne Chan, Bill Clay, Jose Cornejo, Maria Davila, Donald Dear, Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Drew Furedi, Ofelia Hernandez, Ramon Muniz, Mary Rose Ortega, Scott Plotkin, Mary Rodriguez, Julie Ruelas, Howard Welinsky, Andrew Westall, Paul White, Tyree Wieder.

The Commission meeting was called to order by Co-Chair David Cunningham at 4:45 pm.

The vacancy created by the resignation of Dr. Carl Cohn, appointee of Board Member Marlene Canter was filled by new appointee Drew Furedi. Mr. Furedi was sworn in by Ms. Bass, at the beginning of the meeting and was installed as the Board's newest member.

Agenda Item # 1: Charles Kerchner, Professor of Education, Claremont Graduate University, addressed the Board on the history of the LAUSD, past reform efforts and what knowledge we have gained from the LEARN and LAAMP programs. Mr. Kerchner emphasized that merely changing the governance will not make the problems disappear, reorganization, in and of itself, will not do much either, and simply adding funds will not solve the school systems' problems. He stated that we learned a lot from LEARN and LAAMP, but most of the lessons did not stick. Mr. Kerchner offered a "new" prototype for consideration: focus on autonomy, participation, variety of good schools, and accountability. What did we learn from LAAMP and why did it fail? LAAMP did not crack the culture, the district could not get enough money to the schools, the attention was not focused on the classrooms, time and attention was spent on rearranging the roles and responsibilities of the adults and did not focus on the students. He posed some questions for thought: 1) if the district were all charter schools, how would you run the district? 2) if you increase parental involvement, what should be expected from them? 3) how would you create a "diverse portfolio" of schools? and, 4) how do you get the kids to work and perform better?

A question and answer period followed Mr. Kerchner's presentation. In response to many questions, Mr. Kerchner presented some additional informative information: around 1903, a prominent citizen helped the school system break away from City government and the system was very successful because it focused on the students and was built around students' attributes and needs; to improve schools we need to have high expectations, academic pressure, and a safe and orderly environment on campus and to and from homes; and, it takes 10 to 20 years to change a school district;

Agenda Item #2: John Fullerton, Director of Budget and Financial Policy, Independent Analyst Unit, LAUSD, gave a presentation on the LAUSD's budget and budget process. He gave an overview of school financing, LAUSD's system and process; the complexities of doing a budget, the financial pressures on the District and strategies for taming the complexity of the budget. He stated that, after Prop 13, the state and federal government

have played a higher role in financing school budgets. LAUSD has a major problem when finalizing its budget because the budget must be adopted by July 1st, but the state budget rarely gets adopted until much later than July 1st. Also, the state mandates that school systems project their budgets out two years. Consequently, LAUSD's budget is a guessing game and is not as accurate as it should be and administrative decisions are based on an inaccurate budget.

Some of the problems/pressures facing LAUSD include: huge payroll and increased budget concerns; "higher needs" student numbers have grown tremendously so special education costs have risen; transportation costs for the system are very high (buses, maintenance, gas, etc.); food service costs are high (1/2 million meals are served daily); LAUSD maintains an entire police force; and one of the largest Bond measures ever passed, has increased facilities construction; health and welfare costs are rising; unfunded retiree healthcare is a problem; declining enrollment brings in less government funding; and, the continuation of state monies is uncertain.

Questions and answers followed the presentation. Board members' questions led to a number of additional salient points: the LAUSD budget could be improved if it was started earlier in the process; the school culture needs to change; and, schools should have more control over their individual budgets.

Agenda Item #3: RAND Corporation addressed the Board. Three RAND team members, Catherine Augustine, Charles Goldman and Lucrecia Santibanez, were introduced, and they presented a brief overview of RAND Corporation, what they have to offer the Board and what services can be provided. RAND will facilitate discussion, provide speakers, support questions and information requests from Board members, attend all meetings, and will present a summary of issues and general recommendations to support the Board's report to City Council. In December, RAND will submit a report to the Board that will include a documented summary of the topics and discussions from all the meetings, and a series of different options, with pros and cons and implications of each.

Board members expressed concerns that RAND would present its own ideas and foster its own agenda and not present enough views and opinions of the Board members, and that RAND's plan will not reflect the needs and wishes of the Board. The RAND team indicated that they would do research, answer questions, support the Board and would present the Board's ideas and views and would provide additional research materials and ideas. The team reassured members that the recommendations to Council would come from the Commission, not from RAND. The RAND team asked the Board members to provide names of local presenters to Ms. Bass.

No formal action was taken on Item #3, but the Commission members agreed to allow RAND to continue and to provide research and resources and to report back at the next meeting on its progress. The Board also asked Bill Mabie to report back at an upcoming meeting, on the contract with RAND.

Agenda Item #4: Continued until next meeting.

Prior to adjourning, the Board requested that Ms. Bass agendaize the following items for discussion at the next meeting: community meetings/community input, including locations and special interests; areas of study/subtopics for future presentations; school finances; and timelines for future meetings, including subcommittee meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Adrienne Bass
Legislative Assistant to the Commission