

Mónica García

President, Los Angeles Board of Education

LAUSD Board District 2 HIGHLIGHT ON PILOT SCHOOLS

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Mónica's Message



Dear Friends:

Last summer, the Belmont High School family celebrated as the Los Angeles High School for the Arts (LAHSA) was named by Newsweek as one of the top public high schools in the country. A quick look at the data tells why: in this small school, "Diplomas for All" is a daily reality.

After opening on the campus of old Belmont with some of that school's lowest achieving students, LAHSA's teachers got more than three quarters of them across the finish line to graduation (most of the rest are still taking classes at LAHSA; the school stays in close touch with every single one of them). This year, more than 60% of the school's seniors applied to four-year colleges. 100% have postgraduate plans that involve more education, including community college or trade school. What's the secret to these students' success—and how can LAUSD get more of it?

The school's dynamic Principal Esther Soliman credits the school's freedom to look and act differently from the other schools in LAUSD. Together with 7 of its neighbor schools in the Belmont Zone of Choice, LAHSA is a Pilot School—a small (380 students), autonomous schools with a reform teacher's contract through an agreement with United Teachers Los Angeles. As neither a charter school nor a traditional school, the Pilot School model offers an in-District pathway to high-impact, student-centered reforms. At LAHSA, that focus has translated into a rich performing arts program that brings professional actors on campus to coach speech, voice, acting, set, lights, costumes and make-up. Soliman reflects, "Through our autonomies as a Pilot school we are able to offer our students a personalized learning environment, a place where they can find their own voices."

In the spirit of hope

Mónica García
President, Los Angeles Board of Education



With 11 more Pilot schools slated to come online at LAUSD next year, we asked Jeanne Fauci, Director of the Los Angeles Small Schools Center, for her top ten reasons why Pilots work better for kids than traditional schools. Her list is on the next page:



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Top 10 Ways Pilot Schools Work Better for Kids

1) Equity and Access

Pilot schools are focused on equity and access for all members of their school community. Pilot schools must have the same student demographics as other area schools. Pilot schools have a special education inclusion model and robust support systems for all students (intervention, tutoring, test prep, advisory programs) to ensure that all students succeed.

2) Staffing

All Pilot school teachers are UTLA members. Pilot schools have an elect-to-work agreement that outlines working conditions (hours, duties) that the school's teachers, administration, and Governing School Council has agreed best supports student achievement and their educational mission. Teachers sign the elect-to-work agreement on an annual basis. Pilot schools have the autonomy to hire teachers that best fit their education programs. If there are job openings, there is a hiring process that involves the principal, teachers and students in which the teacher that best fits the educational program of the school can be hired.

3) Funding

Pilot schools have a lump sum per pupil that allows them to use their funds to support their educational program. This transparent process that Pilot schools began-- and that is now being adopted by the district at large--gives schools the autonomy and responsibility to use their funds as they see fit. It gives them the ability to use money to ensure that they meet the needs of their students.

4) Leadership

Pilot schools have the autonomy to create a job description and hiring process to select their principal, recommending only one final candidate to be approved by the superintendent. The school's governing council also evaluates the principal annually, ensuring that the principal is responsive to the school community.

5) Curriculum

Pilot schools are freed from local district curriculum requirements. They can choose what content to cover, and how to cover it, within the parameters of state content standards and an A-G curriculum at the high school level. This means they do not need to use packaged curricula or follow mandates where they do not work for the school community.

6) Professional Development

Pilot schools have the autonomy to decide on their own professional development. This means that schools have freedom to choose PD that supports their curricular goals. One of the typical ways that Pilot schools use this autonomy is to provide one to two weeks of PD before school opens so that faculty can work together to improve teaching and learning.

7) Calendar

Pilot Schools have the freedom to set their own school days and calendar years for both students and faculty as long as the calendar meets state requirements. This means that schools can choose the structures that best fit their educational programs and student needs.

8) Bell Schedule

Because of the schedule autonomy, Pilot schools can set their own daily and weekly bell schedules that provide time for in-depth learning (longer periods) as well as more time for student support and, importantly, more time for teachers to meet in grade level and subject area teams as well as whole staff meetings to look at data, discuss individual students and work together to improve instruction and student achievement.

9) Budget

Pilot schools budget their faculty on actual salaries rather than normed salaries. This gives schools the added flexibility (and added responsibility) to use their budget to hire teachers who best fit the needs of the school. All Pilot schools teacher's salaries are based on the LAUSD salary structure.

10) Assessments

Pilot schools set their own promotion and graduation requirements, although they must be comparable in rigor to the district requirements and must comply with all applicable laws and regulations. Pilot Schools place an emphasis on competency-based, performance-based assessments. This allows schools to design their own course pacing and assessment rather than follow district-mandated periodic assessments. Typically, Pilot schools have more rigorous graduation requirements in terms of coursework and other requirements, such as senior capstone projects, than district schools.