

# LAUSD Parent Advisory Committee

## Chairperson's Report

*June 7, 2024*

Hello, colleagues:

What a mess this year has been — much of it beyond our control though some of our own making.

I'll come back to that later. First, here's an update on my meeting with Supt. Carvalho last Monday the 3rd. At 9:10 a.m. I met up with Ariel Harman-Holmes, who chairs the Community Advisory Committee or CAC. We checked in at the Beaudry lobby where Antonio Plascencia was waiting to greet us. After going downstairs to the cafeteria and getting something to drink, we went up to the 24th floor and were met by Carol Delgado, Mr. Carvalho's assistant. After chatting for a while as he was wrapping up another meeting, Ms. Delgado brought us to a small conference room where he was waiting with Deputy Superintendents Karla Estrada and Pedro Salcido, plus Antonio's supervisor, Shannon Haber, Chief of Communications, Engagement & Collaboration.

Supt. Carvalho can be warm and personable, though he also knows when to get down to business.

We started off talking about issues specific to the CAC. Since I also serve on that committee, Ariel and I supported each other in this portion of the meeting. Then a bit later the discussion moved to PAC concerns. Ariel was actually on our committee three years ago before moving to the CAC. Anyway, I mentioned how we on the PAC have been concerned this year about resistance and opposition, seemingly originating within SFACE, to something basic like requesting additional meetings for our subcommittees, which last met back on March 19th. The same thing happened when I asked for another meeting date for our full Committee, simply because we were already running significantly behind schedule with presentations on the eight District LCAP Goals.

Beyond pushback against getting more dates on the calendar, there was the meeting in February with Dr. Elward's notable statement that the District does not have infrastructure to provide the data requested by our January motion, that this data would not be provided, and that we could submit a PRA request for it. Mr. Carvalho correctly observed that this was not the most appropriate answer to the PAC asking for information responsive to our motion. He also realized that many of the issues Ariel and I brought up were rooted in poor communication between committees and the various departments interfacing with these committees, coupled with a misunderstanding of what was being requested. He did say that senior leaders on his team, which I took to mean Ms. Estrada and Mr. Salcido, would be following up with these departments.

While I was originally told that we would have 30 minutes with the Superintendent, our session continued for just over an hour; at one point he mentioned that he was keeping a Board Member waiting but that our concerns were valid and he wanted to hear us out. I did appreciate the time we had with Supt. Carvalho and sent him an e-mail the next morning to highlight and summarize the main points we discussed pertaining to PAC and CAC. He dashed off a brief reply to say this:

*“I believe our meeting was both honest and productive. I will live up to the commitments and ideas discussed.”*

While I never automatically accept at face value anything I’m told by a high-level District administrator, and particularly an LAUSD superintendent, I do feel it’s reasonable to give the man an opportunity to “walk the talk,” so to speak. At least he understands the concerns our PAC has.

Now going back to my first sentence here: As we all know, there are a few things that were done not *with* us but rather *to* us. Some of these are detailed above and were discussed with the Superintendent. Other issues, however, have surfaced during the course of this year on our Committee. Similar to the poor communication between parent leaders and the departments which are supposed to support our committees, unfortunately sometimes this same dynamic gets in the way of members truly understanding each other. It might be accidental, just an unintended oversight, quickly forgotten, or it could be carefully planned, even scripted, designed specifically to target an individual or a belief that’s being portrayed as undesirable or wrong. When we go out of our way to whip up sentiments of one group against another, simply because the two are seen as in some way different, with the implication that one is biased against another or has something to gain by ignoring the legitimate concerns of this other group, we end up getting in our own way. It’s a sad truth of modern society that too often we discriminate against each other while rationalizing our behavior by claiming that “we” are right and “they” are wrong.

When I say this, I’m not speaking only from my own experiences in serving on three District-level committees over the past 16 years. I am also basing my statements on what other parents on our PAC have told me, specifically, that they are sick and tired of coming into our meetings month after month to witness disagreements and loud voices all the time. For the most part members who are frustrated with what they see as time being wasted won’t openly express themselves, but lately a few have broken their silence to speak out. We heard it most recently in comments from two colleagues during our meeting last Thursday, May 30th. Both said essentially the same thing, that they took the time to get involved as elected PAC members because they wanted to make a difference for students. Both also told us that they now wonder if they made a mistake, because every time they attend one of our meetings it’s the same thing: Complaints, accusations, and political posturing: SFACE this, District that, chairperson the other. It’s a downward spiral.

Now I’ve been doing the work of parent and family engagement long enough to have developed a pretty thick skin. When we put ourselves out there and spend time trying to do what we believe is in the best interest of an entire parent committee, eventually we will be faced with those who, for reasons we may not always understand, make it a point to constantly criticize and announce that this person or that person is not doing what is in the best interest of the group. While I’m as willing as anyone to presume positive intentions, it pains me to say that sometimes the realization becomes unavoidable that repeated, lengthy, loud attacks — even those couched in terms of “voicing an opinion” — are really part of an organized campaign to push someone out.

One example of such a movement arising over the past several years involves the claim that a parent in a leadership position purportedly does not subscribe to something referred to as “the parents’ agenda” without specifying what that so-called “agenda” might be. I believe this labeling must be called out for what it is: a cynical attempt to build up one person or group at the expense of another. It’s not a stretch to use another term we are very familiar with in schools: Bullying.

A philosophy known by parent leaders for many years is what we've heard called *divide and conquer*. This idea holds that if parents cannot agree with each other on how to stand together against a bureaucracy, united by common concerns and common aims, then the bureaucracy has nothing to fear from those parents. As much as I've struggled with just how much LAUSD parents are being divided and conquered, the time may now have come to acknowledge what to some appears obvious: ***We as parents are dividing and conquering each other.*** Tragically, every passing year provides yet more evidence that, "We have seen the enemy, and the enemy is us."

At your service,

Paul Robak

*Chairman, 2023-24*

*LAUSD Parent Advisory Committee*

*Website: [lausd.org/PAC](http://lausd.org/PAC)*

*E-mail: [paulPACrobak@gmail.com](mailto:paulPACrobak@gmail.com)*

*Phone: 310-997-5588*