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Dear Commission Members:

It was my great pleasure to meet with you. At the request of your chair, I am sending a short summary of my remarks and a short annotated source list. (In response to a question from one of the commissioners: No, there will not be a quiz over this material.)

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My Remarks

Now is a good time to think about institutional change in public education. The construction of new school buildings in Los Angeles creates an opportunity to put new ideas in them.

New ideas change things fundamentally; they are not silver bullets or magic solutions. Most of the magic has been tried and found wanting. Changing governance does not necessarily change schools. More money may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. Structural reorganization of the school district may be necessary, but it does not reorganize people's heads. If people think the same they will do the same regardless of structure. Finally, "blowing up the whole system" does not provide a replacement.

During the 1990s, LEARN (The Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now) and LAAMP (The Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project) provided excellent case studies of large-scale reform efforts. They were smart reform plans carried out by dedicated and highly energetic people. Thousands of teachers, principals and parents joined in. About half of the district's schools joined LEARN.

They did not transform the school district.

- LEARN and LAAMP were not able to crack the culture of the district, which isolated the reform and the reformers from the core of district operations.

- They were not able to provide a fiscal infrastructure that could break down the web of rules surrounding categorical programs, court decisions, and district practices to deliver unencumbered funds to schools.
- The processes involved were difficult and time consuming; some teachers and administrators found that it was easier to form a charter school or other special school.
- The reforms didn't start with a clear view of teaching and learning and how classrooms and teaching would need to change. Despite interesting pedagogical ideas and good school-based assistance, the majority of time and effort went into rearranging adult power and privilege.

Our research also tells us that school districts, as now constituted, are not a good fit for the tasks we ask of them. It is obvious that the state or federal governments now make many of the decisions that historically were made within school districts. In finance, curriculum, and assessment, districts are much less self-contained than once was the case. Also, the 12 grades that constitute a elementary and secondary school district no longer contain a student's whole education, as it did for most all students when the current system was invented. Graduation from high school is no longer the social or economic passport to adulthood. Thus, it becomes clear that reforming schooling is larger than reforming school districts.

Even though it did not transform the district, LEARN, LAAMP and earlier reform plans *created within LAUSD itself* contain four common elements that auditioned new ideas for public education.

First, all the reforms advocated much greater autonomy for individual schools and building the capacity of the district to support more autonomous schools. Autonomy, it was thought, would bring decision making closer to students and their parents, allow greater flexibility for schools to respond to learning needs, and allow schools to become distinctive in their cultures and programs.

Second, all the reforms sought greater involvement of parents. Parents were to play a greater role in their children's education, "the parent as a child's first educator." And parents were to have a greater say in the operations and governance of the schools, although the suggested mechanisms for doing so varied from plan to plan.

Both the emphasis on parents and the emphasis on autonomous schools were an effort to make the scale of the district more manageable and user friendly, and to provide a policy alternative to breaking up the district into legally separate entities.

Third, all the reforms advocated and depended on a system of high academic standards and a transparent, easy to understand system of tests and accountability. LEARN, in particular, advocated both a system of common standards throughout all schools and school-based assessments. The school-based assessments would more closely reflect actual student work: be more *authentic*, in the language of assessment experts. These assessments would also allow a school to evaluate itself and students on things distinctive to the school.

Fourth, all the reforms advocated some kind of choice among different types of schools. The mechanisms for providing choices were not well articulated, but the idea of different types and styles of education was part of the autonomous school idea, and so too was the idea that students would be able to attend a school other than the one in their attendance zone.

If these four ideas—autonomy, parental involvement, standards and accountability, and choice—were combined and organized around, a fundamentally new institution of education would emerge.

So, it's time to talk about new ideas. The last time the Los Angeles school district was fundamentally reordered was in 1903, when the city charter was changed to divorce the district from the politics of city government. For the public schools these Progressive Era reforms brought forth the organizational idea that would dominate public schooling for more than half a century. A well-run, professionalized public bureaucracy became the ideal of efficiency and effectiveness.

Our research—besides chronicling recent reform efforts—tells how people lost confidence in professionalized public bureaucracy and how new ideas challenge it.

Readings

The Commission asked for a guide to further reading, and I am happy to provide references to some of the work I mentioned in my talk and other things that might be helpful.

1. A short expansion of my argument about institutional change is contained in the Claremont Graduate University *Education Letter*, Vol. 1, No.1. I will send copies to the commission, and the letter can also be found on line at: <http://www.cgu.edu/include/edletter1.pdf>.
2. For a discussion of institutional change in public education see Chapter II in Kerchner, Charles Taylor, Julia E. Koppich, and Joseph G. Weeres. 1997. *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (The book also contains our ideas about post-industrial teacher unionism.)
3. For a look at recent educational change efforts in Los Angeles see: Kerchner, Charles Taylor, and David Menefee-Libey. "Accountability at the Improv: Brief Sketches of School Reform in Los Angeles." In *A Race Against Time: The Crisis in Urban Schooling*, edited by James G. Cibulka and William Lowe Boyd, 3-22. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. The other chapters in the book examine reform efforts in cities across the country. Also, see: Menefee-Libey, David, Benjamin Diehl, Keena Lipsitz, and Nadia Rahimtoola. "The Historic Separation of Schools from City Politics." *Education and Urban Society* 29, no. 4 (1997): 453-473.
4. A couple recent short papers about urban reform issues: American Educational Research Association. Fall 2004. Closing the Gap: High Achievement for Students of Color. *AERA Research Points*. Supovitz, Jonathan A., and Jolley

- Bruce Christman. 2003. Developing Communities of Instructional Practice: Lessons from Cincinnati and Philadelphia. *CPRE Policy Brief* RB-39.
5. There has been relatively little published about the history and operations of the Los Angeles Unified School District. For a study of the district through the Progressive Era, see: Raftery, Judith. *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885-1941*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.
 6. About the Progressive Era in education, the standard works are: Cremin, Lawrence A. *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988 [for a highly positive reading] and Tyack, David B. *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974 [for a more critical treatment]. For a history of the superintendency, see Tyack, David, and Elisabeth Hansot. *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982.
 7. There has been a great deal written about the Progressive Era in California, where Los Angeles was very much in the vanguard of the nation. The standard history is: Mowry, George E. *The California Progressives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951. A contemporary amendment to the history can be found in: Deverell, William, and Tom Sitton, eds. *California Progressivism Revisited*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Sitton, Tom. (1992). John Randolph Haynes: California Progressive. Stanford: CA, Stanford University Press.
 8. Cubberly's textbook, the first widely used text on school administration, should be approached with a warning. Cubberly was very much a man of his time and place, and so to the modern reader he appears sexist, racist, and highly class conscious. The lesson that can be drawn from Cubberly lies in his ability to conceptualize an entire institution and to train a new cadre of people to work in it: Cubberly, Elwood. P. (1916). Public School Administration: A Statement of the Fundamental Principles Underlying the Organization and Administration of Public Education. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.