

“The State of Education in Los Angeles II”

Moderator: Dave Bryan, Political Reporter, KCAL9/CBS2
Panelists: David L. Brewer III, Superintendent, LAUSD
Hon. Marlene Canter, President, LAUSD Board of Education
Maria Casillas, President, Families in Schools
Ray Cortines, LA Deputy Mayor, Education, Youth & Families
A. J. Duffy, President, UTLA

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The education debate within the nation’s second largest school was revisited today, a year after Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s ambitions to takeover the school district were unveiled. Moderator Mr. Dave Bryan of KCAL9/CBS2 introduced the context of the debate, referring to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as “ground zero” in the educational war over who should control the schools. Given that the LAUSD must carry on in the midst of the governance battle while still trying to address the lack of resources, prevalent youth violence, and a high drop-out rate, Mr. Bryan posed the question, “Where do we go from here?”

Ms. Marlene Canter, President of the LAUSD Board of Education and Mr. A. J. Duffy, President of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, both described the education agenda in Los Angeles as moving forward based on the events of the past year. The most influential and controversial education catalyst of the last year described Mr. Duffy, was Mayor Villaraigosa’s educational governance reform legislation, Assembly Bill 1381. “Conflict is not always bad if it leads to new partnerships over change” he said. Though Ms. Canter argued that legislation is unnecessary for collaboration, she referred to the past year as a “milestone conversation” in education because of the attention on reform. Another reason for hope said Ms. Canter is the exciting leadership of the new LAUSD Superintendent, Mr. David L. Brewer III and the new partnerships that are already forming.

Others on the panel described the future of education in the LAUSD as contingent upon converting the “best practices” into a district-wide approach. Mr. Ray Cortines the Los Angeles Deputy Mayor of Education, Youth & Families argued that he has seen some of the best practices in the LAUSD schools and charters, but what is lacking is a “systematic approach” for the implementation of these exemplary methods. Mr. Brewer shared a similar sentiment, proclaiming that many of the successful educational methods and tools are known but not yet replicated across the district. As new Superintendent, he said that he will “shock the system” into action by having the tough conversations and embedding the system with “innovations of vision.”

Mr. Brewer also discussed his agenda for increasing community ownership of both the problems and success of their schools. He described the Belmont Pilot School project as an example of this community-centered model. Ms. Maria Casillas, President of Families in Schools, also expressed the need for community ownership at the local level through emphasis on clusters of schools. She argued that everyone in these clusters must be held accountable for the success of their schools and neighborhoods. Increased control at the local, community level—a widely favored strategy—was adopted in 2000, said Mr. Cortines, but it has never been implemented due to the district bureaucracy. The lack of transparency and excessive bureaucracy, argued Mr. Cortines, is a major barrier to educational success in the LAUSD. Another barrier to education reform that resonated with those in attendance was the perceived lack of cooperation and collaboration between the Mayor, the Superintendent, and the LAUSD. The panel agreed that a future dialogue between the major players would set the stage for education improvements in the district.