

To the Venice and Mar Vista Schools and Communities:

The proposed construction at Mark Twain Middle School was presented to the community because LAUSD had committed itself to a specific instructional model for the Mandarin Immersion program and because the program's academic success has led to enrollment growth that exceeded capacity at Broadway Elementary School.

More important, I advocated for this investment because of my commitment to a vision for dynamic multilingual educational pathways throughout the Venice High School complex. I believe that these pathways combined with STEM and Arts pathways will lead to a public education renaissance throughout our Westside schools. Without investment, a pathway and a vision cannot be realized. These investments in the Venice/Mar Vista schools are part of my broader agenda to increase enrollment throughout LAUSD so that we can stop the vicious cuts to programs and staff that endanger the future of public education in Los Angeles.

As you are aware, the comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the proposed school construction ended on Monday, May 18th. I was advised by legal counsel that I could not respond to comments until after the comment period ended. While it is impossible for me to reply to the thousands of emails and formal comments, I will briefly address some of the key issues and explain how we will proceed.

There is not a viable option for program growth under this 4 classroom model at Broadway. Research from across the nation indicates that locating an elementary language immersion program adjacent to or in close proximity to the middle school where the program will continue, is the best option for maintaining program enrollment through the middle school years. Moreover, there are substantive and valid academic reasons to present a building program to the community.

As your School Board Member it is my role to present a vision for program development and to enact policy initiatives to support the program's goals and vision. It is the role of the Superintendent of Schools to present plans and strategies to implement these goals and this vision.

At this point in our process, Superintendent Ramon Cortines will assume full responsibility for executing the vision and policies of the Board of Education both as it relates Mark Twain, Mandarin/Spanish Immersion at Broadway and enrollment growth initiatives throughout LAUSD. I will continue to give him input and advocate for what I believe to be the best plans to support our vision and our policy. I am your Board Member and I will continue to fight for both of these programs, our schools and the expanding enrollment vision.

I believe even more strongly today that a building project at Mark Twain MS is the best strategy to meet the instructional needs of the Mandarin Immersion program and to stabilize enrollment throughout the Venice High complex. After reviewing the comments to the DEIR, I now believe that the proposed design will not address the impacts of

increased traffic, parking and the loss of potential community recreational space. As such, I have asked the Superintendent to work with Facilities Division to redesign the project so to better address these issues and more equitably distribute the benefits of the project between Mandarin Immersion, Beethoven and Mark Twain. The Superintendent will determine if such a redesign is the best strategy to move us forward. I trust that he will balance the needs of all schools and all children as well as the Board mandate for increasing enrollment as he makes this determination.

The DEIR process has in part served its purpose. LAUSD brought a proposal to address an educational imperative. The community has responded with diverse and passionate input. I am asking the Superintendent to determine the best course of action. I expect a redesign of the proposed construction can address the aforementioned issues and that it remains the most appropriate instructional plan. If it cannot, I expect the Superintendent to present an alternative plan to move forward that honors all the LAUSD programs in question and the families who chose these programs. For public education to work we must have dynamic choices for families and we must be willing to invest in those choices.

I do not regret bringing this vision forward. But I am deeply disappointed the way people have been treated in this process. For families in the Mandarin Immersion program who want nothing more than LAUSD to offer the most academically sound program to have been vilified by some in the community is reprehensible. For families in the Broadway Spanish Immersion program and mainstream program to have to endure yet another round of others thinking they know what's best for their children or treating their children as if they can be easily discarded is heartbreaking. On behalf of LAUSD, myself and our community, I am sorry.

I believe in democracy and I believe in organizing. I believe even when I don't agree with the tactics or the outcomes. But a campaign designed to scare and intimidate families away from a school or a community is not democracy and it is not organizing. It is an adult version of the very bullying we are trying to eradicate from our schools. And it has no place in our neighborhood. Families in these programs only want the best education LAUSD can provide for their children. The cost of that shouldn't involve being the victims of misdirected rage. As a community we will sometimes disagree passionately. We have to find a way to that without dehumanizing each other. We all can do better.

Superintendent Cortines will decide what to present to the Board for final approval. I will continue to advocate passionately for our enrollment growth policy and for the language pathways in Venice to be one of the prototypes for this policy. Know that I believe deeply in each of these outstanding programs. I believe in the teachers, the families and the students. I believe in public education and I believe in our community. I know we have been through a hard time, but I ask you, on behalf of our kids, to continue to believe with me.

Thank you,
Steve