

Subject: Re: Important background for Wednesday's Kids First Strategy Group meeting

From: Ben Austin <benaustin3@gmail.com>

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Hi all, below are two additional proposed strategies participants have submitted to discuss at today's meeting. Just a reminder that Ana is graciously hosting at GPSN: 1150 S. Olive Street in Downtown Los Angeles. Please account for rain delays and be on time. We have a jam packed agenda and will start at 4 sharp.

Here are the additional proposals:

Ed Reform Framing and Language Center: Our side has lost control of the framing, messaging, and language around education reform. It is difficult to win political support as well as policy battles when conventional wisdom tells the public that charter schools are "private," run by billionaires for profit, and engaged in a scorched-earth "war on public education." Not only must we push back these intentional lies, but we must also establish a positive frame of ed reform as an instrument of justice and equity for Black and Latino families who are the victims of a failing status quo that was at its core designed to limit their economic and social status. To accomplish this will involve coordination between existing ed reform groups, but also the creation of an independent effort with the freedom and flexibility to: communicate vigorously with reporters who perpetuate the framing of our opponents; create coalitions between reform educators and progressive causes, from gun safety to health care to immigrant rights to bilingual education to police misconduct to reproductive rights; build bridges in minority communities including funding for Black and Latino civil rights and community groups; be a source of earned media via social media, op-eds, podcasts, radio/tv appearances, etc.; provide a California-focused center of intellectual and policy thought on these issues that result in earned and paid media (e.g. Randy Weingarten's NYT Sunday paid ad); be aggressive in fighting UTLA/CTA on wedge issues such as teacher quality; honor legislators who support kids first policy; and find other ways to outflank CTA from the left. Much of this is already being considered or even worked on by groups such as CCSA, but they may be constrained by funding, the need to work in cooperation in Sacramento with opponents, and other very real issues that limit their ability to be fully engaged in this arena.

- * Helps win elections: 2
- * Impacts public narrative: 3
- * Drives Kids first policy change: 2

- * Benefits entire reform ecosystem: 3
- * Empowers parents and students: 1

Kids First Index: One way to hold both our friends and opponents in office accountable is to create a Kids First Index, which would rate lawmakers and policymakers on a scale of say 0 to 100. This is likely easier to suggest than to do, but there is no reason that the format needs to be excessively complex. The Index itself is not valuable unless there is a vehicle to disseminate scores and share them with voters and the media, and if the group creating the Index is seen as representing the needs of kids. The existence of the Index would not only generate interest in any organization we create, but would also brand it, and potentially in ways that might be very potent. For example, if I understand this correctly, UTLA and the district recently agreed to draw LCFF funds intended for low income kids to help pay for the new teacher contract. If our Index was designed to measure how strongly lawmakers stood up for the least privileged kids rather than the most affluent among us, and we made sure people know about this, then this sends a strong message to progressives.

- * Helps win elections: 2
- * Impacts public narrative: 1
- * Drives Kids first policy change: 2

- * Benefits entire reform ecosystem: 1
- * Empowers parents and students: 2

On Sun, Mar 3, 2019 at 7:52 PM Ben Austin <benAustin3@gmail.com> <<mailto:benAustin3@gmail.com>> wrote:

Hi all, below is material for Wednesday's Kids First Strategy Group meeting: revised and refined goals, a proposed agenda, and a list of initiatives we could collectively adopt to begin backwards planning from our short and long term goals.

I want to acknowledge a tension in the work ahead of us: I think we all agree that we need to figure out how to work better and differently together so that over time we can make the whole greater than the sum of our parts. As Katie said at the last meeting, in many ways the work of this group could be considered a 10 year project. And as Ana and others mentioned: Alex Caputo Pearl has been working for far more than ten years to achieve the victories that are just now bearing fruit for UTLA. But we are also managing short term threats, challenges, and opportunities we cannot ignore.

While it may seem contradictory to work on both tracts simultaneously, hopefully we can walk and chew gum and even forge strategic synergy. In the short term we can learn to work better together, build collective power, and win short and medium term victories; while simultaneously reflecting, learning, and evolving as a community so that 5 and 10 years from now we aren't in this same position.

Based on feedback I've gotten from many of you since the first

meeting, I've attempted to translate our agreed upon collective goals into a format which we can use to measure progress in the short and long term. As you can see, I've broken them into a specific long term "moon shot" goal, and short-term goals that lay the foundation to achieve our long term goal:

* By 2030: A quality public education for every student in the LAUSD, agnostic to school model, measured by child outcomes. This is the goal we agreed upon in the last meeting, adding a deadline. The 2030 date is obviously random. But it feels far enough away that it forces us to think long-term (it's more time than it took for America to figure out how to land on the moon), but soon enough that it's urgent, non-theoretical, and will directly impact the children in the system today.

* By November 2020: Retake board majority, change public narrative/shift Overton Window, defend quality charters, establish legal rights for parents and students to translate asymmetrical organizing into legal rights and political power to advocate for kids. We had agreed to each of the above goals at the last meeting but not the specific 2020 deadline.

This is a proposed agenda:

1. check-ins (5 mins)
2. Are these the right goals and correct timelines? Are they measurable? (15 mins)
3. Discuss the key work streams that are essential to achieving our goals (at next gathering we will discuss who best fills which lane) -- moderated by Seth. (20 mins)
4. Discussion of short and long term opportunities to leverage power. As Machiavelli says, it's better to be feared than loved. Right now we are neither. (25 mins)
5. Discussion of short-term strategies, tactics, board resolutions to collectively support in order to achieve our goals, hopefully adopting 3-5. (55 mins)

Below are a list of proposed initiatives that would help achieve our agreed upon goals, based on feedback from each of you and discussion during our initial meeting. Each of the proposals are summarized in one paragraph, then ranked on a scale of 0-3 in terms of how effectively they help us achieve our short and long term goals. If you would like to add to the list please feel free to reply-all to this email before Wednesday, and structure your proposal in the same format. Here's the list:

* Candidate recruitment, training, and support. We must collectively recruit and train candidates for school board and mayor that share our kids-first values, while building a sustainable campaign operation to support these candidacies. The 2020 school board races represent a critical opportunity to recapture our reform board majority -- with BD3 and potentially BD5 representing key opportunities for pickups that would flip the board. The 2022 mayoral race represents an opportunity to take back the mayor's office and recapture our ability to drive a citywide agenda from the top-down. We need to begin recruiting and training candidates for these races, as we develop a pipeline of kids first candidates to run and win over the course of the next decade.

student: 2

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 3
- * Impacts public narrative: 1
- * Benefits entire reform ecosystem: 3
- * Defends charters: 3
- * Empowers parents and students: 0

* Pro-charter board resolution and legislative strategy. Our board allies made many caveats before their vote in favor of the charter ban: this isn't about restricting parent choice, it's not about banning charters for a long period of time, it's not meant as a signal to the legislature to ban new charters statewide or to allow for the denial of charters based on fiscal impact. We could simply ask our board allies to codify their rhetoric in the form of a resolution crafted by LAAC and CCSA. Included in this strategy would also be coordination with CCSA on a legislative and statewide strategy to block draconian anti charter legislation.

student: 3

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 0
- * Impacts public narrative: 1
- * Benefits entire reform ecosystem: 1
- * Defends charters: 3
- * Empowers parents and students: 0

* Establishing students as a legally protected class. Establishing students as a legally protected class would literally translate "kids first" from a soundbite into a new civil right for all LAUSD students. It would serve multiple strategic goals for our group and our movement: reframing policy debates away from charters to kids, creating a much needed wedge issue for reformers, giving us the ability to drive an agenda even without four board votes, laying the groundwork for establishing a new culture of empowerment amongst LAUSD parents and students, unrigging the system by incentivizing it to put kids first, and reframing ed reform as a fundamentally progressive value rooted in civil rights rather than a technocratic value based on top-down elitism.

* Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD student: 3

- * Helps win elections: 2
- * impacts public narrative: 3
- * Benefits entire reform ecosystem: 3
- * Defends charters: 2
- * Empowers parents and students: 3

* PSC 2.0. If our core goal is a high quality public education for every LAUSD student, we should seriously consider embracing a school turnaround initiative targeted at increasing the amount of high quality seats in the LAUSD and grounding the public narrative in the moral problem of failing schools. An initiative like this could be structured like Yolie's original resolution which empowered the superintendent each year to identify failing schools and propose turnaround measures (including charter conversions), or we could embrace an idea Nick has floated by establishing a 5 year renewal contract for all public schools, district and charter. In either construction, we should empower parents and students with a non-advisory seat at the table to determine the destiny of their own school communities.

student: 3

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 0
- * Impacts public narrative: 2
- * benefits entire ecosystem: 2
- * Defends charters: 1
- * Empowers parents and students 0-2 (depending on framework)

* Undocumented parents voting. LAUSD could follow the lead of San Francisco Unified and empower undocumented parents with the right to vote.

student: 1

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 1-2
- * Public narrative: 3
- * Benefits entire ecosystem: 1
- * Defends charters: 1
- * Empowers parents and students: 3

* Equal protection lawsuit. Kids Coalition has been researching the potential for an equal protection challenge to LAUSD policies that lead to inequitable outcomes for low income children and children of color (the two existing constitutionally protected classes in California). The advantage of this strategy is that it does not require a board vote, and if we settle with Austin it doesn't even require a court victory. The implications could be sweeping given that constitutional rights trump district policy and even UTLA contract rights.

student: 3

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 0
- * Impacts public narrative: 3
- * Benefits entire ecosystem: 2
- * Defends charters: 2
- * Empowers parents and students: 2

* Parent trigger 2.0. Parent trigger is still valid state law and is protected by a recent favorable California Supreme Court decision. But it is virtually impossible to use because it is difficult to define an eligible failing school in the absence of API scores and NCLB's program improvement status. If the LAUSD tied parent trigger eligibility to its new school performance framework, it would give parents a powerful seat at the school site to advocate for the interests of their children. We could also explore modifications such as: creating more collaborative in-district turnaround options for parents, establishing policies that incentivize high quality charter participation such as long-term lease agreements, and giving high school students the legal right to sign a petition.

student: 2

- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
- * Helps win elections: 0
- * Impacts public narrative: 2
- * Benefits entire ecosystem: 2

- * Defends charters: 2
- * Empowers parents and students: 3

* Attack UTLA. As we discussed at the last meeting, our goal isn't to "beat" UTLA, it's to transform a system for kids. But we do need to deal with the fact that they are trying to beat and eliminate us. That would not be our goal. It would be to weaken them politically so that we can better achieve our goals and collaborate for kids in the context of a more balanced power dynamic.

- student: 1
- * Helps ensure a quality education for every LAUSD
 - * Helps win elections: 3
 - * Impacts public narrative: 1
 - * Benefits entire ecosystem: 2
 - * Defends charters: 2
 - * Empowers parents and students: 0

Lastly, just a reminder about our confidentiality norm. This is obviously a lot of sensitive stuff and Wednesday's discussion will be robust.

Please feel free to check in with any feedback before Wednesday. Otherwise I'll look forward to seeing everyone at 4pm at GPSN. It's great being in the trenches with all of you.

Thanks a lot,

Ben