



**Parent
Organization
Network**

Breaking Through Barriers

August 2021

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
LAUSD ISSUANCE OF
DISRUPTIVE PERSON LETTERS:

**“WHEN WE KNOW
BETTER, WE DO
BETTER.”**



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INTRODUCTION AND RECAP

Research on parent and family engagement has demonstrated a clear connection to improved student outcomes for attendance, academics, social-emotional skills, graduation rates, college and career readiness, teacher satisfaction, and school improvement.

Research on parent and family engagement has demonstrated a clear connection to improved student outcomes for attendance, academics, social-emotional skills, graduation rates, college and career readiness, teacher satisfaction, and school improvement. However, rarely are educators exposed to meaningful training on parent and family engagement during pre-service, induction, or in-service. Consequently, many teachers and administrators come to believe this partnership is not an essential practice and may even adopt negative beliefs about families. As a result, too many low-income families and families of color struggle to feel truly engaged at their children's schools.

In some cases, engagement takes a negative turn when disagreements arise between parents and school staff and then escalate to conflict. In 2016, PON released a report on the issuance of "disruptive person letters" (DPLs) to parents in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). These letters are issued by principals to parents, guardians, other adults, and even minors, for behavior which has been deemed, at the discretion of the principal, to be "disruptive." A DPL restricts access to an LAUSD school site for up to one school year from the date a letter is issued and requires the recipient to obtain the principal's permission to enter the campus at any time, for any reason. This practice is not exclusive to LAUSD; school districts in California and other states use these letters but may refer to them by different names such as Stay Away Letters, Limited Access Letters, or even Ban Letters.

However, in our 2016 report we found that some LAUSD principals relied on Disruptive Person Letters to ban parents who come to schools trying to resolve issues related to their children,

issuing 71% of all letters to parents of elementary students.

There was no process to appeal DPLs or restore the rights of parents to be present and participate in their children's education.

OUR REPORT LED TO THREE OUTCOMES IN 2017:

- 1) **LAUSD issued a new policy bulletin, Disruptive Person Letters (BUL-6826.0), which offers guidelines on issuing letters, outlines an appeal process, and provides template letters.**
- 2) **The LAUSD Board of Education passed a Board Resolution (RES-054-16/17), Increasing Communication and Strengthening Relationships Between Schools and Parents, directing the superintendent to work with parents and community groups in developing a pilot program to support school-parent relationships in cases when conflict does arise.**
- 3) **The California Commission on Teachers Credentialing updated requirements for administrators to include the use of positive behavior interventions, conflict resolution, and restorative justice as a performance expectation.**

This report shares the progress LAUSD has made related to DPL issuance, appeals, and staff training. Information shared here is important given that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced and emphasized the critical role of family-school partnerships in the academic achievement of students. The current reopening of schools in a climate that is politically charged, and where many families have endured traumatic experiences, may predispose some situations to escalate to conflict, but resources are available to mitigate this risk, and the outcomes we have seen to date are promising.

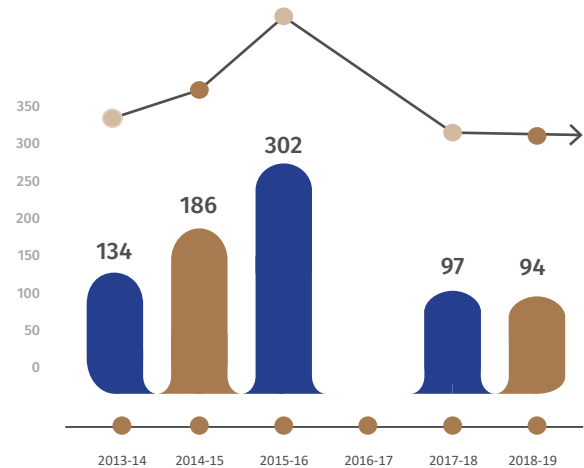
2021 Progress Report: TOP 5 FINDINGS

In March 2019, PON submitted a second Public Records Act (PRA) request to LAUSD on DPLs. In April 2020 we received 216 DPLs and then in June 2021 an additional 20 DPLs for a total of 236 letters. The letters were issued from school years 2016-2017 through 2019-2020.

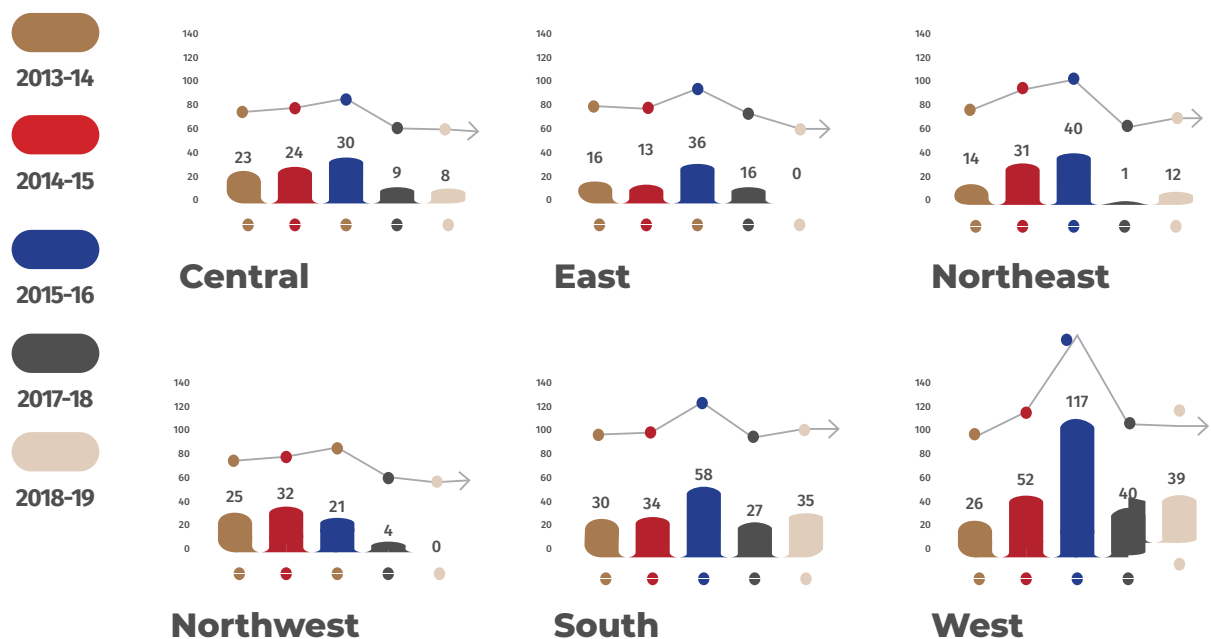
1 The number of DPLs issued declined 67.8% from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018.

This analysis includes data from five school years. The first three school years were reported by PON in 2016. This new data comes from 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Unfortunately, data received for the other two school years, 2016-2017 and 2019-2020, were incomplete, so those years were excluded from the analysis in Findings 1 and 2. Data includes both warnings and actual restrictions. **Although DPL issuance declined in every local district, principals in Local Districts South and West continue to issue the most DPLs.**

DPLs issued by LAUSD



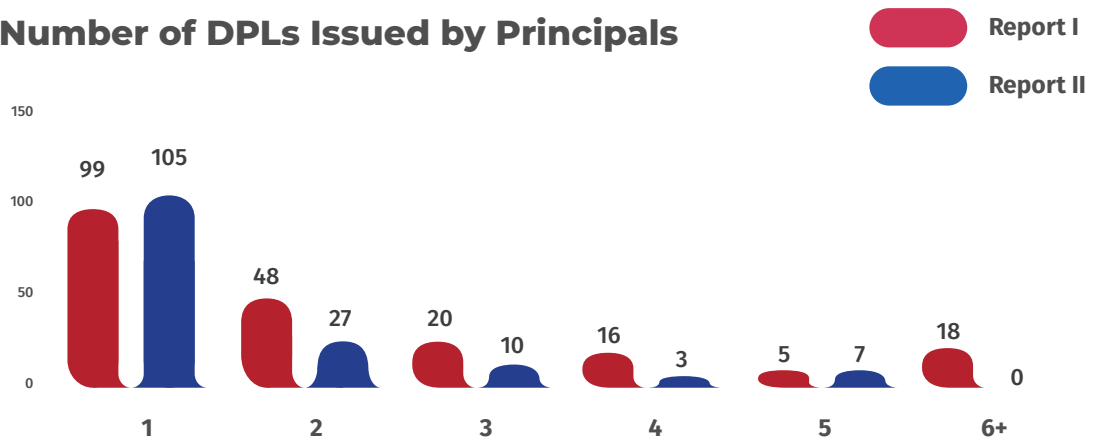
DPLs issued by Local District



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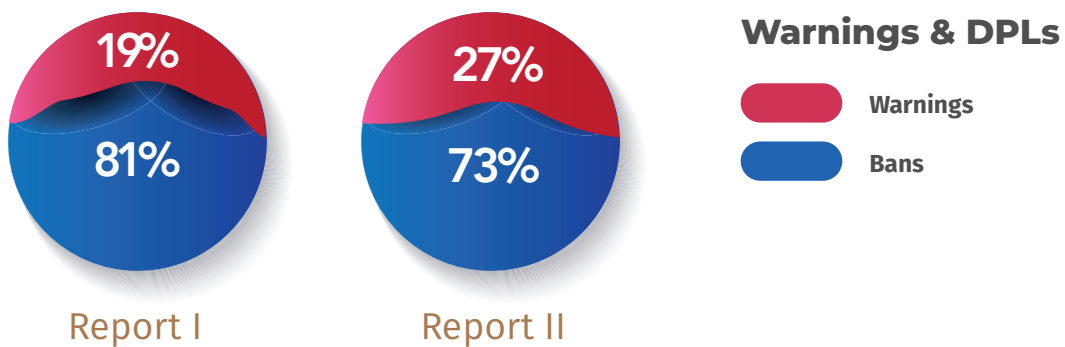
The number of principals issuing a high number of DPLs declined from 11% to 4.6%. In the 2016 report, 32% of all DPLs came from 11% or 23 principals. These principals each issued 5 to 10 DPLs during the period. In this report we find that 152 principals issued 236 DPLs, but most issued one or two letters, and only 4.6%, or 7 principals, issued 5 letters. No principal issued more than 5 letters. This graph includes all DPLs from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020.

Number of DPLs Issued by Principals



3

Warnings increased by 8%, from 19% in 2016 to 27%. While it is certainly a positive sign that principals now provide warnings, it is important to note that in 2016 we found 91.5% of recipients only received one letter. This means all it takes is one letter, whether a warning or a DPL, for a parent to abandon any further attempts to be engaged at their child's school.





4 **There were no appeals in this data set.** Although an appeals process was instituted in 2017 with BUL-6826.0, we were unable to determine whether any recipient made use of it. Only 44% of DPLs issued included information about the option to appeal the letter, as required by the bulletin. Also, it is important to note that warnings cannot be appealed.

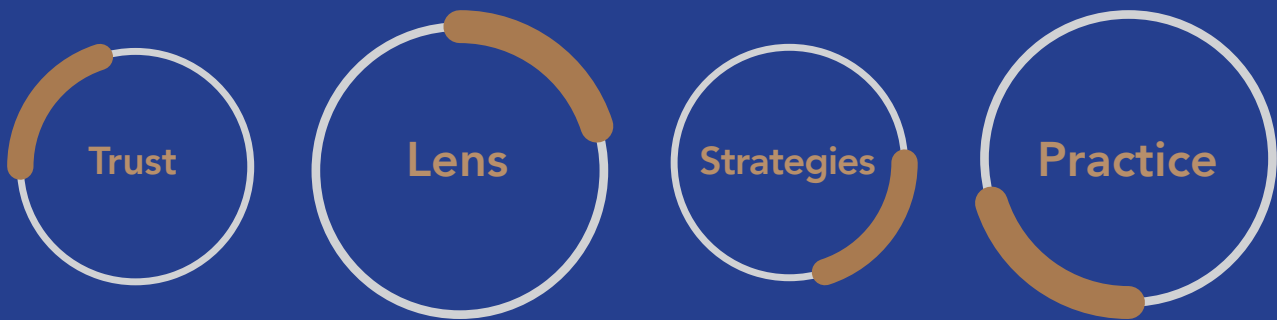
5 **LAUSD training outcomes are promising in providing principals with alternative strategies to working with parents instead of using DPLs.** Over 130 District leaders from all local districts participated in an 8-hour training from June 2018 through January 2020. To learn more about the training and the outcomes, please see the next section.

LAUSD TRAINING DESCRIPTION & OUTCOMES

The intent of this summary is to provide a brief synopsis of the District's training developed in support of the Increasing Communication and Strengthening Relationships Between Schools and Parents Resolution passed by the Board of Education on March 14, 2017.

As a result of the resolution, all local districts (LD) received training during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school year to increase communication and strengthen relationships between schools and parents. The professional development was hosted by each Local District Office and included Parent and Family Center personnel, Local District Superintendents, Instructional Directors, Administrators of Operations, Operations Coordinators, Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Administrators, PACE Coaches, Los Angeles School Police Department Officers, School Mental Health, Nursing, and Pupil Services staff and other District personnel. The objectives of the one-day training included:

- Awareness of the Increasing Communication and Strengthening Relationships Between Schools and Parents Resolution.
- Learning about the literature regarding relational trust as a means to respond to conflict and building empathy through LAUSD DPL case studies.
- Understanding the impact of trauma and how using a trauma informed lens can strengthen relationships with parents/caregivers, as well as District personnel.
- Activities to proactively prevent and resolve conflict and mediate issues when they arise.
- Strategies and tools that may be employed when Local District personnel become aware that there is a conflict, lack of communication, or potential misunderstanding between a parent/caregiver and the principal and/or other school staff.
- Understanding of Restorative Justice practices as a framework to facilitate a change in mindset to resolve conflict when it arises.



Relational Trust:

- Develop awareness and importance of cultivating relational trust by introducing short articles including: Trust in Schools and Six Shifts to Better Family Engagement.
- Facilitated reflections about relational trust by making connections to a person or incident between persons that may have benefited by the tenets included in the articles.
- Emphasized the road traveled when you fracture a relationship through a DPL and the long-term conflict that arises versus the benefits of deescalating and mending relationships.

Trauma Informed Lens:

- Awareness of adverse experiences that may affect one's reaction in a stressful or triggering situation.
- Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to bring awareness to the impact on mental health.
- Resources and practical strategies to adopt a trauma informed lens in schools and how it supports to develop and strengthen relationships.

Effective Communication Strategies:

- Exploration of the identity of others and how others may perceive identities.
- Use of effective communication to engage listening and mindful responses.

- Listening to guide the conversation from conflict to resolution.
- Awareness about interpersonal conflict and strategies to manage conflict to ensure a positive school culture for all stakeholders.

Restorative Justice Practices:

- Community building to value all members of the school community.
- Strategies to promote strengthening communication and relationships when responding to a person who is escalating
- Overview on how to plan, develop and facilitate restorative conferences and harm circles.

Professional Development Outcomes:

The multi-disciplinary teams of District personnel who participated in these trainings in each of six (6) Local Districts conveyed that they valued the training content, consistently rating the presentations favorably and reporting the intention to use the strategies learned, as well as seek/recommend similar trainings in support of our strengthening relationships between families and school sites.

LAUSD raining
Evaluation Results:
% who Agreed or
Strongly Agreed

96%

The Managing Difficult Conversations content was relevant. (Human relations, Diversity and Equity)

96%

I recieved important information on enhancing skills to manage conflict

97%

The Trauma Informed content was relevant. (School mental health)

97%

I received important information on understanding impact of trauma.

97%

The Restorative Justice content was relevant. (Restorative Justice)

96%

I received important information on implementing restorative strategies.

98%

Overall, I was satisfied with the information I received in the three-part training on Increasing Communications & Strengthening Relationships training

PON CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS & LAUSD RESPONSES

“WHEN WE KNOW BETTER, WE DO BETTER.”

MAYA ANGELOU

Although we cannot directly attribute the decrease in DPL issuance in LAUSD to any one specific factor, increased awareness about the issue, along with the training provided to some district staff and principals, are likely factors contributing to this positive outcome.

We congratulate the District for the progress made thus far. At the same time, in the spirit of collaboration and continuous improvement, we provide the following recommendations to refine the training curriculum, guidance given to principals, and stricter enforcement of BUL-6826.0.

1

As we return to school, offer a restorative restart. ON a member of a broad California-based coalition of 39 organizations advocating for to use this moment to reimagine and rebuild schools. A restorative restart refers to ensuring all California school districts take “6 weeks over the summer or at the beginning of the school year to offer students, families, and educators” time to engage in restorative practices “centered on relationships, that address the whole child, strengthen staff and partnerships, makes teaching and learning relevant and rigorous, and empowers teams to reimagine and rebuild systems”. For more details, please see the full publication here.



LAUSD RESPONSE:

The District has created social emotional wellbeing resources for schools to use to implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports/Restorative Practices. The District is also investing in additional Systems of Support Advisers to support school teams with relationship building, focusing on the whole child, strengthening communication and partnerships in collaboration with families, students, and school site staff. Two Roadmap documents have been developed to guide and support Social Emotional Well-Being – for our families and for school and district staff to promote the resilience and well-being of all school community members. Student Health and Human Services has created a professional learning community in the District’s learning management system, Schoology to provide educators with access to daily community building and wellness focused activities for classroom, home, and school community use.

Here is a link to some of the resources that have been developed by Student Health and Human Services: Positive Behavior Intervention and Support_RP / PBIS RP - Home (lausd.net)

Through the Mental Health Recovery plan, the district is also investing in mental health supports through school-based psychiatric social workers who will support every school site in the district, supporting families and all school community stakeholders to continue to focus on well-being, resilience, and safe, healthy, welcoming, and affirming environments.

¹ PACE (2021) REIMAGINE AND REBUILD: RESTARTING SCHOOL WITH EQUITY AT THE CENTER. RETRIEVED FROM [HTTPS://REIMAGINECASCHOOLS.ORG/](https://reimaginecaschools.org/)

2

Expand training to all principals, including early childcare center directors and candidates clearing their administrator credentials.

As a preventive measure, expand principal training on communication, relationship building and conflict resolution to all school principals and to principal candidates in District induction programs. Prioritize training to those already issuing DPLs, particularly in Local Districts South and West, as well as to principals assigned to preschools and elementary schools, where the level of family engagement typically is higher, and the probability of conflict greater.



LAUSD RESPONSE:

The District will continue to work alongside each Community of School (CoS) team to provide professional development to increase communication and strengthen relationships between schools and parents.

The additional investments in Systems of Support Advisers and Psychiatric Social Workers will support this critical work, providing additional training and school-site level supports districtwide in the upcoming school year.

3

Improve training by connecting the impact of systemic racism to trauma and foundational research on effective family engagement practices.

Given that DPLs are likely issued in schools with higher concentrations of families that may have experienced the compounded effects of systemic racism over multiple generations and from the pandemic, which leads to higher levels of trauma, we urge the District to add “cultural competency” and “implicit bias” components to the DPL training curriculum. Also, we urge the District to broaden the training to include foundational research on effective family engagement practices included in CDE’s LCFF Priority 3: Family Engagement self-reflection tool. The tool includes measuring the implementation level of a “welcoming environment,” so that all parents and families feel that not only are they allowed to be on campus, but that they are actively encouraged to participate in school activities and events.



LAUSD RESPONSE:

The District is in the process of implementing professional development for all District staff on implicit bias and how to be a non-racist/anti-racist educator. Dr. Tyrone Howard has partnered with the district in the development of a 3-part training, and a facilitator’s guide has been developed to support all schools and offices in this effort.

LAUSD’s Parent Community Services branch and Student Health and Human Services have organized a Resilient Families Course with four modules for families. We are expanding this to include the Resiliency roadmap. The training includes concepts of deescalating in times of stress, a focus on how wellness impacts all of us, as well as the identification of “isms” as a barrier to building safe and affirming school communities.



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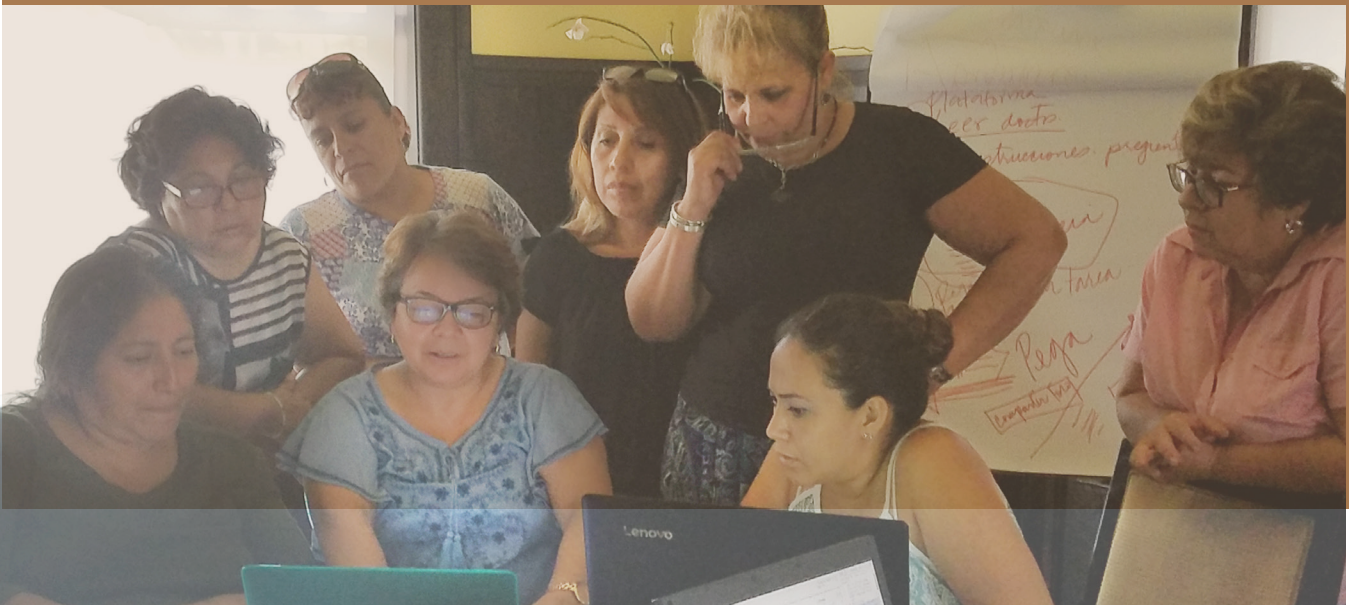
As we return to school, offer a restorative restart. Revise BUL-6826.0, Disruptive Person Letter, so that the new version:

- a. **Outlines preventive actions and supports available to principals to resolve conflict.** This could include additional, follow-up training for principals, support from peers, mentor principals or local district staff, offering training to parents, requesting facilitated dialogue, and/or mediation.
- b. **Shortens the restriction period.** Currently, the “Sample Letter” template by default is in effect for one year. The DPL should provide shorter time options such as 10 days, two weeks, three weeks, or four weeks. If a principal wants to impose a longer period, they should be required to obtain the approval of their director or COSA.
- c. **Differentiates the “warning” template from the actual DPL.** Improve “Attachment A: Sample Letter” by including prompts to document the circumstances and reasons why a parent is receiving this letter. Without context, it is difficult to appeal the letter and monitor areas where parents, families and/or principals may need extra support.
- d. **Ensures that principals upload all letters to iSTAR.** While each DPL issued must be uploaded and attached to the associated iSTAR report, the OGC Public Records Act Unit was forced to manually collect letters from individual principals. After 15 months of waiting for OGC to produce responsive documents, only two years of new data were provided. This overly lengthy response time is clearly unacceptable.
- e. **Provides support for parents.** Require that all warning letters and DPLs provide information about how parents can receive support to resolve conflict and, for a DPL, specific information on the appeal process, including the timeline, per BUL-6826.0.



LAUSD RESPONSE:

In the face of conflict, we are presented with an opportunity to support a return to calm, and to focus on empathy, healing, and a shared child/student focus. Restorative practices support all parties with mending fractured relationships, fostering mutual respect and understanding, while also addressing any harm that has been done to the critical relationship between our families and our schools.



5

Provide training to parents on relationship building and conflict resolution as part of leadership development. Effective family-school partnerships require dual-capacity building for both parents and staff. Establishing trust is key to achieving effective collaboration. The earlier this trust is established and nurtured, the more positive results these partnerships will produce for everyone involved: Parents, families, staff, and students.



LAUSD RESPONSE:

LAUSD's Parent Community Services branch and Student Health and Human Services have organized a Resilient Families Course with four modules for families. We are expanding this to include the Resiliency roadmap. The training includes concepts of deescalating in times of stress, a focus on how wellness impacts all of us, as well as the identification of "isms" as a threat to building safe and affirming school communities. A resource library is also being developed.

CONCLUSION

LAST, THE PANDEMIC SHOWED US OUR SYSTEMS ARE NOT WORKING WELL. "WE MUST STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ALL CHILD- AND FAMILY-FACING SYSTEMS IN ORDER TO ERADICATE SYSTEMIC RACIAL AND OTHER INEQUITIES; TO BUILD TRUST BETWEEN AND AMONG STUDENTS, FAMILIES, STAFF, EDUCATORS, DISTRICT LEADERS, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS; AND TO STRENGTHEN SYSTEMS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. BY REDESIGNING SCHOOLS TO BE RESTORATIVE PLACES—WHERE STUDENTS FEEL SAFE, KNOWN, SUPPORTED, AND FULLY ENGAGED IN LEARNING— WE CAN LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR LONG-TERM SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION³".

² PACE (2021) REIMAGINE AND REBUILD: RESTARTING SCHOOL WITH EQUITY AT THE CENTER. RETRIEVED FROM [HTTPS://REIMAGINECASCHOOLS.ORG/](https://reimaginecaschools.org/)