

Overcoming PUSD's Perception Gap – greatly benefiting our public schools, the students, their families and our entire community

In contrast to school districts across the country where something like 75% of the school-age kids attend their public schools, in Altadena, Pasadena and Sierra Madre less than 50% go to the PUSD.

What accounts for this discrepancy? A lot of it has to do with the long-standing and serious perception gap - the gap between a large segment of the community's misperception of the schools' performance and the schools' actual performance: Though there is room for improvement, our public schools are doing well and getting better, but unfortunately, through no fault of their own, too many people in the community fail to appreciate how good our public schools really are.

We need to end this perception gap – and the sooner the better.

The benefits will be enormous:

- Attendance, including middle class attendance, will rise,
- State funding from Sacramento will rise,
- Community engagement and support, including financial support and support at the ballot box, will rise,
- Morale throughout the district will rise,
- The performance of our public schools will improve,
- The future prospects of our students and their families will rise and
- The community will be stronger – and pleased and proud.

We want to keep in mind these two thoughts of Rick Kahlenberg's, the expert professional observer of education across the country who in 2006 and 2017, while he was with the Century Foundation in Washington DC, came at the request of the Pasadena Educational Foundation to study our community and its public schools:

1) If any school district in the country has potential for true excellence, it's the PUSD. This statement is supported by the district's small size and nimbleness combined with the community's enormous human, financial, institutional, cultural, scientific, medical, creative and other resources.

2) In schools with authentic real-world diversity and students with a full range of cultural, social, financial backgrounds, all students benefit, including those from financially strong families with high expectations for their children.

How can we overcome the perception gap? The PUSD and its institutional and individual supporters must call it out, telling the community loud and clear - and often - that our public schools are in fact much better than many of us think they are.

Of course, in recent years the PUSD and its many supporters have put out information about many good things going on at our public schools, but that alone is not enough. Many of those with negative views of our public schools don't think about them, don't pay attention to them and aren't aware of or affected by this good information. More important, learning about one, five, twenty or more great things going on in the PUSD is not at all the same as learning right now, from trusted sources, that our public schools really are OK.

The key, then, is to say openly, repeatedly and forcefully that there is a perception gap and that our public schools really are much better than many of us think they are. Then, when people hear something good about the PUSD, they can accept it and take it as further confirmation that our public schools really are OK!

Over time, the myth about the PUSD will be replaced by truth. Eventually, the atmosphere in our community, instead of saying that our public schools are not good, will say that our public schools really are good and getting better.

Three things each of us can do ourselves, starting today: tell family, neighbors and friends that our public schools really are much better than many of us think they are, 2) refer them to 15 Things You Might Not Know on PEF's website, where you and they will find clear, concise information about many of the good things going on in the PUSD and 3) put a blurb about this on suitable emails you send others.

We're confident that as this effort gets going, the PUSD's many institutional and individual good friends and supporters and others will increasingly join in support of this effort. That help will make a real difference.

Finally, urgency. We need to have a strong sense of urgency about this. For the sake of the kids now in our public schools, and the ones who will be in the public schools in the coming years, the sooner we get results, the better!

Thank you for listening!

George Brumder

2.29.24