



**A Report on the  
Public School Choice 2.0 Advisory Vote Process**

**Submitted by Families In Schools**

Prepared by:

Kaci Y. Patterson, Director, Community Engagement and Advocacy

Oscar E. Cruz, Vice President

***The mission of Families In Schools is to involve parents and communities in their children's education to achieve lifelong success.***

## I. Background

Founded in 2000, Families In Schools (FIS) was created specifically for the purpose of engaging parents in the education of their children so that they could experience a quality education from Pre-K through high school that would prepare the child to be college and career ready. The Public School Choice Resolution aligns with our organization's belief that parents must guide and monitor their children's education. The PSC Resolution enables parents, who are primary stakeholders, to seek options that best meet the academic, social, and cultural needs of their children.

FIS participated in the first iteration of Public School Choice referred to as PSC 1.0, and did so in a variety of ways. Most notably, President Maria Casillas co-chaired the Taskforce on Workforce Stability along with CSULA President, James Rosser. Through a small grant from the California Community Foundation, FIS also contributed to the implementation of PSC 1.0 in collaboration with the LAUSD Parent and Community Services Branch and other nonprofits to develop material to inform parents and community stakeholders of the resolution; to moderate community meetings organized by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles and LAUSD where applicant teams presented their school plans to stakeholders in attendance; and to observe the advisory vote process to track and report any voter irregularities. After the PSC 1.0 Advisory Vote, FIS issued a report providing key recommendations for improving the process.<sup>1</sup> In summary, FIS recommended to:

- Increase the number of workshops to help parents understand 1) the school and student performance data that led a school to becoming a focus school, and 2) the different school designs and/or models being proposed as the path to transformation;
- Develop a process by which all applicant teams would have equal access to outreach and engage parents to gain their ideas and incorporate their suggestions in the school plans; make community meetings more accessible to parents; and
- Strengthen the voter protocols to clarify voter eligibility requirements, eliminate electioneering, and increase voting center staffing.

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<sup>1</sup> Report can be viewed at: <http://educationadvocacy.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/fis-observations-and-recommendations-advisory-vote-pscr.pdf>

## II. PSC 2.0 Advisory Vote Observation and Survey Results

### A. PSC Advisory Vote 2.0 Structure

The PSC 2.0 process impacted 13 schools. Three of those schools were ‘focus schools’ and ten were new schools. The Advisory Vote was managed by the League of Women Voters of Los Angeles (LWVLA). Voting centers were located at focus, feeder or relief schools. For more information about the structure, please refer to the LWVLA report.

### B. FIS Role

FIS participated in the implementation of the PSC 2.0 Advisory Vote because we believed some key modifications had been made from the previous year<sup>2</sup> and because the process still maintained the potential to incorporate parent voices in reforming their low-performing schools. Parents are the most important advocates for their own children and thus FIS wanted to contribute to strengthening the advisory vote process and the voices of parents. Our contribution in PSC 2.0 was supported in part by a grant from United Way of Greater Los Angeles. An estimated 1,500 hours of staff time were invested throughout this process. FIS involvement in the second round included<sup>3</sup>:

- *Steering Committee.* FIS was invited to provide input to the LWVLA of Women Voters Los Angeles, LAUSD, and the United Way in the planning and execution of the advisory vote, as well as in the development of key materials. For example, FIS developed “key questions” for parents to consider when determining the quality of the school plans exhibited during Applicant Team Presentations.
- *Facilitating Community Information Meetings.* United Way of Greater Los Angeles (UWLA) and LAUSD organized several community meetings at each of the PSC impacted sites and invited FIS staff to facilitate meetings with parents, school staff and community members. FIS facilitated meetings throughout the process, which began in the summer of 2010 and dealt with such topics as understanding the advisory vote process; reviewing performance data of the impacted school(s); and learning about the different school plans submitted by the applicant teams.
- *Voting Center Observations.* FIS coordinated and trained a group of 25 community volunteers who provided over 140 hours of observations at all 13 voting sites participating in the 2.0 process.

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to [www.publicschoolchoice.lausd.net](http://www.publicschoolchoice.lausd.net) and the LWVLA report to review key changes in the advisory vote process from 1.0 to 2.0.

<sup>3</sup> FIS did not outreach to parents to participate in community meetings or in the advisory vote. Outreaching to parents was the responsibility of the impacted schools and the local districts.

- *Staff Volunteers.* 14 FIS staff members volunteered as education or voter center staff across 11 sites. In addition, FIS also recruited additional volunteers through our network of community based organizations to staff the education and vote centers.

### C. Community Observers

FIS coordinated and trained a group of 25 community volunteers who provided over 140 hours of observations at all 13 voting sites participating in the 2.0 process. Based on the observations conducted by the community volunteers and first-hand FIS staff experiences, the following issues were identified:

<b><i>Opening/Closing<sup>4</sup></i></b>	Observers reported 7 occasions where the vote center either opened late or closed early by ten or more minutes.
<b><i>Voting Center Staffing<sup>5</sup></i></b>	<p><i>Understaffing.</i> Several observers and FIS staff reported that many voting centers were understaffed and did not have sufficient numbers of volunteers during “high-peak” times where there was an influx of voters. Observers reported that the longest wait time to cast a vote was 30 minutes.</p> <p><i>Language Assistance.</i> A lack of bilingual volunteers at many sites added to voter confusion (either about the ballot or the process itself) and put additional pressure on the few bilingual volunteers to manage multiple voter categories.</p>
<b><i>Voting Materials<sup>6</sup></i></b>	Some observers reported that voting materials (ballots, rosters, etc.) did not arrive on time, which caused the voting center to open late and contributed to a backlog of voters waiting in line to vote. Others reported that the supply of voting materials was inadequate. Some parents expressed frustration that there was not sufficient time or that the information was not comprehensible to lead them to an informed vote.

<sup>4</sup> PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/20-OPENING; PSC3@MUIR 1/20-OPENING; PSC4@CARVER 1/20-OPENING; PSC4@CARVER 1/22-OPENING; PSC10@MONROE 1/29-OPENING; PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/20-CLOSING; PSC8@EDISON 1/18-CLOSING

<sup>5</sup> PSC10@MONROE 1/25, 1/29; PSC11@MANN 1/27; PSC12@SAN FERNANDO 1/25; PSC13@IRVING 1/29

<sup>6</sup> PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/22 - PSC4@CARVER 1/20 - PSC10@MONROE 1/29 - PSC13@IRVING 1/29

<b><i>Inaccurate Voter Data Lists<sup>7</sup></i></b>	<p>Many of the lists provided by the district were incomplete (meaning there was not an A-Z roster for one or more categories) or inaccurate. Several FIS staff reported having to 1) turn students away who were not on the district’s roster list but who had current valid student identification proving they attended a PSC impacted school, and 2) send dozens of parents who asserted that their child attended the PSC impacted school to the “other parent” voting line because their name did not appear on the district’s roster.</p>
<b><i>Voters Turned Away<sup>8</sup></i></b>	<p>There were 7 reports of voters being turned away due to problems with voter lists. See description above. Other reports of voters being turned away were due to the LWVLA making the decision to deny someone a ballot when it was discovered or suspected that they were bused in from outside of the impacted PSC community.</p>
<b><i>Intimidation &amp; Electioneering<sup>9</sup></i></b>	<p>There were 23 reports of voter intimidation, disruption or electioneering at 11 sites. In addition, FIS received 17 community complaint forms that were forward to the LWVLA. (Please see the LWVLA report for a full list of reported incidents.) The reports received by FIS corroborate the majority of incidents listed by the LWVLA.</p>

<sup>7</sup> PSC8@Edison 1/18; PSC10@MONROE 1/25; PSC12@SAN FERNANDO 1/25

<sup>8</sup> PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/20; PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/22; PSC5@BETHUNE 1/19; PSC6@ESTEBAN TORRES 1/18; PSC10@MONROE 1/25; PSC11@MANN 1/27; PSC12@SAN FERNANDO 1/29

<sup>9</sup> PSC1@CARNEGIE 1/22-DISRUPTION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC3@MUIR 1/20-DISRUPTION; PSC3@MUIR 1/22-DISRUPTION, INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC4@CARVER 1/20-DISRUPTION; PSC5@BETHUNE 1/22-DISRUPTION, INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC6@ESTEBAN TORRES 1/18-DISRUPTION; PSC7@SANTEE 1/18-DISRUPTION; PSC9@ROSEMONT 1/29-INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC10@MONROE 1/25-DISRUPTION, INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC11@MANN 1/27-DISRUPTION, INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING; PSC12@SAN FERNANDO 1/29-DISRUPTION; PSC13@IRVING 1/29-INTIMIDATION, ELECTIONEERING

<p><b>“Other Parent” and “Community” Categories<sup>10</sup></b></p>	<p>LAUSD provided the LWVLA with a list of parents, employees, and students from impacted focus, feeder, or relief schools, all of which could vote. The LWVLA used these lists to check voters in and asked each for identification that was compared against the roster. There was no such list for the “other parent” and “community” categories as it would be impossible to produce. This allowed for anyone to self-identify and vote in those categories, making these two voting categories especially difficult to manage.</p> <p>Observers reported incidents where applicant teams bused voters in from areas outside of the PSC community to vote as an “other parent” or “community” member. In addition, in some cases, parents and students asked for vote center volunteers to provide them with “proof” of their vote because their teacher or their child’s teacher had promised some form of incentive for voting. The LWVLA notified all voters seeking such verification that none would be provided. This raises enormous concerns that parents and students might have been influenced to vote for an applicant without regard for the quality of the plan, based solely on the recommendation of the teacher.</p>
<p><b>Vote Center Concerns</b></p>	<p><i>Perceived Advantage/Disadvantage.</i> At least one external applicant team took significant issue with the location of its voting center and complained several times to the District and the LWVLA that having the vote take place at Monroe High School posed a significant disadvantage to their application.</p> <p><i>Accessibility for the Disabled.</i> Carver Middle School and Monroe High School were the only two sites reported with no accommodations for the disabled. There were no report of any disabled person being denied an opportunity to vote.<sup>11</sup></p> <p><i>Voter Confidentiality and Ballot Box.</i> At 3 sites, observers reported that the secrecy of the ballot was not protected and/or the ballot box itself was not easily visible or properly secured.<sup>12</sup></p>

<sup>10</sup> Busing Incidents: PSC5@BETHUNE 1/22; PSC2@CLAY 1/22; PSC10@MONROE 1/25

<sup>11</sup> PSC4@CARVER 1/20; PSC10@MONROE 1/25

<sup>12</sup> PSC4@CARVER 1/20-BALLOT BOX NOT EASILY VISIBLE; PSC10@MONROE 1/25, 1/29- BALLOT BOX NOT EASILY VISIBLE, SECRECY NOT PROTECTED; PSC13@IRVING 1/29-SECRECY NOT PROTECTED

## D. Exit Surveys

Across all 13 voting centers, 1,397 ballots were cast by LAUSD rostered parents. There was an estimated 198,938<sup>13</sup> of parents eligible to vote in this category. FIS collected 343 surveys across all 13 voting centers. Surveys were anonymous and conducted as voters exited the voting center. Of the 343 total surveys, 175 were conducted in Spanish and 168 were conducted in English. Below you will find a chart comparing the results from this year to those from PSC 1.0.

***How did you find out about the Public School Choice Advisory Vote? (Mark all that apply)***

	<u>TV/Radio</u>	<u>The School</u>	<u>My Child's Teacher</u>	<u>Community Organization</u>	<u>My Child</u>	<u>Family/Friend</u>
2010	2%	87%	N/A	5%	N/A	13%
2011	1%	69%	10%	13%	22%	9%

***How did you learn about the school plans presented? (Mark all that apply)***

	<u>Attended School Meeting</u>	<u>Child's Teacher</u>	<u>Family/Friend</u>	<u>LWVLA Ed Center</u>	<u>Didn't Know Anything</u>	<u>Website</u>
2010	70%	N/A	19%	N/A	12%	6%
2011	64%	18%	20%	10%	4%	N/A

***This school year, have you attended a meeting with your child's teacher or counselor?***

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2010	80%	20%
2011	81%	18%

***This school year, have you attended a school committee meeting where parents help make decisions about the school?  
(Title 1, School Site Council, Bilingual Advisory Committee)***

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2010	52%	48%
2011	68%	32%

<sup>13</sup> Number based on information provided by the LAUSD Data and Accountability Office

***Does your child's school offer training and workshops on how you can help your child learn?***

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2010 <sup>14</sup>	N/A	N/A
2011	90.3%	9.7%

***Do you feel welcomed at your child's school?***

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2010 <sup>15</sup>	N/A	N/A
2011	96.71%	3.29%

### III. Overall Observations

Despite implementing changes in PSC Advisory Vote 2.0 to improve the credibility and validity of the process, significant limitations make it apparent that a new mechanism to capture parent voices as part of the Public School Choice process is necessary. Based on involvement in the development and implementation of the advisory vote, community and staff observations, assessment of parent complaints, and survey results, FIS believes the following key obstacles make the current process ineffective:

- Impacted schools are not welcoming of Public School Choice as a reform strategy. Most school staff, along with their bargaining units, view the PSC strategy as a hostile takeover and are mobilizing their resources to oppose any proposal from external teams. However, at the same time, staff at the impacted schools is trusted by parents and community members to receive objective information about the process and about the school proposals, which creates a significant conflict of interest. Surveys reveal that parents are relying on the school/staff to get information about the process - 78% and about the school plans - 82%.
- Outreach to parents within the impacted PSC communities is narrowly focused on rallying existing supporters - 68 % of the surveyed parents indicated that they had attended a school committee meeting where parents help make decision about the school. Thus, FIS concludes that a majority of parents participating in the advisory vote are already in relationship with the school. Furthermore, efforts to engage the larger parent demographic from the impacted schools, or other eligible parents from other LAUSD schools, private/parochial schools within the PSC community, appears to be non-existent. Data provided by the LWVLA show a tremendously low turn-out across all voter categories.

<sup>14</sup> Not asked in PSC 1.0

<sup>15</sup> Not asked in PSC 1.0

Furthermore, parent education continues to be one-sided as internal applicant teams appear to have an inherent advantage in accessing parents and students.

- Parents cannot be expected to learn and comprehend complex information within a limited time-frame. There are insufficient opportunities for parents to learn and comprehend complex information regarding school performance and school plans in order to make an informed decision. Although there was an increase in the number of community meetings at each of the impacted schools, these sessions are still insufficient and not easily accessible to working parents.
- Protocols for “community” and “other parent” voter categories produce unreliable results as there are no mechanisms to verify voter eligibility at the site. In addition, in both PSC 1.0 and 2.0, applicant teams abused the vague nature of the categories to stack the vote with their supporters.
- Electioneering continues to be a significant problem despite efforts by the LAUSD and the LWVLA to thwart such activities. Please refer to page 4 for a list of documented incidents as well the LWVLA report.

## IV. Recommendations

In October 2010, FIS issued a letter to LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines, co-signed by the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamerica (COFEM), Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and National Council of La Raza (NCLR), recommending that “greater emphasis should be placed on how to collect reliable feedback from a broader segment of the impacted stakeholders rather than on designing an election-style process that faces significant implementation challenges.”

It is now clear to FIS that the election-style process remains flawed. In addition, there is great concern that with the increased number of impacted schools in PSC 3.0 and in light of limited resources available the challenges faced in PSC 1.0 and PSC 2.0 will only be exacerbated.

**Therefore, the most significant recommendation submitted by FIS is to replace the advisory vote with strategies that effectively engage parents in learning about school performance, in voicing their concerns and needs, and in providing feedback to the applicant teams.**



Additional recommendations are submitted with that goal in mind:

- ***Parent Education***

The District should make available parent-friendly tools that explain key data through colorful and descriptive graphics, illustrating the gaps in student performance on key indicators. All applicant teams, teachers, principals, and parent center staff should receive training with a variety of tools so all parties receive consistent and reliable information about their school's performance over time. In addition, the district should explore other ways, such as surveys and focus groups, to solicit input from parents to inform the school plans.

- ***Accountability***

The District should incorporate within its current accountability system, a process that guides and monitors school and local district staff to implement the overall PSC process with integrity and fidelity, welcoming all parties, and enabling parents to participate in the process without fear or intimidation. The District should require that local district staff and principals establish a set goal for engaging a minimum number of parents in learning opportunities so they, in turn, can provide informed input to applicant teams.

- ***Community Partnerships***

The District should continue to engage with the non-profit community to ensure Public School Choice is credible with parents and with the public. In particular, the District should actively pursue partnerships with various media outlets to develop a public information campaign designed to inform parents and the community at large about the objectives of the Public School Choice process.

- ***Parent Voice***

The District should survey parents within these school communities to (a) determine how they participated in the Public School Choice process (engaged in learning opportunities workshops, as members of an applicant team, attended team presentations to provide feedback) and (b) to get feedback about their preference on the competing school design plans. The District should also enlist parents as members of applicant teams and require them to report how the school plan incorporates and honors parent voice.



FIS remains committed to the Public School Choice Resolutions as a viable and powerful school transformation strategy. FIS recognizes the huge potential it offers in bringing innovation and increased levels of student achievement to struggling schools. The recommendation to eliminate the advisory vote comes from understanding that the problems inherent in the process are too many and too large for a quick fix. FIS knows that schools cannot succeed without profound parental involvement in their children's education. Everyone wins when parents are involved, especially schools. So FIS encourages LAUSD, and especially the hard working teachers whose mission it is to facilitate learning at higher levels, to strive to engage parents in ways that genuinely values their familial assets, and that cultivates these to support learning at home and at school.

## Contact

For additional information about the report, please contact:

Kaci Y. Patterson, MBA  
Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy  
Families In Schools  
[kpatterson@familiesinschools.org](mailto:kpatterson@familiesinschools.org)  
213-210-3917

Oscar E. Cruz  
Vice President  
Families In Schools  
[ocruz@familiesinschools.org](mailto:ocruz@familiesinschools.org)  
213-210-3912