



YOLIE FLORES
Board Member

Written Testimony to the Little Hoover Commission, State of California
February 25, 2010

What led me to introduce the Public School Choice Resolution; Why was it necessary?

The Public School Choice resolution stemmed from 1) my growing frustration at the seemingly casual approach to what should be a "911" emergency response to our educational crisis in Los Angeles; 2) my observation that there was simply no lever in place to motivate anyone to do better; and 3) my own personal commitment to give parents and students choices so that they are not held hostage to failing schools.

Over a two-year period, from the moment I was elected to the Board, I made several attempts to elevate a sense of urgency (raising consistently the concern that only 30% of our third grades can read at grade level, the persistent low achievement of English Learners, and the 50% drop out rate), to introduce proven ideas (e.g. small schools), and to forge important but controversial conversations about changing the rules that seem to get in the way of ensuring high quality education for every student (seniority, tenure, merit pay, and evaluation).

My experience is that there seemed to be resistance to all of these issues for a multitude of reasons. And yet, I could see that – if we really wanted to – we could transform our schools to yield significantly better outcomes. We could go to scale on several successful models already in our district (pilots, small schools, etc). But these in-district reform efforts were restricted by UTLA. I knew a pressure lever was needed.

That lever became choice and competition.

What are the goals of the resolution?

- To promote a sense of urgency and accelerate change
- To create a space and energy for innovative and creative ideas to improve academic achievement from within
- To engage parents and community – give them a voice
- To offer choices; build a portfolio of schools within LAUSD
- To increase accountability

How will this effort replicate successful public school choice models in Los Angeles?

- All schools – in particular those in Program Improvement – are now on notice that they may be next, which creates the pressure for change/urgency
- Plans will be selected based on merit and quality
- All selected plans will be monitored regularly; those not performing will be revoked
- Providing students choice increases students' level of commitment to do well
- More parents engaged
- Public will for reform strengthened

As the district has begun to implement the resolution, what challenges still need to be overcome?

The greatest challenge I see is the sustainability of this effort over time (changing superintendents and board members)

More immediately, challenges include:

- Union resistance
- Moving beyond “insiders” and “outsiders;” polarization; trust
- Being firm on accountability; needs to be real
- Robust community and parent engagement; requires more time and a greater amount of resources
- Public will to protect the “fight for reform”

Could this resolution be replicated in other urban school districts in California?

Absolutely. Leadership and courage are the essential ingredients. It could be done better; we have lessons learned to discuss and share.