

*On November 17, the Weingart Foundation joined the California Community Foundation and The California Endowment in sending out the following open letter. Addressed to leaders in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the United Teachers Los Angeles, and the Broad Foundation, the letter encourages dialogue and parent and community engagement regarding the Great Public Schools Now initiative, as well as the selection of the next LAUSD superintendent. As foundations that have long invested in improving education for underserved communities, we offer ourselves as neutral conveners in these important discussions, which ultimately must strive toward a shared vision for the future public education.*

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Attn:  
LAUSD Board of Education  
LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines  
United Teachers Los Angeles President Alex Caputo-Pearl  
Broad Foundation Founder Eli Broad

November 17, 2015

Dear colleagues,

Like all parents, we raised our children with the hope that they'd enjoy all of life's possibilities. We knew that a high quality education was the centerpiece to the opportunity to achieve their goals and contribute to society. As leaders of Los Angeles-based charitable foundations, we want to ensure strong educational options and opportunities for engagement for all of today's parents — especially those who struggle economically here in our imperfect paradise.

The California Community Foundation, the California Endowment and Weingart Foundation have invested in efforts to educate and inform parents and to build their leadership skills to become stronger advocates for their children and communities. In some cases, we have supported programs and projects related to the LAUSD, while in other instances we have supported the development of charter schools, pilot schools and partnership schools. Our priority has and will always be to ensure poor and vulnerable communities have access to high quality educational options and are informed about what makes for a good school.

Recently, the Broad Foundation released a provocative proposal to significantly increase charter schools in communities that have high concentrations of underperforming schools. In the midst of the controversy surrounding this proposal, we must remember that our priorities are families and children. Superintendent Cortines has consistently reminded us that the schools belong to the community, but it takes community, with parents at the forefront, to make the schools great.

If the goal of the Broad initiative is to increase the number of high performing school seats (whether charter, magnet, partnership, etc.) in communities that have shown demand for them,

then it should receive thoughtful consideration. But this goal should not come at the expense of the majority of students who will remain in district schools. As part of the analysis of the Broad proposal, careful consideration should also be given to the effect of such alternative school expansion on the LAUSD. School initiatives in other cities have demonstrated that the intended reforms often fall short if they are done to communities rather than with communities.

In the short term, civil dialogue among all parties — and full parental and community engagement — would seem to be the better course of action for Los Angeles. After all, the education challenges in L.A. are deeply rooted and not singularly caused. Issues of race, immigration, poverty and equity — and their respective roles as barriers to educational success for children of color — must be confronted and not avoided.

At this point, our foundations are not interested in taking sides on the Broad initiative; rather, we are bullish on the matter of full and robust participation of community, parental and youth engagement on key, critical questions – such as the Broad Charter School proposal, and the desirable attributes of a soon-to-be-hired school superintendent.

What we are willing to do is offer ourselves as neutral conveners interested in doing what is best for all of our parents and children. We must engage parents and community members and help them preserve their opportunity to secure high quality education for their children. L.A.'s vibrant future depends on it. We are open to what form our role might take, and willing to listen to constructive input from you.

The goal of achieving the highest quality public education system for our young people is well within our reach. But the first order of business is rallying the willingness to engage one another, listen with intent and agree upon a shared vision of the future of public education.

Sincerely,

**Fred Ali**  
President & CEO  
Weingart Foundation

**Antonia Hernández**  
President & CEO  
California Community Foundation

**Robert K. Ross**  
President & CEO  
California Endowment