

**Perceptions of the Parent Curriculum Project's
Program Goals and Effectiveness in the
Lynwood Unified School District**

Camille Wilson Cooper

Occasional Report #2

Outreach Evaluation

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Graduate School of Education & Information Studies
UCLA

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Summary and Key Issues for Consideration

Perceptions of the Parent Curriculum Project's Program Goals and Effectiveness in the Lynwood Unified School District

- This report discusses the findings of an evaluation of the Parent Curriculum Project (PCP) in Lynwood Unified School District (LUSD). The PCP is a parent education program sponsored by the Center X research organization that is affiliated with UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. (See p. 5)
- Qualitative case study methods, involving interviews and observations were used to obtain the evaluation's data. (See pp.7-8)
- UCLA staff, PCP parents, principals, and the LUSD's superintendent indicated that they agree that the Parent Curriculum Project in Lynwood Unified School District is pursuing the worthy goal of empowering parents through curriculum-based education and leadership development. It is evident from our data, however, that these stakeholders are far from reaching consensus about how to accomplish the program's goals and what amount of resources are needed to do so. (See pp. 8-10)
 - *Can stakeholders gain from clarifying how they think parents should be empowered in the district?*
- Program coordinators and parent participants have varied opinions about what type of curriculum content best suits parents needs. As a result, the structure and content of the PCP classes vary across the different program sites. (See pp. 10-13)
 - *To what extent should program coordinators and parent participants agree about the program's curricular focus? Are there ways these two groups can have a productive dialogue about this issue?*
 - *Would the program be enhanced if coordinators could strike a balance between site-based autonomy and overall program consistency?*
- Parent participants engage in a variety of valuable non-instructional activities aside from the curriculum-based classes they attend. These activities help prepare parents to become school and community leaders. Some parents also become leaders within PCP, and data show parent leadership is critical to sustaining the program. (See pp. 13-16, 28)
- Parents, UCLA staff, principals and district officials pointed to four major ways that the Parent Curriculum Project has enhanced the knowledge and leadership skills of parent participants and contributed to the improvement of LUSD schools. They also suggested ways the program can improve. (See pp. 17-19)
- Racial and other interpersonal tensions are prevalent among the PCP parent leaders. Data indicate that even if all parties can strengthen their organizational skills and agree upon the PCP's curricular

focus, these tensions may end up undermining the program's success. (See pp. 19-22)

- How can the parent leaders confront and resolve their conflicts?

- Would it be advantageous for UCLA's School-University Partnership staff to encourage the parents to openly examine and discuss race and diversity matters and facilitate such discussions?

- The absence of policies and procedures that guide the PCP's implementation in LUSD appear to hinder the program's organization. (See pp. 22-25)
 - Would PCP leaders and parent participants benefit from drafting policies that set standards regarding program coordination, outline how PCP parent leaders should be selected and trained, and specify spending limits?*
- UCLA and Lynwood Unified School District officials have yet to reach an amicable understanding regarding their long-term, administrative and funding responsibilities to the PCP. Data suggest that LUSD will have to assume a primary funding role in the future, yet district officials indicate that they are not prepared to fund the program at the same level as UCLA has in the past. This may necessitate scaling down the PCP in future years. (See pp. 25-31)
 - If this proves to be the case, are there ways that UCLA and LUSD officials can help parents locate and secure external resources?*
 - Would parents be interested in developing and using grantwriting knowledge to not only sustain the PCP, but also bring additional educational resources and programs to the district?*
- Data from the LUSD principals and superintendents imply that they want PCP graduates to volunteer in schools and help district personnel achieve their goals. Parents and UCLA staff made a similar point, yet went further in stressing a belief that parents are entitled to play a significant role in setting the district's agenda and gain power to improve the school system in ways *they* think most benefit their families and all students. (See pp. 28-31)
 - Are there ways to ensure that all stakeholders have a forum to express their opinions about this matter and a vehicle to collaborate and fairly settle disputes?*
- All accounts reveal that Lynwood's parent community, LUSD, and UCLA each have vested interests in ensuring the longevity of the Parent Curriculum Project. (See pp. 31-32)
 - What steps can the three groups take to better solidify a three-way partnership among them?*

- Have program developments occurred since this evaluation was conducted that might alter the findings?

Perceptions of the Parent Curriculum Project's Program Goals and Effectiveness in the Lynwood Unified School District

Introduction

The Parent Curriculum Project is a curriculum-based parent education program that strives to inform urban school parents about curriculum content, instruction, subject matter frameworks, academic standards, and assessment. The Parent Curriculum Project is sponsored by UCLA's Center X, an educational outreach organization housed in UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies that is designed to promote the intersection of educational research and practice.¹

Written literature about the Parent Curriculum Project found both in PCP handouts and on the Center X website outline several other primary program goals.² In addition to offering parents curriculum-based instruction, PCP attempts to model a constructivist classroom that is student-centered where parents use self-assessment techniques. It further aims to inform parents about the impact of school reform in their district, foster positive teacher-parent interaction, and encourage them to become school and community leaders whereby they advocate for all children not just their own. PCP is designed to implement these tasks and ultimately "empower" parents, as well as exemplify a parent education program that other schools and districts will want to model.

PCP partnerships exist between UCLA and the Los Angeles Unified School District, Inglewood Unified School District, and Lynwood Unified School District. This report focuses particularly on how program stakeholders perceive the Parent Curriculum Project's goals and effectiveness in the Lynwood Unified School District (LUSD). The first section of this report overviews the Parent Curriculum Project in Lynwood Unified School District, highlighting the PCP's

¹ Originally the UCLA Outreach Evaluation Team was directed towards assessing parent education programs in LUSD that were sponsored by both Center X and the Career-based Outreach Program (CBOP). We learned, however, that contrary to earlier expectations, CBOP does not operate such a program. Instead, it focuses solely on helping prepare high school students in local districts attend college. According to CBOP staff, parents of the students they serve are invited to orientations and informational meetings so that they can gain a better awareness of what their children are learning in the program. They, however, do not participate in a separate program component that is specifically geared towards them like the parents participating in the Parent Curriculum Project.

structure. It also offers information regarding the program's participating parents and schools. The second section outlines the objectives and methods of the evaluation, and the third section details the evaluation's findings.

I. Overview of the Parent Curriculum Project in Lynwood Unified School District

LUSD serves a community that mainly consists of low-income and working class Latino and African American residents. It is classified as a "Title I district" because of the high rate of poverty among its students' families and its large population of English language learners. Thus, LUSD receives a significant amount of federal categorical funds. The district is also known to have low achievement scores. The district's Parent Curriculum Project began during the 1998-99 school year, and the program's structure is evolving. PCP administrators and participants are also working to ensure the program's longevity, we discuss these developments below.

Program structure

Participating parents in Lynwood Unified School District enroll in a 13-week institute, which includes classes that are conducted two days a week. The institutes take place at LUSD schools, and LUSD schoolteachers, or parent graduates of former PCP institutes, teach the classes. The PCP provides participants free breakfast, lunch, and childcare services. The program also pays them a \$150 stipend upon completion. In addition to parent education classes, the PCP program sponsors a variety of other activities for parent participants throughout the school year, such as professional development workshops and parent conferences. PCP parents are further encouraged to discuss aspects of their experiences with the program in an on-line journal that is posted on Center X's website.

The LUSD schools that implement the Parent Curriculum Project vary per each 13-week term. Furthermore, while UCLA's PCP Co-Director Angela Hasan oversees the entire PCP program in Lynwood Unified School District, each participating school has its own parent director and parent site coordinator who implement the program at their site. These parent leaders report to Hasan.

² The Center X Website link is <http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/>.

The PCP institutes are site-based, therefore, the parent director and site coordinator of each are able to structure classes, schedule guest speakers, and plan activities according to the needs and desires of their school community and the parents involved. This is done with the approval of Hasan and each school's principal.

At the end of each 13-week session, parent participants present *action plans* that they and their peers develop throughout the institute. These plans specify what parents see as the key problems that hinder LUSD schools and explain their strategies to help solve them. The action plans are often presented at the parents' graduation ceremony, where they also receive certificates and commendations from PCP directors, school personnel, district officials, and community leaders. The parent graduates are then eligible to serve as parent directors or site coordinators of their own institute if they choose, and all are encouraged to assume leadership positions as school and district volunteers.

Participating parents and schools

Participants of the Parent Curriculum Project in LUSD overwhelmingly consist of Latina mothers. This in part reflects the fact that approximately 80% of LUSD's student population is Latino, most of the remaining 20% is African American, though the district does have small populations of Vietnamese, Filipinos, and White students. We estimate, however, that Latina mothers comprised over 90% of the parent participant population in the PCP institutes that were held during the period of our data collection. Out of approximately 236 participants, about 12 Latino fathers and six African American mothers were involved in the program. PCP leaders' efforts to recruit non-Latino parents are discussed in depth in later sections of this report.

Six of LUSD's twelve traditional K-12 schools have implemented at least one Parent Curriculum Institute since the program began in the 1998-99 school year. This includes four elementary schools, one of the district's two middle schools, and the district's only high school. Five institutes were held at three different schools during our data collection period. Will Rogers

Elementary School and Lindbergh Elementary School each had one, and Lynwood High School held three institutes. One was held during the day, one in the evening, and one on Saturdays. PCP Co-Director Angela Hasan explained that the program planned to implement three other institutes at three schools during the course of the 2000-01 school year, but that had not happened as of March 2001.

II. Evaluation objectives and methods

Research associates on the UCLA Outreach Evaluation Team conducted the LUSD Parent Curriculum Project evaluation in the fall of 2000 and winter of 2001. The evaluation is part of the team's efforts to assess various aspects of UCLA's educational outreach initiatives.

Evaluators of the LUSD Parent Curriculum Project set out to understand how different stakeholders involved with the parent education program perceive its goals and effectiveness. To do so, program coordinators, directors, and participants were interviewed along with LUSD's superintendent and the principals of schools where the Parent Curriculum Project was implemented during the fall of 2000 and winter of 2001. Interviewees were asked to discuss their involvement in the PCP, their general impression of the program, including the aspects of the program they most valued, what they think should be improved, and their perceptions about the program's impact. Interviewees' comments related to wide array of issues, including the PCP's administration, organization, funding, curriculum content, and recruitment tactics. In addition, interviewees explained their views about UCLA's and Lynwood Unified School District's role in the Parent Curriculum Project.

Aside from interview data, information from observations also informs this evaluation. Evaluators observed several Parent Curriculum Project classes, workshops, graduation ceremonies, and a meeting of program coordinators and directors. Observation data, which includes both descriptive and substantive information, was obtained in order to gain an impression of whether the content of PCP events and interaction among program leaders and participants are consistent with the program's

purpose and goals described above. In total, the LUSD Parent Curriculum Project evaluation is based on data from 20 interviews and over 25 hours of observation. (See the Appendix for a full list of collected data.)

III. Findings

The findings discussed in this section relate to the most salient themes evident in the UCLA Outreach Evaluation Team's interview and observation data.

Agreement about program goals

Disagreement about program goals can often serve as a barrier to effective program implementation. Thus, we asked each interviewee to describe their perception of the Parent Curriculum Projects' key objectives to determine whether their views aligned with the goals specified in the written literature about the PCP. Respondents articulated their opinions differently, and stressed some functions of the program over others, yet overall, interviewees agreed that PCP is designed to empower parents through offering them curriculum-based learning and information on "navigating their child through the system."

According to interviewees, this empowerment comes, in part, through parents increasing their involvement in school and district affairs and asserting their voice. Toni Protti, the former Director of the UCLA/Lynwood Partnership, explained that the PCP strives to "get parents to understand what these schools should be doing to educate their kids." She further attested that all LUSD parents should have access to what they desire, and "gain a voice" for their children because "if they don't know what's going on, they don't know what to fight for." Angela Hasan, Co-Director of the PCP, concurred that this type of parent knowledge comes from parents understanding "what good teaching and learning looks like," which is what the parent institutes try to demonstrate.

Others asserted that the PCP tries to empower parents by helping them learn how to communicate effectively with school personnel, understand their parental rights, and work to bring

about school improvement. Thus, parents are encouraged to hold schools accountable for quality learning and also contribute to the district's general reform efforts. To do so, parent directors and principals particularly stressed that parents must feel more comfortable visiting school campuses and less intimidated by school personnel. In this regard, one parent director stated, "The main goal for me is bringing the parents into the school, working with the school, and giving them a sense of belonging, like they're not an outsider, so they can walk into the school at anytime."

Despite overall agreement about what the PCP goals are and should be, data reveal that UCLA staff, parent leaders, and participants vary in their beliefs about how the program's empowerment goals should be accomplished. While most said that PCP's curriculum-based focus is essential, data show that UCLA staff and parents hold different opinions about whether this focus should incorporate non-traditional subject matter. Thus, as Hasan asserts, "the goals haven't changed but expanded," a point we explore below in our discussion of PCP's curriculum content.

Curriculum issues & Parent activities

It is clear from our observations that the Parent Curriculum Project educates parents in multiple ways. Aside from receiving classroom instruction throughout the 13-week institutes, parents learn to assume advocacy and leadership roles in LUSD through developing their action plans. Parents also participate in educational events outside of the classroom, and many go on to coordinate or facilitate institutes after they complete their coursework. We will describe how parents engage in each of these learning methods, but our attention turns first to matters regarding PCP's curriculum content and instruction.

The debate over PCP's curriculum focus. The Parent Curriculum Project was designed to offer parents curriculum instruction that relates to the content areas that their children learn about in school, such as math, social studies, and English. Thus, instructors cover these areas during the majority of the 13 weeks that parents participate in the PCP classes. The parent participants we interviewed contended

that learning about these traditional curriculum topics is valuable. Several parents explained that it helps them assist their kids with their homework and better gauge if their children's teachers are effective. At the same time, some parents explained their desire to expand the content of the classes in order to address topics like sex education and domestic violence prevention. Since the institutes are site-based, some PCP leaders have chosen to incorporate these types of classes, along with things like CPR training, while others have not.

Those who wish to maintain a traditional curriculum focus explained that they do not understand how enlarging the focus relates to improving schools. As one site coordinator stated in reference to adding a domestic violence prevention workshop, "I don't see that as being a part of the school issues...I think school issues should stay school issues and things of that nature should be community oriented...because they have all kinds of hotlines." Similarly, a parent director for an institute at another site asserted that incorporating non-traditional subjects in the PCP curriculum is getting the program "off-target." Hasan stressed that she prefers the program's traditional curriculum content but is sympathetic towards the parents who are asking for change. She said, "It's (the PCP) evolving because it's a safe space for them."

Indeed, several parents we interviewed who favor adding alternative classes are Latino immigrants with elementary-level education who asserted that the PCP has offered them a forum to explore personal and controversial issues that they feel uncomfortable discussing in their communities and families. They also said that gaining such exposure through PCP has helped them help their children.

For instance, a group of fathers discussed their need to better communicate with their sons in order to persuade them to improve their behavior at home and at school. One father stressed his belief that learning more about sex education through PCP would help him do this. Likewise, a mother participating in a different institute explained, "As parents we don't talk about sex openly. We need a

more open communication.”

A couple of other Latinas, who are stay-at-home mothers, contended that participating in PCP is enjoyable for them not only because it allows them to help improve their children’s learning, but also because it provides them an opportunity to put their domestic responsibilities on hold and engage in an environment where they feel free to express themselves. One mother referred to this as, “leaving the ‘little box’.” Others reiterated the point that the PCP has indeed become a safe space for women who are in abusive relationships to seek help for themselves and their children.

Hasan asserted similar conclusions when she reflected on what she views as parents’ motivation for expanding the PCP curricular focus. She explained that, “Parents see schooling on a more holistic level.” Hence, they perceive the quality of family life as an essential determinant of their children’s academic performance and have explained to her that living in an unhealthy home environment hinders their capacity to be involved in schools. Hasan further stated, in regard to the PCP’s focus, “When I started I saw it as more segmented, ...I’m learning from what they feel is important.”

UCLA staff and PCP parent leaders have not planned any activities geared towards trying to resolve the curriculum focus issue at this point. So for now, parent directors and site coordinators still have some leeway to determine their institutes’ course content. Furthermore, in addition to some parents wanting such things as domestic violence prevention and sex education courses, several agree that adding English-learning and computer classes, along with informational sessions about special education, is needed. We also observed that institute classes varied in whether they were taught in English and translated into Spanish for the mostly Latino parent audience, or taught in Spanish and translated into English if a few African American parents were present. This seemed to differ based on the preference of the institute’s parent director and site coordinator. For instance, one parent director emphasized her opinion that all information should be presented to the parents in English in order to

help encourage them to learn the language.

Given the flexibility that parent leaders have to structure their institute according to what they perceive as their sites' and participants' needs it is likely that different PCP institutes will continue to pursue separate avenues to achieve the program's empowerment goals. UCLA staff, parent leaders, and a principal commented that they like the site-based focus of each institute and it inspires parents to feel a deeper sense of school ownership. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the inconsistency that has resulted from parent directors' autonomy and differing opinions about the program's focus will cause a harmful riff among PCP participants and leaders.

Valuable non-instructional parent activities. Curriculum instruction seems to offer PCP parents a foundation for understanding more about their children's schooling and inspire some to improve their life circumstances. Activities like developing school action plans and coordinating parent institutes, on the other hand, align with the program's objective to encourage parents to become school-community leaders.

We had the opportunity to observe parents presenting their action plans during PCP classes and graduations. At one of the institutes held at Lynwood High School, parents were divided into approximately seven groups of five. Each group had created an action plan that addressed concerns relating to a certain theme, like safety or teacher-student relations. These parents, like those at PCP institutes held on other campuses, suggested that LUSD educators and district officials need to do more to prevent gang violence, serve fresh and healthy food in the cafeteria, supply students with enough books, keep the bathrooms cleaner, etc.

Parents also discussed how they could help with most of these tasks. For instance, in regard to overcrowding, one Lynwood High School group said they would volunteer to help verify parent addresses to prevent non-Lynwood residents from enrolling in LUSD schools. At Lindbergh Elementary School, parents expressed concern about traffic congestion and accidents occurring after

school. They volunteered to set up cones to make pathways for students and serve as crossing guards to prevent the students from being harmed.

Each of the principals we interviewed said they appreciated the Parent Curriculum Project producing a larger volunteer pool and commented on how they would like parents to become more involved at their site. The principal of Lindbergh Elementary School stated that she would like parents to assist teachers with classroom instruction. The principal of Will Rogers Elementary School said he needs parents to serve as “an active parent patrol,” monitoring school grounds to enforce trespassing policies. Lynwood High School’s principal said he hopes to see PCP graduates participate in the school’s external evaluation and WASC accreditation committees.

Across the board, principals, UCLA staff, and parents stressed the need for PCP participants and graduates to commit to helping LUSD schools on a long-term basis. Superintendent Harold Cebrun further asserted that parents have to determine for themselves how to “utilize their education.” In doing so, he suggested they can choose to be a “group of complainers or problem-solvers.” The superintendent argued that, in the past, district parents have been “stiffs” because they were not given the chance to offer input and assert their voice. He, however, said the district “can’t have that.” Superintendent Cebrun added that he would like to see PCP parents serve on district-wide committees such as the Superintendent Advisory Board or the District Advisory Council.

As of early March, Hasan explained that the PCP parents had indeed taken greater steps to assert their voice in the district. They formed a *parent council* that will serve as an advocacy group and negotiating body within the district. And, LUSD offered funding for a few PCP parent leaders to participate in decision-making and conflict resolution workshops sponsored by the district. Center X staff said they would find ways to provide parents with additional professional development support so they can effectively collaborate with district officials as well. Hasan further commented that the parents were discussing ways to revamp the PCP model so it can serve the entire Lynwood Unified

School District, as opposed to a few LUSD schools. Parents plan to draft a proposal for the expansion that includes a budget, and eventually submit it to the Superintendent and Board of Education for approval.

Contributions of parent leaders. Parent directors and site coordinators of the each Parent Curriculum Project institute exemplify the leadership goals of the program since they too are PCP graduates. Both the parent director and site coordinator receive a \$2,000 stipend for their work. The parent directors are responsible for planning the content and schedule of each institute. They find teachers to instruct classes, gather the necessary materials for parent participants, and oversee implementation at their site. The site coordinator works with the parent director and handles logistical details like processing attendance paperwork and arranging for catering and child care services. We observed parents in both roles being very attentive to parent participants during classes. They often assisted parents with activities, helped with English-Spanish translation, and served in a troubleshooting capacity. In addition, some of the directors and coordinators, along with other PCP graduates, teach some of the institute's classes.

Parent participants, UCLA staff, and principals repeatedly characterized parent directors and site coordinators as being very dedicated to the PCP and willing to put forth a great deal of time, energy, and for some, their own limited funds to help maintain the program. These people commonly referred to the parent leaders as “wonderful” or “great.” Several of the directors and coordinators are long-time district volunteers who were active in LUSD before they became involved in the Parent Curriculum Project. Others are much less experienced.

While most of the PCP leaders we interviewed indicated their intent to remain actively involved in helping to organize the program, parent participants also expressed an interest in assuming leadership roles after completing their institute. To date, the PCP leadership has not established policies and procedures that specify how directors and coordinators will be recruited, selected, and

trained. This may have already contributed to tension among a few of the parent leaders who feel some parents have received more leadership opportunities than others. One site coordinator explained that she was not trained for her position and further contended:

I think there needs to be training for parents who want to be site coordinators or directors. You can't just hop up because you completed a class. You get the site coordinator's position and all of a sudden after that, 'Oh I'm becoming a director.' You can't become a director of a school district like that. You have to have qualifications right? Some type of experience, some type of something to just be a director and it takes more than just one class.

Another parent leader also said that current parent directors should assist in preparing others for the chance to assume a leadership role. She stated, "some are leaders, some are not, and it's up to us, the parent directors, to stay with parents until they're ready to lead."

Issues pertaining to parent leadership, training, and selection will warrant further attention in the future. For now though, the PCPs existing cadre of parent leaders may be one of the program's most important assets given their commitment to ensuring that the program continues to benefit other parents and LUSD as a whole. Hasan, in fact, explained that she plans to train a few parents to become spokespersons for the Parent Curriculum Project. This will enable them to present at local conferences and district meetings in order to inform other educational agencies and districts about the program.

Beliefs about program effectiveness

The parent leaders' strong commitment to the Parent Curriculum Project reflects the fact that they and almost everyone we interviewed maintained that the program has been very effective, despite some opposing views about its curriculum and organization, which we discussed above and will revisit in later sections of the report. Many agreed with one parent participant who remarked that the PCP "has helped us grow and learn more about our kid's system."

Indeed most interviewees pinpointed four major ways in which the program has impacted parents and LUSD schools. First, is the program's success in providing new sources of knowledge to

participants that enable them to help their children achieve academically. A parent director explained:

I was saying before that being in the PTA for four years, we haven't been able to do what this program is doing for the school and for the parents. It's been able to expand opportunities for parents to learn English, to learn a little bit of reading, a little bit of math and history. I think it really empowers them to feel better about themselves. I think each day they're opening up more and asking more questions, and getting help with the math and reading. They really want to learn and they really want to help, and there hasn't been anything else besides this that's been able to provide this for them.

Parents further stated that they have learned more about their parental rights, which is particularly important for those who are undocumented immigrants who entered the PCP classes unaware of how they could serve as advocates for their kids in LUSD. A parent director commented that many of these parents are less "afraid" to speak up for their kids as a result of what they have learned in the program.

The second type of impact that several interviewees discussed, including each of the principals, pertained to the PCP helping boost parent participants' confidence. They insisted that this has resulted in several parents wanting to go back to high school or onto college. For instance, the principal of Lindbergh Elementary School stated that the PCP "enhances their learning...now all these women want to go to school." She added that, "It gives them self-esteem...they can really help their children now, and it gives them a healthy respect for education. They can say to themselves, 'I'm knowledgeable, I'm worthy.'"

We also observed the participants beaming with pride and excitement because of their involvement in the PCP. This was particularly evident at the graduation ceremonies where they were surrounded by spouses, relatives, friends, and their children. Several mothers' eyes appeared to twinkle with joy as they marched into the room with bright smiles, passing their families to step onto a stage and receive a completion certificate. A few participants also wept.

Third, as we mentioned earlier, several interviewees characterized the Parent Curriculum

Project as offering participants a “safe space” to convene. Others stressed that the program has provided them support services and a valuable social network. In this regard, one participating mother asserted:

I like the program, and I wish that all the parents could take advantage of it. I think it's educational and we get time to socialize sometimes. And sometimes our parents need to do that -- get away from work and home, and our children sometimes (*she laughs*). It's great. I love the fact that you can bring your child to the day care here ...I think that's very important. I think some of our parents don't have a babysitter and this is the sole reason why we don't go out there to work or to take school classes and improve ourselves because we don't have someone to take care of our kids. It provides us a babysitter, it provides us breakfast and lunch. I think it's great, very good.

The fourth type of impact that interviewees commonly referred to is their perception that the program has groomed an enthusiastic body of parent volunteers. Lynwood Unified School District's superintendent stated that if 150 parents graduate from the PCP he perceives that as having “300 more hands” to help the district. He added, “I hope they see it the same way.”

Aside from asserting positive remarks about the Parent Curriculum Project, interviewees also suggested ways in which the program can improve. Principals and parent leaders specifically stressed that they need more facility space to hold institutes since the schools they are working in are already overcrowded. Several others recommended that the PCP program expand by offering parents longer classes and implementing more institutes at additional schools. Moreover, a principal expressed preference for wanting to be kept better informed about PCP activities and events.

Superintendent Cebrun suggested that parent leaders invite their school's principals and district administrators to visit the classes and talk to participants about ways they can best help improve LUSD. Similarly, a PCP site coordinator expressed concern about ensuring that parents stay active volunteers after completing the program. With regard to this, she questioned “where does it go from here?” Two parent participants further asked “what real power” were parents going to have in the district after graduating from the institutes. All of these interviewees' queries highlight their opinions

that more should be done to address parents' long-term contributions and benefits.

The remaining recommendations that interviewees offered pertain to improving the PCP's recruitment methods and ironing out several uncertainties surrounding the program's structure and budget. We discuss these matters in depth below.

Program participation & tensions surrounding race and recruitment

Widespread perceptions about the effectiveness of the Parent Curriculum Project appear to have contributed to its increased popularity in LUSD, particularly among Latina mothers. While this is a positive development, Hasan and several parent leaders have emphasized the need to attract African American and Asian parent participants as well. They have also questioned the effectiveness of their recruitment tactics and wondered why it has been especially difficult to attract more African American parents to the program.

We asked parent participants and leaders how they heard about the program and why they were interested in getting involved. Most explained that they found out about the program from a friend, neighbor, or relative who graduated from a previous PCP institute. They stated that the program appealed to them because they anticipated that it would help them better understand the school system, ensure their children's educational success, and experience personal growth. One mother said, "I wanted to learn about parents' rights and how to focus so that our kids can go to college... If I don't know anything, I can't help my daughter,.." In addition, a parent director proclaimed, "parents are amazed at the opportunity (to take the classes) because this is new for them."

UCLA staff, PCP parents, and principals speculated about why African American parents in the district have not responded to the Parent Curriculum Project with as much enthusiasm as Latino parents. Most attributed African Americans' low participation rates to racial tension, language differences, or parents' work schedules. An African American PCP leader suggested that, "A lot don't feel comfortable around Hispanics, they don't feel comfortable with people speaking (Spanish) and

they don't understand the language. Many times they feel they are talking about them.”

Furthermore, a Latina PCP parent leader stated:

Here we don't have any other than Latinos. And it's real sad because at this school we have another race (African Americans). But no matter how we invite them, we don't have them involved --one thing that I don't agree with because I don't see them working together with us, like they should .. (There is) so much argumentation about us being racist, but it's the other way! We invite them, we give them special invitations and it's like they don't listen. . . .It's true they always say they are working, but we have many we know they are not, but they don't get involved.

Overall, parent leaders and UCLA staff indicated their frustration and/or confusion about the lack of African American participation in the program. Though most did not assign blame, a few did associate the issue with the racial tension they claim is prevalent between African Americans and Latinos in the school district and broader Lynwood community. PCP parents and staff further discussed the need to heighten their efforts to recruit African American parents and others. Some suggested holding program orientations, at which prospective parents receive PCP applications, in the early morning or evening to accommodate parents working during the day. Yet, others noted that African American participation is still low at the institutes held in the evenings and on Saturdays.

Hasan and a few parent leaders stressed their commitment to promoting integration within the PCP. Hasan said that parents “know how to be empowered within separate groups but not together,” and that she wanted every PCP parent leader to assume responsibility for helping diversify their participant population. Before this is possible, however, parent leaders may first have to confront and resolve the racial tension that a few said exists within their own group.

We observed evidence of this tension in a meeting of parent leaders where an African American site coordinator accused a Latina parent director of discouraging African American parents to attend her institute. The Latina parent leader denied the allegations. During this exchange several other Latina women shifted or rolled their eyes and seemed to huff in frustration because of the site coordinator's remarks. Later, two parent leaders commented that such hostile exchanges are common

in their meetings, and one stated, “I’d like to see this group come together better.”

Indeed, promoting and implementing racial unity and representation within the Parent Curriculum Project remains a key challenge that if not confronted will likely weaken the program and undermine its goals. Furthermore, we suspect from our observations of and conversations with parent leaders that some non-race related, interpersonal conflicts exist between parent leaders that may need to be resolved as well.

Since the Parent Curriculum Project has given parents a safe space to address other personal issues, perhaps the UCLA staff can also encourage them to openly examine and discuss race and diversity matters. PCP Co-director Angela Hasan similarly suggested that Center X’s School-University Partnership team “think in terms of creating and sustaining those spaces for a parent to have this occur.” She further stated:

We talk about the race relationships between Latino and African American parents. We talk about that and we talk about the segregation and all of that. But the impact that has on children’s education -- I don’t know if we fully understand it and how that has to be part of an agenda of a partnership -- to continuously have these conversations going.

Promoting dialogue about race seems particularly appropriate since racial tension and racist beliefs relate to the educational inequities impacting LUSD students, and stand to impede school reform efforts. Moreover, once PCP leaders become more unified it is likely that they will be better positioned to develop and implement effective recruitment tactics geared towards diversifying PCP’s participating body. They will also be more prepared to assist diverse parent populations. Parent leaders may also want to consider striving to achieve more gender balance in addition to seeking increased racial representation.

Overall concerns about the PCP’s administration, organization & funding

Our discussion of the PCP parents’ mixed views regarding the programs’ curriculum focus, leadership selection, and racial tension all point to inconsistencies that may have arisen, in part, because the program lacks important policies and procedures. Several people we interviewed

supported this notion and contended that the Parent Curriculum Project should become better organized. In addition, UCLA staff, PCP parents, principals, and LUSD's superintendent all commented about the shifting administrative and funding responsibilities of UCLA and the district. Such changes appear to be impeding the program's ability to function effectively. We explore various aspects of the program's organization below, starting first with a discussion about the perceptions of UCLA's coordinating efforts. Then we describe how the relationship between UCLA and LUSD will likely determine the Parent Curriculum Project's future function in the district.

Requests for better organization among UCLA staff. Most of the people we interviewed complimented UCLA staff and remarked that they have done a "fine" job in administering the Parent Curriculum Project overall. For instance, one principal stated:

They (UCLA staff) are so positive about what they do and they're so professional about what they do, and they do it so well. I couldn't be happier. My contact with UCLA is like 100% professional. There are no amateurs.

Parent participants also indicated that they are very proud to be involved with a UCLA-sponsored program, and both parent leaders and participants remarked that they greatly appreciated the services UCLA staff have offered them. Interviewees who offered suggestions as to how UCLA could improve its role with the program all recommended that the staff communicate better and/or ensure that parent leaders receive needed resources in a timely manner so they can run the institutes well.

Though Angela Hasan oversees the functioning of the entire LUSD Parent Curriculum Project, another UCLA staff member assists her. In addition, a parent director serves as a UCLA-LUSD liaison for the PCP and has taken on additional leadership duties.³ A few PCP parents suggested these leaders clarify their duties so they know who to turn to when problems arise or they have questions.

A principal further recommended that both UCLA staff and PCP parent leaders do more to inform parents and school personnel about the program's purpose and function. The principal said he

³ Other staff members from UCLA's Center X are affiliated with LUSD's Parent Curriculum Project, including the Center X administrators and the Director of the UCLA-Lynwood Partnership who oversees all of UCLA's outreach programs in the district. These staff members, however, rarely work hands-on with the PCP.

would like to see UCLA produce “strong, concise paperwork,” such as distributing a one page memo that describes the program’s purpose, goals, and meeting times in order to “ spread awareness” about the program “so everyone’s on the same page.”

Similarly, LUSD’s Superintendent recommended that UCLA officials make a formal presentation about the Parent Curriculum Project to the district’s board of education and principals since some district leaders are unaware of the program and others have misperceptions about it. He remarked that some principals feel “threatened” by the PCP. The superintendent further contended that if UCLA shared more information about the program, “they can change the level for expectations” and “remove threats over them taking over the district.”

Parent leaders also pointed to ways that UCLA staff can make their job easier. Several emphasized that the university is often slow in processing purchase orders and reimbursing parent directors when they pay for supplies with their own funds as a result of UCLA not providing needed materials or paying for contracted services on time. One of the parent leaders commented:

We’re finding a lot of delays in payment. We have to pay the caterers, we have to pay the babysitters. We’re buying supplies, and sometimes there’s a week’s delay in getting supplies. So those are the issues that are a concern because a lot of us don’t have the money to pay first.

Another parent director noted how embarrassed she was after having to teach an institute without the proper materials. She stated:

It’s just unprofessional! I’m a parent, but I would like a way to do it the right way. I am trying also real hard to help them (parent participants), and I’m supposed to be the example, and if they are dealing with me like that, it’s not fair.

A few PCP parent leaders also contended that UCLA staff members are sometimes hard to get in touch with, yet others said that the staff is always responsive to their needs.

As we explain below, UCLA’s ability to be responsive to the concerns and suggestions expressed above is complicated by the fact that the boundaries that demarcate the university’s and LUSD’s administrative and funding responsibilities for the PCP have become blurred.

Uncertainty about UCLA's and LUSD's administrative role and fiscal commitment. UCLA assumed nearly all of the administrative duties and funding responsibilities of LUSD's Parent Curriculum Project when it started in the 1998-99 school year. Hasan asserted that since then the program has developed at a "rapid pace" and the university's Center X does not have the funds and staff available to remain as responsible for the program as it once was. In fact, PCP parent leaders have undertaken many of the program's organizational duties over the past year. This was partly intended and related to PCP's empowerment goals, yet it was also a result of UCLA staff being limited in the time and resources they now have to commit to the PCP.

In addition, UCLA's constraints have led them to renegotiate their funding agreement with Lynwood Unified School District and encourage the district to increase their fiscal commitment to the program. Hasan explained that the School-University Partnership agreement between UCLA and LUSD states that the two entities will each cover 50% of outreach expenses, yet it is not specified whether the Parent Curriculum Project falls within that agreement. Consequently, UCLA and LUSD have had to draft their funding terms from scratch.

Parent leaders were speculating about how the shift between UCLA's and LUSD's responsibilities for the PCP would impact the program when we began our evaluation in the fall of 2000. Several PCP parents echoed the sentiment of a site coordinator who stated that she is "very uncomfortable" with the change. Parents and a principal remarked that they "trust" UCLA to coordinate the PCP more "smoothly" than what they anticipate the district will. Yet, a UCLA staff member asserted that LUSD officials have not resisted funding the PCP since the State mandates that districts support parent programs, and they have yet to do so.

The urgency of determining Lynwood Unified School District's capacity and willingness to fund the PCP escalated when the program's funding ran out near the end of 2000, halfway through the school year. Around this time PCP parent leaders and principals commented that there was no money

left to pay instructors who had taught the institute classes during the fall term. Moreover, district officials decided to postpone PCP institutes that were scheduled to begin in January 2001, due to lack of funds.

By February 2001, Center X administrators planned to pay the outstanding PCP bills for services rendered, and district officials agreed to reimburse them. Trinity Garcia, LUSD's assistant superintendent in charge of business affairs, also proposed to adopt a \$30,000 budget to fund a new round of PCP institutes. Hasan, however, estimated that individual institutes need a minimum of \$12,000 to operate. Thus, she and a few parent leaders asserted that a \$30,000 budget could not sufficiently sustain the Parent Curriculum project especially since the PCP is growing in demand. They also noted that district officials did not seek parent input or review past budgetary information before suggesting the \$30,000 figure.

PCP parent leaders originally scheduled a meeting to be held in late January 2001 at which they planned to confront the superintendent and demand increased fiscal support. We were told that the meeting was cancelled at the request of Center X's School-University Partnership coordinators. One interviewee said the coordinators felt it would be more politically strategic for them to meet with district officials first and voice some of the parents' concerns instead of risking the chance of officials being angered or alienated by a parent confrontation.

By early March, LUSD adopted the \$30,000 budget and specified that the monies would be used to both fund PCP institutes through the remainder of the school year and reimburse UCLA. Nothing was resolved regarding the future funding of PCP, and the extent to which LUSD and UCLA would cover the program's operational expenses. Hasan, however, noted that the assistant superintendent planned to find ways to allocate some of the district's state funding towards the Parent Curriculum Project next year and possibly double the program's budget. She perceives this as an encouraging development.

Superintendent Harold Cebrun said that because LUSD has a considerable amount of categorical monies, he is not against funding part of the PCP. He stated, “If we have to step up we’ll do that, it doesn’t bother me,” yet further stipulated, “I don’t need to pay it all.” The superintendent explained that, “We like this partnership,” and the partnership consists of “sharing costs,” which he anticipates the district and UCLA will do if they are truly committed to the Parent Curriculum Project’s success. Cebrun did not comment on whether the district would increase the \$30,000 budget. Moreover, though the superintendent characterized the PCP as a “good program,” he said he would like to see evidence that it has had a positive impact on parents before the district makes a final decision about its long-term, fiscal commitment.

Parent leaders will have to face scaling down the Parent Curriculum Project in the upcoming school years if the district opts to fund the program at a much lower level than UCLA has in the past. Parents and UCLA staff stressed that they want to avoid this. Hasan also stated that, “I think the dynamics of depending on the district for everything is just not healthy.” Hence, she asserted that it would be wise for parent leaders to find alternative program funding from organization donations and grants, and that UCLA should help them gain the “knowledge and know-how” to do so.

One parent director has already secured a \$40,000 grant for parent education programs at the middle school where she volunteers. She said she intends to allot part of those monies for funding PCP institutes. Still, the parent director emphasized her belief that parents should hold LUSD accountable for committing appropriate funds to the PCP. She added that she anticipates the issue is “going to come down to a fight” between parents and district officials.

Organizational implications for PCP Parent Leaders. Overall, our data indicate that changes in UCLA’s and LUSD’s role in administering and funding the Parent Curriculum Project will continue to dramatically impact everyone involved in the program, especially current PCP parent leaders and district parents who stand to benefit from participating in the program. If the district and UCLA can

not reach a compromise about the long-term funding of the PCP that will allow the program to function as it has in the past, parent leaders may be left to fight for outside resources. This will require them to work even harder for nominal pay or no pay. It remains to be seen whether the parents, who for the most part have very limited socioeconomic resources and many domestic responsibilities, will be able to do so.

For now, most of the parent leaders we interviewed said they are committed to the program for the long-term because it continues to impact their families' lives in such positive ways and has the capacity assist others. A site coordinator commented that, "I just want to teach people," and "I refuse to let it (the PCP) die."

Hasan said that UCLA can offer PCP parents valuable assistance in their efforts to become stronger leaders. She maintained that, "We need to support them in becoming an organized body" and help them to gain "negotiation powers and things like that." She further suggested that UCLA staff do more to encourage district officials to accept the PCP parents' increased leadership roles and not feel threatened by them.

Additional perceptions about district support. Prior to the debate about the PCP's budget, several interviewees characterized the district and superintendent as supportive of the parent education program and general efforts to empower Lynwood's parent community. One parent director described Superintendent Cebrun as "excited" about the program. Another director, who also serves on the Superintendent's Advisory Board, asserted that district leaders seem to sincerely want the PCP to succeed.

While UCLA staff members did not question the superintendent's sincerity in backing the Parent Curriculum Project, they along with a couple of parent leaders pointed out that Cebrun has a political interest in visibly supporting programs that help parents. They contended that the superintendent is aware that he must maintain good public relations with the parent community so they

will continue to support him in his administrative role and not complain to the Board of Education, to whom he reports. One person also argued that this is particularly true since the hiring of the superintendent, who is African American, initially upset much of the district's Latino population, many of who told LUSD's board that they wanted a Latino administrator to fill the post. These interviewees further explained that parents have noticed a "positive difference" in how they are treated in the district and in schools, which they attribute to Cebrun's support and the PCP's positive impact.

The superintendent emphasized his commitment to empowering LUSD's parents when we spoke with him. He stated, "It's a triangle -- school, home, and the students, all three are necessary for success and without one it doesn't work." We also observed Cebrun speaking at several of the PCP graduation ceremonies where he commended parents on their accomplishments and urged them to become more involved in the district.

In addition, the superintendent appointed Marilyn Samson, a district schoolteacher on special assignment, to serve as a district liaison for the PCP in addition to working on other professional development duties. Samson, who we observed participating in a PCP parent leadership meeting, has offered to help parent leaders reserve conference space for meetings and advise them about applying for grants.

UCLA staff and parent leaders emphasized that, along with the superintendent, it is essential that school principals back the Parent Curriculum Project for it to succeed. According to a few interviewees, Superintendent Cebrun has encouraged principals to support the PCP, particularly those who appear to feel threatened by the program. One person said the principals are afraid of "losing power" and being held more "accountable" by parents. Others noted that a few principals have developed a more positive attitude about the PCP after observing the program's positive impact.

When we asked one parent director whether the principal at her school is supportive of the Parent Curriculum Project she replied:

At first no. At first we kept hitting roadblock after roadblock. . . I think (the principal)

was resistant because (the principal) felt that by giving this information to the parents they would have questions. Like right away when we gave them the Title I information, they wanted to know, “Where is your Title I?” “How much is it?” And it kind of intimidated (the principal). But now the parents are volunteering. The parents are going to conduct the Halloween Festival that is coming up. They’re going to do the school beautification. They want to get CPR certified so they can have those resources and all those things. And the parents are willing to get quite a bit of education because they are committed to helping the school. And the only request that they made of (the principal) is that they want to have more education in English and computers. So (the principal)’s trying to find the money right now to fit that into the schedule, and (the principal)’s trying to find an outside company that would run that program.

Indeed, each of the principals we interviewed strongly endorsed the PCP, and one even characterized himself as the “proud papa” of the program at his site. The principals, however, said they were not aware of the Superintendent’s position on the program.

In closing, our data suggest that everyone directly involved with the Parent Curriculum Project views it as a program that has enriched parents and contributed to school improvement. Still, several assert the need for UCLA to help disseminate more information about the program to LUSD board members, principals, and prospective parents in order to expand the program’s backing and clarify its purpose.

Now that the district has allotted some funds to cover PCP program expenses, parent leaders hope to implement more parent institutes. Officials from UCLA and Lynwood Unified School District, however, must still work out an agreement regarding PCP’s future funding and coordination. Parent leaders may indeed end up assuming greater leadership responsibility for the program once it resumes. If so, they will likely have to address several of their own internal debates in order to make sure the PCP functions smoothly.

Conclusion

Over the past two and half years, UCLA’s Parent Curriculum Project has developed into a program that has informed nearly 350 parent graduates from Lynwood Unified School District about boosting their children’s chances for educational success and improving the district overall. Our data

indicate that the program has also helped to place many of these parents on a permanent path to personal and professional development.

Collaboration between the university and LUSD remains an integral part of the PCP, yet the dedication, enthusiasm, and energy that parent leaders and participants have brought to the program has maintained the PCP. University and LUSD resources combined with parents' leadership will determine the PCP's future success. We hope that the findings from our evaluation will assist UCLA, LUSD, and parents in solidifying a three-way partnership. If the Parent Curriculum Project continues to operate in LUSD with adequate funding, a stronger organizational infrastructure, and collegial relationships between and among partners, the program has great potential to play a key role in producing equitable, urban educational reform. This reform could be informed by research, educators' expertise, and parent voices, which would serve each party's interests.

APPENDIX: Collected Data
Evaluation of UCLA's Parent Curriculum Project in Lynwood Unified School District

PARTICIPATING LUSD SCHOOLS

Will Rogers Elementary School - Operated 1 parent institute
Lindbergh Elementary School - Operated 1 parent institute
Lynwood High School - Operated 3 parent institutes

INTERVIEWS (20)

UCLA Staff

Angela Hasan, Co-Director Lynwood PCP (Two interviews conducted)
Toni Protti, Former Director of the UCLA/Lynwood Partnership
Favian Lopez, EAOP Site Coordinator for Lynwood

PCP Parent Directors/ Site Coordinators

Parent Director at Lindbergh E.S.
Parent Director at Hosler E.S.
Parent Director at Will Rogers E.S. and Lynwood H.S. (Two interviews conducted)
Site Coordinator at Lindbergh E.S.
Site Coordinator at Will Rogers
Site Coordinator at Washington E.S.
Site Coordinator at Mark Twain E.S.

Parent Participants

Mother at Lindbergh E.S.
Mother #1, Lynwood H.S. (Weekday class)
Mother #2, Lynwood H.S. (Weekday class)
Group of four fathers, Lynwood H.S. (Saturday class)

Principals (Those at schools with programs that ran during the fall quarter)

Principal of Lindbergh E.S.
Principal of Will Rogers E.S.
Principal of Lynwood H.S.

District Officials

Harold Cebrun, Superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District

OBSERVATIONS⁴ (9)

Mark Twain graduation, 9/23/00	Lynwood H. S. Saturday class, 11/18/00
Lindbergh class, 10/25/00	Will Rogers graduation, 12/05/00
Will Rogers class, 10/31/00	Higher education workshop, 12/07/00

⁴ Evaluators planned to conduct two additional observations, one at a PCP Institute that was scheduled to begin at Hosler Middle School in December 2000, and the second at a meeting between PCP Parent leaders and LUSD's Superintendent, but both events were cancelled.

Lynwood H.S. Weekday class, 11/9/00
Parent leadership meeting, 11/16/00

Lindbergh graduation, 12/08/00