

Press-Telegram

COMMENT

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LBUSD's success is a community effort

By Christopher J. Steinhauser

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will name America's best urban school district on Wednesday in Washington, D.C., where he'll announce the winner of the \$1 million national Broad Prize for Urban Education. Many of us from Long Beach will be on the edge of our seats because our school district is among the top five finalists for the award. The Broad Prize honors school systems that have shown the greatest growth in academic achievement for all students.

Having won the Broad Prize in 2003, Long Beach is now a five-time finalist for this prestigious honor. Only Boston Public Schools share this five-year record of excellence.

Educators throughout the nation ask us how we do it. How does Long Beach continue to show steady, significant gains in student achievement, especially when compared to other urban school systems?

It hasn't happened because we're perfect. But we're closer to realizing the dream of educational excellence and equal opportunity

than almost every other urban school system. Broad Prize reviewers said so after sifting through stacks of data. These national education experts toured our schools and classrooms. They talked to our teachers and students. They listened to our parents. They liked what they saw and heard.

I could go into the minute details of how we use student performance data to monitor progress and improve instruction, or how we've invested in teacher training, or any number of other day-to-day, behind-the-scenes efforts. All of those efforts are crucial. But ultimately the main reason we're seeing progress in our local schools is that, with strong community support, we've held fast to our original mission.

Last week, 87,000 children arrived in our classrooms to start the new school year. Each student brings a unique set of hopes and dreams, collectively known as the American Dream. Our mission as educators — which is essential to the survival and success of our great nation — is to help each of these stu-

dents attain that dream. And we've pledged not to let anything stand in our way — neither poverty, nor disability, nor bleak economy.

Living up to that promise takes tremendous teamwork. To be in the running again for this award is a testament to our heroic teachers, tireless support staff, administrators, parents, our 9,000 volunteers, our more than 1,100 business and community partners, our school board, our colleagues in higher education, civic leaders, service clubs and philanthropic foundations such as The Broad Foundation, insightful news media, local clergy, Realtors, retirees, and many others who share our commitment to kids and schools.

To all of them, we say thank you.

Being a five-time Broad Prize finalist confirms that the Long Beach community still believes in public education. We believe that regardless of color, culture, language or race, every child deserves good schools and teachers. There's a lot of public discourse on this topic, with passions running high and plenty

of loud voices that can throw school districts off course. Yet we in Long Beach have quietly persisted, guided by a clear focus.

Look into the wide eyes of a kindergartner on the first day of school, and you'll understand where our focus is. That child doesn't know the difference between conservative and liberal. That child is unaware of our budget problems. That child cannot discuss the nuances of immigration policy, or fix the economy, or fight prejudice and ignorance and fear — at least not yet.

As they have for 124 years in our school district, entering our classrooms are the future doctors, lawmakers, scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, astronauts, authors and artists of America. We cannot let them down.

When we look our children in the eyes and tell them they can be anything they want to be if they work hard, we mean it. And we make it possible — not because we seek glittering trophies, but because the greatest prize of all is a good education.

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