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EDUCATION

## Would You Like Fries With Your iPad?

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Prior to the LAUSD vote January 14, 2014 to approve Phase II of the district's \$1 billion iPad project, I shared the following remarks with school board members during the three minutes allotted each speaker during Public Comment:

Good afternoon, board members, Superintendent, sorry about that [jumping the gun], I was looking for my iPad. Part of this discussion about iPads has been framed as -- I'm David Lyell, UTLA Secretary -- it's been framed as a debate about who should and should not have access to technology. No one is opposed to providing students with access to technology. This project really isn't about technology. This is about providing a vehicle for students to conveniently complete common core state standards testing.

The problem with this whole focus on testing is that taking tests in and of itself doesn't really teach you anything other than how to press a button or how to fill in a bubble. It doesn't teach you critical thinking skills. And, speaking as an individual, that's part of the problem with Common Core State Standards. We had No Child Left Behind and then Race to the Top. Now we have Common Core State Standards. Because they say, well, it'll be transformational. Because, after all, if students can't pass the current tests, the solution must be to give students different tests. Obviously, that's completely not true.

The iPad project goes to the heart of this issue and instead we need to focus on teaching students the basics of learning how to read, write, add, and subtract, and develop critical thinking skills. Those skills are developed through asking questions. Those questions only get asked when you lower class size, fully staff campuses, honor due process rights, pay employees a fair living wage, and expose students to a well-rounded curriculum. Yet teachers in LAUSD remain near the bottom of all teacher pay in LA County, due process is often not being honored, and the idea of providing students with essential supports and services -- smaller class sizes and fully staffed campuses -- have all but been dismissed by the board.

Computers are everywhere nowadays. But in the end, in and of itself, giving students iPads isn't going to necessarily help them learn how to use computers. If you go to a fast food restaurant, the person who takes the order is going to do so by pressing a button on a computer. On an iPad.

There's a great documentary called *The Lost Interview*, and the subject is Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple Computers. And in the documentary, he says at one point, when he talks about computer science and his desire to learn computers, quote, 'It had nothing to do with using [programs] for practical things, it had more to do with using them as a mirror of your thought process. To actually learn how to think. I think everyone in this country should learn to program a computer. Everyone should learn a computer language because it teaches you how to think. I think of computer science as a liberal art.' End-quote.

So by giving students iPads, are we training them to develop critical thinking skills, or are we just preparing them for a life working in fast food restaurants?

As a district, in order to improve student achievement, we need to maximize every last tax dollar at our disposal, and spend that money in a responsible way. Responsible policy means focusing time and energy on lowering class size, making sure every student has access to a full-time nurse, librarian, pupil services and attendance counselor, psychiatric social worker, arts, etcetera. I see my time is up, so in closing, with all due respect, for this and other reasons, while I'm glad to see the district slowed down on this proposal, it just doesn't feel like it's been handled in a very responsible manner. Thank you.

After I finished my remarks to the Board, Superintendent Deasy took the time to respond to my call to lower class size, raise teacher pay, and restore positions (I must have pushed some of his buttons). He insisted that my remarks were off base because the bond money being used for iPads can't fund those things, but he ignored what we know to be true: Once the bond money dries up, the District intends to use general fund dollars to pay for the iPads (*L.A. Times*: <http://lat.ms/1f6jedi>). Raises, rehiring staff, and lower class sizes do come from general fund money.

Here's video of my remarks, as well as his response: (*Youtube*: <http://bit.ly/1e9eAZW>)

With rare exception, school board meetings are calendared during the day, so teachers involved with Phase I of the project haven't even had an opportunity to address the board, and numerous other questions have arisen about the lack of responsible oversight concerning this project. A few examples...

The district only reluctantly admitted to paying for a three-year software license before it had even actually seen what it was purchasing (L.A. Times: <http://lat.ms/1akJZgA>).

It was also recently revealed that some staff members were given free iPads a year before the board voted for Phase I of this project, at a pitch meeting by software peddler Pearson. (KPCC: <http://bit.ly/1dKdM7S>).

So, who's investigating? LAUSD's Office of the Inspector General. In other words, when possible impropriety arises, the district has authority to investigate itself.

As if all of this isn't alarming enough, LAUSD announced this past week that the only committee charged with overseeing the iPad rollout is set to be disbanded. (LATimes: <http://lat.ms/1aFsYeO>).

California is facing many challenges, and bond measures will be needed to be approved in the future. But when LAUSD conducts business behind closed doors -- in secret -- as it did so in voting to extend the Superintendent's contract, and only agrees to release that board vote after being threatened with possible legal action, for this, and the aforementioned reasons, as well as other concerns, these actions only further erode an already tenuous relationship between the board and an already skeptical electorate (L.A. Times:<http://lat.ms/1ihjVFE>).

I know board members care deeply about public education. But as recently deceased board member Ms. Marguerite Poindexter LaMotte said about students, and I think you could apply this to the board's relationship with the public: "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Ms. LaMotte will be greatly missed.

Follow David Lyell on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/davidlyell](http://www.twitter.com/davidlyell)

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UTLA leadership has been less than vociferous about this and compromises of AFT, UTF and NEA, heck I can't even keep track of all of them, have cost teachers dearly--particularly in large urban districts like LAUSD. By conceding to Common Core and accepting big \$\$\$ from Gates, Walton and Broad, these unions sold us out and the local unions are conspicuously indifferent to our plight. Well, essentially everyone is indifferent or downright acrimonious to teachers because people assume unions have their backs. The truth is the unions are behind teachers, all right. They are just there to shove them into an abyss Arne Duncan calls an achievement gap. Teachers are not afforded basic considerations, much less acknowledged as professionals. Teachers are endangered and harmed on campus, where principals won't call an ambulance for them. They're defamed, cheated, mentally assaulted, discriminated against, harassed, and literally ruined when they report corruption or abuse. Of course come close to vesting in a full pension and there is a target on your back ... Some have died from EXTREME stress, many have lost their careers, houses, hope. That is egregious. I wanna puke when Deasy pulls an astro turf. Then there's media, which has no interest in hearing teachers, yet fawns over the blatant incompetence, criminal indifference and unethical arrogance that is LAUSD Deasy. I say keep the iPads. Lose Deasy and UTLA.

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At least they will be able to play more games, socialize, and waste more time. And it only cost the school district 1 billion dollars. That is a bargain.

22 JAN 9 01 AM