



June 27, 2007

The Honorable Marlene Canter  
President, Board of Education  
Honorable Members of the Board of Education  
Superintendent David Brewer  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
333 S. Beaudry Ave., 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

**Re: Oppose Pay to Play for LAUSD School Fields and Facilities**

Dear President Canter, Honorable Board Members, and Superintendent Brewer:

We urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject the Pay to Play proposal that would require non-profit organizations that serve children to pay for school fields and other facilities after school and on weekends. LAUSD cannot balance its budget on the health of our children.

It is particularly inappropriate for LAUSD to adopt a pay to play requirement because LAUSD does not enforce school physical education requirements under state law.<sup>1</sup> Non-profit youth groups including Anahuak Youth Association are providing a public service to the children of Los Angeles that LAUSD itself fails to provide. In many instances the children simply cannot afford to pay to play. In any event, parents and taxpayers have already paid for school fields by voting to tax themselves through over \$20 billion in school construction and modernization bonds and matching funds for LAUSD since 1997. The present Pay to Play proposal is not well thought out, the details are not clear, and there are no objective and fair standards for deciding who would pay and play -- or not. LAUSD and the public defeated a Pay to Play staff proposal in 2005. The LAUSD Board should reject the Pay to Play proposal now.

According to LAUSD Budget Director Roger Rassmussen, there is currently no provision in the Pay to Play proposal for exempting non-profit groups that serve the children who can least afford to pay to play. Other details of the Pay to Play proposal have not been worked out. The proposal is to charge \$78 for a permit, and \$84 for each day a site is used. However, there are no details beyond that. Anahuak Youth Association, for example, has 148 teams, and they play year-round. Would Anahuak be required to buy one \$78 permit, or 148 permits? How long does a permit last? How many teams could play per day for \$78? Would Anahuak qualify for an exemption because its members cannot afford to pay to play? There are no answers to any of these questions. Moreover, the Pay to Play proposal is based on the faulty assumption that it costs LAUSD \$4.7 million to provide places to play and other facilities after school and on weekends, and that LAUSD would recover that amount. If groups drop out because they cannot pay to play, then LAUSD will recover less than that amount. And the cost assumption is not explained anywhere. Finally, it is necessary to ensure that groups that pay (like adult leagues) do not trump children's groups that cannot afford to pay.

It is no answer to say that LAUSD should adopt a Pay to Play requirement because the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) charges fees. Los Angeles City Controller Laura Chick has

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<sup>1</sup> California Center for Public Health Advocacy (June 8, 2006); Robert García and Aubrey White, *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region* 9-10, 19-20 (The City Project Policy Report 2006) ("Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities").

published an audit of Recreation and Parks documenting unfair fees and financing and other disparities for recreation and parks. The audit calls for a strategic plan and community needs assessment to improve recreation in every neighborhood and alleviate unfair disparities.<sup>2</sup> The audit calls for objective standards to measure equity and progress, and to hold public officials accountable. Recreation and Parks is engaged in the process of reform now. It would be taking one step forward and several steps backwards for the children of Los Angeles for LAUSD to adopt an unfair fee structure with no objective standards now, just as RAP has started the process of reform.

Similarly, LAUSD claims that other school districts charge fees, but LAUSD has not documented whether those districts enforce physical education requirements, what those fees are, whether there are any exemptions, and the demographics of the other districts based on income and poverty compared to LAUSD.

LAUSD and the public defeated a staff proposal for Pay to Play in 2005, when the public had ample notice and opportunity to be heard. Indeed, LAUSD's Beyond the Bell program raised the Pay to Play proposal at community meetings in 2005. This time around, LAUSD has buried the Pay to Play proposal in the budget and has provided little opportunity for full and fair public participation in the decision-making process.

It is particularly inappropriate for LAUSD to adopt a pay to play requirement because LAUSD does not enforce school physical education requirements. Evidence-based research published by the California Endowment and others documents the importance of physical education to improve student health, youth development, and academic performance. This research also documents unfair health disparities based on race, ethnicity, and income. Very importantly, increased physical activity is also associated with improved academic performance.<sup>3</sup> Over 87% of LAUSD children were not physically fit under state Fitnessgram standards in 2004.<sup>4</sup> In LAUSD, the five largest PE class sizes averaged 93 students in middle schools and 87.5 in high schools.<sup>5</sup> 91% of LAUSD children are children of color, and 74% are low income (qualify for free or reduced meals).

At LAUSD's South Gate High School, 1,600 children took the state Fitnessgram test and not one passed. Forty schools did not have a single physically fit student. Less than 10% of students were physically fit in nearly one-third of the 605 schools in LAUSD. Only eight schools had student populations that are more than 50% physically fit.

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<sup>2</sup> City Controller Laura Chick, *Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks* 20 (Jan. 5, 2006); Deborah Schoch, *How Can L.A. Create Better Places to Play*, L.A. Times, June 1, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., San Diego State University, *Physical Education Matters 1* (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007) ("Physical Education Matters"); UCLA Center to Eliminate Health Disparities and Samuels & Associates, *Failing Fitness: Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools* (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007).

<sup>4</sup> *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities* at 9, Cal. Dep't of Ed. Website, [www.cde.cd.gov/ta/tg/pf/index.asp](http://www.cde.cd.gov/ta/tg/pf/index.asp); Cara Mia DiMassa, *Here's the Skinny: Most Students Aren't*, L.A. Times, Nov. 25, 2004. See also Howard Blume, *It's a stretch for schools to find enough space for P.E., As students' health becomes a bigger issue, space constraints in L.A. Unified make fitness tougher to achieve*, L.A. Times, Nov. 26, 2006; Jennifer Radcliffe, *Going to War Against Epidemic of Childhood Obesity*, Daily News, Jan. 27, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *Physical Education Matters* at 4.

Percentage of Physically Fit Children in LAUSD Schools<sup>6</sup>

Percentage of Physically Fit Children	Number of Schools in LAUSD
0%	40
1-5%	58
6-10%	96
11-15%	123
16-20%	83
21-25%	75
26-30%	42
31-35%	38
36-40%	22
41-45%	16
46-50%	4
>50%	8

The levels of child obesity are intolerably high even for children in the best neighborhoods—ranging from 23% to 39% throughout the Los Angeles region.<sup>7</sup>

We urge the LAUSD Board to reject the Pay to Play proposal. At a minimum, the proposal requires further study, full and fair public information and participation, and fair and objective standards to exempt non-profits that serve the children who are least able to pay to play. The present proposal fails on all grounds. The children of Los Angeles deserve better.

Very truly yours,

Raul Macías  
President and Founder  
Anahuak Youth Association

Robert García  
The City Project  
Executive Director and Counsel

Irma Muñoz  
President and Founder  
Mujeres de la Tierra

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*, Map 403.