

LCS Reimagined

To begin with, we wish to acknowledge the hard work and effort expended by the MAUSD Superintendent, Board, Facilities Feasibility Study Sub-Committee and countless community members who have engaged in addressing the issue of declining enrollments and school consolidation. It is our perception that the approach taken (including the NESDEC report) represents a deficit-based approach that begins by identifying problems (declining enrollments, growing financial strains) and then offering up “solutions” to fix them. There is little in this approach that would appear to build consensus and promise sustainability. We suggest that a strengths or asset-based approach would offer up the possibility of some creative responses and potential solutions to the district’s enrollment and fiscal challenges. Unlike the quantitative approach characteristic of the NESDEC report, we look to the viability of a qualitative approach, i.e., looking at each individual school, assessing what is unique, powerful and valuable about that school that could be built upon in forging a way forward. This has led to discussing the idea of transforming LCS into a magnet school, focused on environmental sciences, and whether that might be a way forward to:

- further enhance the school’s academic program,
- provide the school with a strong academic and social mission consistent with community values, and
- attract tuition students from outside our five town district.

Historically, magnet schools have been utilized as a desegregation tool based on a rather simple theory: create a school so distinctive and appealing—so magnetic—that it will draw a diverse range of families from throughout the community and beyond eager to enroll their children. To do so, the school must offer an educational option— a specialty—that is not available in other area schools. A look across district magnet programs today reveals a wide variety of curricular specialties and educational approaches reflecting the idiosyncratic interests and resources of their communities. Among the curricular themes or instructional approaches currently found at magnet schools are aerospace education, communications, culinary arts, environmental science, performing arts, international studies and many more. As one researcher has noted, magnet schools are the “off- spring” not just of “the search for racial and ethnic equity in public education” but also of the “quest for improved teaching and learning.” Their theme-based approach promotes many of the factors associated with effective schools, chiefly, innovation in program and practice, staff and curricular coherence, increased parent and community involvement, and greater student engagement. In the best of magnet schools, this adds up to higher student achievement.¹

We are using the term magnet school to illustrate the possibility that LCS could offer a specialized curriculum that would enhance the

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, *Innovations in Education: Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs*, Washington, D.C., 2004. pp.3

standardized curriculum that K-6 elementary students receive. The school would remain accessible and free to the children of Lincoln and would be subsidized with tuition paying students from outside of the district. The goal would be to keep the teachers and staff intact, but whether LCS could remain in the district or would have to become an independent school is the big question and one that would need to be studied to determine the best route forward.

In summary, we believe that converting LCS to an environmental sciences magnet school deserves further study, discussion and consideration.