

Los Angeles Daily News



Eli and Edythe Broad, pictured in front of The Broad Museum in 2015, are trying to make a \$3.75 million gift to Los Angeles schools.

LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

More politics from a teachers union

By Larry Sand

Nov. 27, 2016

Led by the United Teachers of Los Angeles, educators at four local schools have refused to accept a \$3.75 million gift because it would come from “a pro-charter school organization,” Great Public Schools Now. The union’s president, Alex Caputo-Pearl, blustered, “It’s a public relations stunt that offers chump change to a couple of LAUSD efforts while they [GPSN] continue to put tens of millions of dollars into unregulated charter growth.”

The union’s hostility dates back to September 2015, when it was revealed that the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation had formed GPSN, a nonprofit organization whose goal was to create 260 new charter schools and enroll 130,000 students in Los Angeles. The plan included strategies to raise money, recruit teachers, provide parental outreach and navigate the inevitable political battles.

The education establishment was furious and immediately counterattacked. L.A. school board President Steve Zimmer charged that the Broad plan “represents a strategy to bring down LAUSD.” Caputo-Pearl targeted billionaires’ alleged influence in education, saying their “attacks must stop” and they “should not be running public education.” He charged that “charters are unregulated and will create inappropriate competition,” in addition to other fact-free scare tactics.

After this badgering, GPSN relented and modified its focus. The group announced in June it would include the funding of high-performing traditional public schools in low-income L.A. neighborhoods that deserve replication or expansion. GPSN’s goal, very simply, is to “do more of what works.”

Having seen the original charter expansion plan modified to include traditional public schools, the union should be happy, right? Wrong.

So what would make Caputo- Pearl happy?

Claiming to be open to olive branches, he said, “We would actually be very encouraged if Eli Broad (and the Walton Family Foundation) came back with another offer and said, ‘What we’re going to do is give a substantial amount of money, millions of dollars, to the L.A. School Board ... to spend in the way they see fit.’”

Giving money to a unioncontrolled school board is akin to giving a fistful of cash to a drunken sailor. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg found this out. His \$100 million gift to Newark public schools (which get about \$22,000 a year per student, twice as much as LA schools) didn’t make any difference to students as the sclerotic bureaucracy frittered away a large part of the donation.

GPSN executive director Myrna Castrejón responded to Caputo-Pearl’s comments by saying, “I wish I could say I was surprised to see UTLA — which purports to represent teachers and students around Los Angeles — put politics ahead of what is essentially nostrings- attached funding for district schools.”

Castrejón is right. With UTLA — and teachers unions in general — it’s all about politics and power. The unions view any change to the status quo as a threat, a start down a slippery slope, which is why a philanthropic donation to schools that work is deemed a “public relations stunt” and must be stopped in its tracks.

The money would go directly to the school district and could be on the L.A. school board’s agenda as soon as Dec. 13. UTLA is asking the board to turn down the cash. The \$3.75 million question is whether the board will go along with the union’s self-serving propaganda or do right by the kids and accept the donation.

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