November 1, 2002

Dear Principal:

UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access is working with students, teachers, and parents around greater Los Angeles to examine and report on the conditions for learning at their school. As you know, principals can now pass on information to parents through their School Accountability Report Card or SARC. While providing some information to the community, these SARCs rarely encourage public engagement in school improvement or broader efforts to bring more resources to the school. Our project motivates students, parents, and teachers to become more informed and more involved in school improvement. It also opens lines of communication to state officials to let them know when schools require additional resources to provide quality learning conditions for all students.

At the end of the year, our Institute will issue “Virtual School Report Cards” that parallel the official SARCs while adding information to support ongoing school improvement. Each month, our journal, Teaching to Change LA, will feature reports from different schools on one aspect of their school’s program—for example, the quality of instructional materials or the school’s efforts to promote a safe and democratic learning environment. We will ask local and state officials who should be responsible for ensuring quality in these specific areas.

Our Institute will provide teachers with readings and lesson ideas to guide student examinations. Students will learn to access information from the Internet about school conditions, conduct surveys and rubric-guided interviews, analyze statistics, and write about their findings. Our experience in the last couple years suggests that students from the primary grades through high school benefit from such academically motivating activities.

We also offer groups of parents readings (in English and Spanish), tools to access information about school conditions on the Internet, and strategies for examining their own schools. Parents will acquire information and skills that allow them to advocate on behalf of all the students in their community.

We are very excited about the possibility of working with your school on this important project. You can access more information about this project at www.TeachingToChangeLA.org. I would also be happy to talk with you further about the Virtual School Report Card project and how our Institute here at UCLA works with schools to promote quality conditions for all students.

All my best,

John Rogers
Associate Director, UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access