

WE SALUTE THE GRADUATES OF 2023

Charter School Collaborative created during COVID-19

By Helene Seifer

In at least one case, positive strides came out of our years of COVID-19 isolation: the forming of the Los Angeles Public Charter School Collaborative (LAPCSC), an informal information-sharing group that has already helped best practices in education flourish.

"It is an unexpected silver lining of the horror of COVID that this group came together," says Amy Held, executive director of Larchmont Charter School.

The Collaborative was founded mid-March 2020, right when the pandemic was beginning to hit and educators were struggling to understand what was expected of schools. Five or so charter school executive directors, including Held, jumped on a Zoom call to compare notes. The conversation was so helpful they decided to Zoom-meet every Wednesday morning. Now, three years later, executives from 31 charter schools regularly participate in the weekly video calls, including the three Larchmont Charter Schools.

Held explains that there is no leader and no agenda for

the calls. During the pandemic, school executive directors would bring up such topics as "Do you understand the latest health guidelines?" or "What are you hearing from parents?"

Their conversations led to direct actions, including one that changed how Larchmont Charter communicated with parents. "Larchmont would send out a weekly eblast," notes Held, but she kept hearing about something called Parents Square, a platform that stores all announcements and letters and that links to the school calendar and parent directory. Larchmont Charter switched. Held emphasizes, "I'm a big believer in the wisdom of crowds."

Other programs discussed and adopted by many are i-Ready Diagnostic, to assess the need for student interventions in various subjects, and Care Solace, a concierge service to help connect students, families and staff to mental health services.

A newer initiative created by the group is a program to send teachers and school leaders to visit other excellent schools, including private schools, to directly observe

ideas in action.

Held says that the reason that the LAPCSC is successful is that charter schools are in a unique position to implement changes since they have their own school boards and are smaller than LAUSD-run schools. Held explains, "As small schools, a part of our

Prop 28

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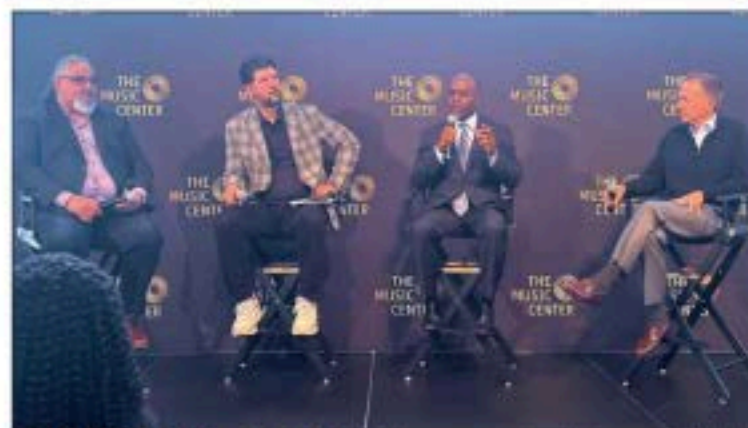
tics, noting that "Barely one in five public schools in California currently has full-time arts teachers." Passage of Proposition 28 is expected to generate close to \$1 billion, which would make it "the largest investment in arts education in the history of the country," creating an additional "15,000 good-paying arts jobs."

A highlight of the afternoon was the personal story of rapper will.i.am. In an interview with Beutner, the performer talked about growing up in the projects in Boyle Heights. He traveled to a magnet school in Pacific Palisades, where he began playing beats on the lunchroom tables. "Music changed my life," he explained. "Even though I was poor, my currency was my

secret sauce, our super power, is our ability to be nimble. We really know our students and our families." Held tells a story about being able to think out of the box to help a particular student. "We had a student who was really struggling. He had a lot of behavior issues. We hired an alum [who had

also felt the pull of gangs] to provide one-on-one support. The alum called the student every day and drove him to school." With that help, that student graduated.

Information about the Los Angeles Public Charter School Collaborative is at www.lapubliccharters.org.



PANELISTS (left to right) Max Arias, executive director SEIU local 99; David Goldberg, president-elect of California Teachers Association; Tony Thurmond, state superintendent of public instruction; and Austin Beutner, Proposition 28 author and former Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent.

creativity. I could cash it in for social currency."

That concept that the arts bring confidence and belonging to young people was a common thread throughout the event. Beutner moderated the first panel, which addressed, "the promise of

Prop 28," and all the panelists mentioned the importance of the arts when they were young, including Tony Thurmond, who said, "I grew up on food stamps and government cheese. School was everything. Music helped me find my voice."