



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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A Sad Day for Education in Poway

Several dozen parents and students from the San Diego Math Circle converged on the Poway Unified School District Board of Education Monday night in an effort to persuade Board members to modernize existing policies that penalize achievement for accelerated students.

At the center of the controversy is Rancho Bernardo High School student Lucas Brown, whose exceptional acceleration accumulated over approximately nine years in PUSD has shone a light on the challenges schools face in meeting the needs of highly gifted youth.

The world seems divided on what this light shows: Gifted students, their parents, and educators involved with modern gifted education see Lucas as a “test case” and his PUSD experience as a model for others to follow. The PUSD Board of Education, however, seems to view Lucas as a problem rather than a solution.

Lucas’ father, David Brown, points out that PUSD has done a number of visionary things that go a long way toward solving some of the systemic problems facing gifted students. Most important, Brown stresses, is the successful demonstration over nine years spanning all levels of schooling – elementary, middle, and high school – that a modified curriculum plan blending a track of independent study with a balance of traditional classes can meet the needs of gifted students for acceleration while permitting a normal high school experience integrated with social peers.

“It is incredibly important that Lucas’ PUSD experience proves gifted students do not have to be denied access to the advanced education they need nor be shipped off to non-traditional schools that deny them a normal high school life,” Brown says. “A range of distance-learning options readily available today make it possible to bring advanced education to the student, so that limitations of school resources and curricula no longer have to put a ceiling over the heads of motivated students of high ability.”

All does not end well, however, as was demonstrated darkly Monday evening.

Unsolved is the problem of how to close out an accelerated student's high school education with a record that accurately conveys the student's actual studies and measures achievement fairly.

“Lucas as a test case reveals some bizarre, but unnecessary problems,” Brown says.

Lucas presented his case to the Board of Education, detailing how present PUSD policies deny him credit for 80% of his advanced studies. Worse, his advanced collegiate studies in the allowed 20% are denied honors weighting, valuing them less than the AP courses taken by non-accelerated students in traditional classes. The result is an academic record that is highly distorted and unmeasurable in conventional terms, misrepresenting academic achievement.

Several members of the San Diego Math Circle community addressed the Board in support of the need to reform its policies, including parents of other area students experiencing similar challenges. All expressed deep concerns over policies that disincentivize high academic achievement and put our best students in compromised positions as they compete for scholarships, internships, and jobs.

Richard Rusczyk, President and CEO of the Art of Problem Solving, Inc. said, “We must enable our best students to pursue opportunities outside school when they have exhausted their schools’ resources.... More and more of our students are in schools that reward them properly for taking college-level classes, by providing grade-point valuation equivalent to AP classes. I ask that you join those schools and school districts in providing appropriate incentives to our best students that encourage them to develop their abilities to their full potential.”

The PUSD Board of Education was unmoved.

Each member present – Gutschow, Ranftle, Mangum, and Patapow – spoke in response to the public comment, but pointedly refused to consider the concerns that had been raised. Instead, members took pains to position the Board's past actions as being taken in special deference to Lucas, rather than as improvements in the District's policies for the benefit of all gifted students. Finally, each Board member individually refused to permit any discussion of any point.

Said Lucas of all this, “It's very sad that instead of using my experience as a test case to work out some obviously needed policy changes, each PUSD Board member is making this about me personally. It's clear that the Board does not share my ethic for improving education for gifted students.”

The proverbial light bulb hovering over the head of the Poway Unified School District flickers a bit more dimly today.

Leadership wanted.

The San Diego Math Circle (www.sdmathcircle.org) is a cooperative venture blending the volunteer and charitable efforts of parents, expert instructors, UCSD, the Art of Problem Solving, Inc., and is supported by private donations and corporate sponsors.