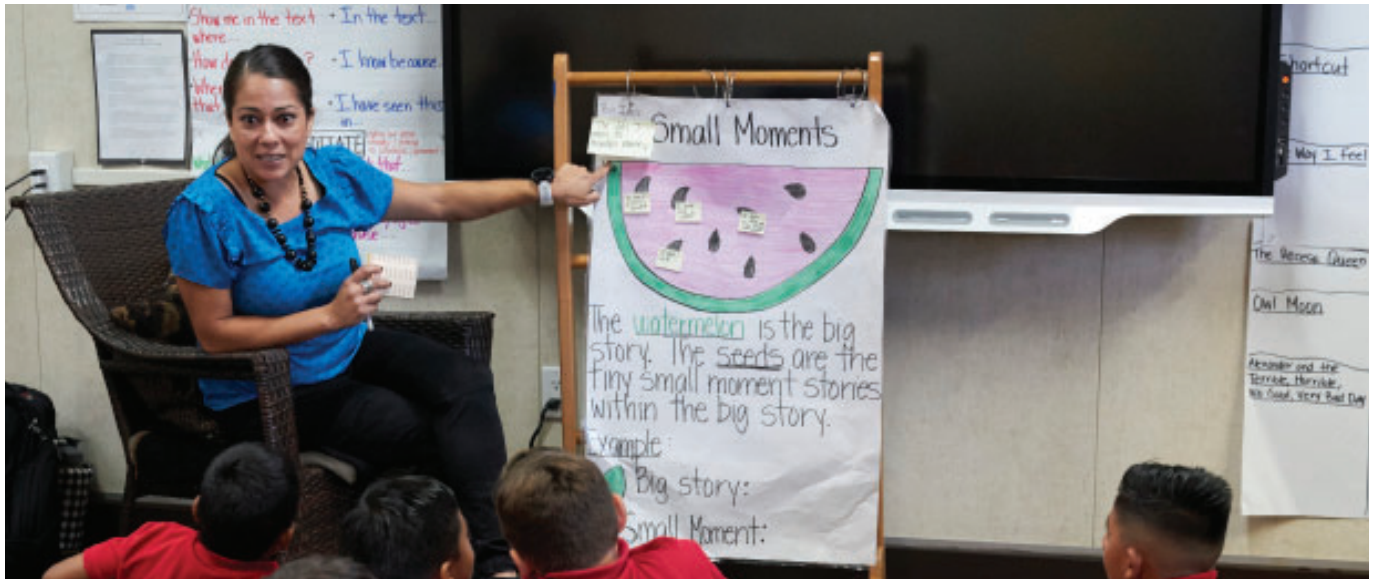


Downtown Does Have High-Quality Education Offerings



By Drew Furedi
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DTLA—I read your recent editorial “Downtown’s Desperate Need for Elementary Schools” (June 24) with great interest. It makes a strong plea for “walkable, high-quality schools” for the “legions of people moving [to Downtown L.A.],” yet it made it seem that there are no education opportunities for families in Downtown Los Angeles.

We have a different take.

Para Los Niños has been working in the Downtown community since 1980 to respond to the ever-growing and ever-changing needs of Los Angeles’ most vulnerable communities. Throughout its first two decades of operation, Para Los Niños developed deep and rich programmatic services in response to the needs and demands of area children and families. In 2002, because of the demand from the families we served, Para Los Niños opened a charter elementary school in Downtown and the organization became a school operator. Today, PLN operates two high-quality early education centers and three high-quality charter schools across Downtown. Our proven approach helps build stronger, more stable families, and brighter futures for children.

Our project-based approach keeps students intellectually engaged and enriched while our holistic model builds social-emotional skills, character and confidence for over 1,000 students at our Gratts Primary Center in Westlake-MacArthur Park, PLN Charter Elementary School and PLN Charter Middle School in Downtown. Together with the other programs we run, we serve over 6,000 children, youth and families a year in 14 sites across the city.

Due to the income and housing inequality facing our city, many of the families who attend our schools might not live Downtown, but most work here. They are the backbone of Downtown — working families who make Downtown run. They may not live in the new high-rises but they are the construction workers building the high-rises and the staff who run the buildings. They are the garment workers and produce workers who create our clothes and bring food to our city. Our families work tirelessly to ensure that their children have what they need to be successful.

At our schools, students learn in ways that foster creative problem-solving and innovation while emphasizing literacy and language arts. Parents are encouraged to engage and learn too — we offer leadership development to support students' academic achievement and build the personal strengths to succeed. Families also have options for after-school, with early drop-off and late pick-up available for up to 11 hours a day, so they know children are safe and learning under high-quality care.

Many of our families face great challenges every day — nearly 100% of the families we serve qualify for free and reduced priced lunch, and the average income of the families we serve is less than \$25,000 a year. Yet the students at our Charter Elementary School outperformed all of the LAUSD in math when you look at the latest state test results.

Here's the great thing — these schools are public, free and open to all. We hope everyone recognizes there are high-quality education options for families who spend their time in Downtown Los Angeles.

Drew Furedi is President & Chief Executive Officer of Para Los Niños.

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For more information on our schools, youth centers, or to get involved please visit paralosninos.org today.