

JOHN DE BECK'S  
RESPONSE TO 102 LETTERS  
FROM CONCERNED LINCOLN HIGH STUDENTS

Thank you for your letters telling me about how you felt when you saw the TV interview about Lincoln's performance in last year's API testing. It was clear to me that you care about your school, and were given information from the staff to include in your letter. I hope you all work hard and raise the school performance this year. I am saddened by many of the statements you made about me because I have been to the school more times this year (2) than I have to Point Loma, La Jolla, Mission Bay and other schools in my part of the district. I am on record that the Auditorium needs a massive investment because it isn't ready for any theatrical productions. (How would I know that?)

As to caring about the community, I spent 1/3 of my teaching career at Lincoln and the family names of many of my students may include some of your relatives. The Ragsdales, the Moss's, the Jackson's, the Jones, the Hayes, are some that come to mind. I regularly visit the area now to enjoy the new improvements, but I fondly remember the rolled tacos just up Imperial from the school and I still go the great Barbecue across the street.

The names I was called in the letters you sent included: racist, coward, ignorant, rude, stupid, prejudiced, disrespectful, nasty, mess talker, and others.

You have a right to express your anger and the names you used are forgiven because they are not taken as insults, but evidence of how much you dislike what you think my TV interview did to the school's reputation.

One of you wished me a complete recovery from the stroke I had this year that has limited my visits to schools even in my area. It is true it has affected my visits, but I have yet to find that my visits raise student performance or close achievement gaps..

Please forgive me for being a teacher, but I took the liberty of making a few corrections to spelling and grammar in each letter. I didn't place a grade, but I hope when you get it back that you check out the corrections and the comments I made to each of you. I think you all did a good job of expressing yourself, and congratulate you on the overall quality of the letters. You all will get them back!

Now for the content and information you told me over and over in your letters.. I think many of you got this repetitive material from the Lincoln staff and they are used as excuses for the embarrassing API scores the school earned in its first year of operation that were the basis of my TV interview.

I have to say that the entire Lincoln program was a product of the creative minds of the new principals and key teachers that were given the power to make decisions on how to open the school. The freedom to make these decisions was not withheld by the school board. Yet, many of the things you commonly reported to me as reasons for the low performance of the school were things the

staff chose to do. None of these were brought to the board as problems, In fact, the board was told by Shelia Jackson, and the Lincoln Administration that the school was doing well from the start and no problems were ever brought to the board's attention; for proof you can check our agendas.

So, many times the fact that the school accepted 600 more students than it was built or staffed for, came up in your letters. The decision to take more students was that of the Lincoln High Administrative Leadership including Principal Mel Collins. In fact, your school board representative, Shelia Jackson, used the popularity as evidence that kids were coming back home to their neighborhood.

None of the administrative staff used any available techniques to limit enrollment. They could have used a lottery, or made specific requirements that kept the school to 1,800 students. They did not!

After it became evident that the school would be overcrowded, it was staffed, and the supplies and books were ordered. No one came to the board and said; "We can't do this, we can't handle the crowding; we won't have room for the kids!" It was "all good" as far as the reports to the board were concerned. I suspect staff was overconfident in their ability to make it work. Now, you students tell me that they were wrong! The district should have put you in charge, because the staff just laid low and let the problem go down.

So another common comment in your letters was "The kids came from 77 other schools and many of these schools "cleaned house" and sent a bunch of losers and poor students back to Lincoln. I am surprised that you believe this, because every student had to apply to enter Lincoln, and had to live in your attendance area. Again, staff did nothing to set any standards for admission, including behavior, or credits, or grades. So it was their decision to let these kids back into the area in which they live. Despite what you apparently have been told, there was no forcing them back, it was strictly a choice the students and their parents were permitted to make. Some Lincoln resident kids still remain in other schools, so that is proof that choice was how these kids got back. I can't fault the staff for being open and letting kids back home, but I can't see how they could ignore these kids and their performance elsewhere when they designed the program at Lincoln. How do you know they came from 77 schools unless the staff told you?

Another common comment was that the school didn't do well because it opened with all 4 grades instead of starting a grade at a time. That too was a Lincoln Administrative Staff decision. I remember the discussion about this centered around the idea that the kids who were forced to enroll in other schools when we closed Lincoln, should have the right to return. The newly assigned Lincoln Administrative Leadership made that decision. They shouldn't use their decision as an excuse for not making API. It was their design.

Some of you said that a high percentage of the seniors admitted were unable to graduate because they came with deficiencies and couldn't meet graduation requirements. You gave me the actual numbers, but that information could only have come from the staff. The decision to place them as seniors or to admit them still is a staff decision. This issue even applies to those who were placed in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade program at Lincoln. Even though the board had set a policy that

students who failed most of their 8<sup>th</sup> grade subjects would be retained in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the Lincoln administration paid no attention. Instead, all former 8<sup>th</sup> graders were accepted at Lincoln, and they were far below grade levels even when they enrolled. Staff decided they could help them catch up, but these were the very students that negatively affected the API scores.

Again, admitting all these kids, even with the known overcrowding, was acceptable to the staff. I personally had a discussion with one of these new principals about my concerns before the school opened. She assured me that they saw no problem.

Now we get to another common statement in your letters that I find simply amazing. You say you didn't meet the participation rate for the CASSE because only 85 % of the kids were present for the CASSE test. You stated that they stayed away from school because of the school and community environment. (I include the presence of Gangs at school, as well as your expressed fear of contact with gang bangers on the way to school as your reasons that attendance was so bad.) I fault the staff for not making you feel safe in school, and the community for not making gang activity unacceptable.

I don't deny that there are gangs around the community or in the school as some of you stated, but I see no reason to use that as the reason for not attending school. Even in Compton, which is a far more dangerous community than Lincoln's, the students attend school and the high schools there met more than 10 of the API goals including the attendance goal that Lincoln couldn't manage to meet.

In checking various comparable neighborhoods in LA, Long Beach, and Sacramento, I could not find any High School that missed on EVERY API goal, including attendance. Lincoln missed on all 22 goals.

You say I am wrong about your motivation. I certainly pray that you are right, but on the day I was interviewed on TV, I knew that Lincoln had missed all the API goals set for the school. I still believe the reason was student motivation.

The best evidence I had is the lack of interest in school (MOTIVATION) demonstrated by failing to attend regularly. I hope you saw "Freedom Writers." or "Stand and Deliver," which were evidence that some teachers have found out how to motivate kids just like you. The job of motivation and the resulting achievement these real kids made is the direct result of staff effort. The teachers in these true documentaries were African American, and white. I personally don't accept the concept that there is a cultural difference in ability. I have found some evidence of a cultural difference in motivation and the attendance at your school is part of my evidence. You can't learn if you don't come to school.

So we come to the question some of you raised that the tests are "not made for kids like us!"

This is an interesting and recurring issue. Compton seems to have figured this out because their kids seem to pass them and nearly all the nationally-known Black Colleges and Universities still accept test scores designed in the same

way. I don't know if this is an excuse or someone else has told you to tell me about test biases. I know that there are problems, but many schools in communities just like yours seem to have overcome those issues and succeeded anyway.

I am sorry you believe I demeaned your school. That was never my intent.

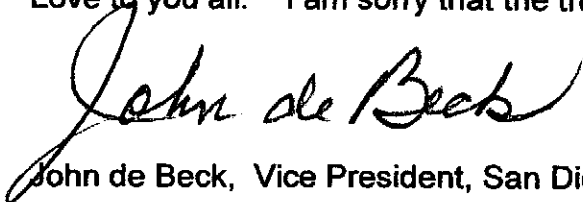
I do believe the Lincoln Administration and staff have to have a wake up call. They can't be given a new 132 million dollar campus, and free reins to design a program and select students to participate, and then use you, or me, to deny the facts of the school's performance. Your letters reflect their defensiveness, and I think they have used the TV interview (probably more than once) to fire you up and divert attention to me from their failed leadership.

Years ago, I remember some folks in your community said the school district was miss-educating our African American Kids. I never want to hear that again! I care enough about all students at Lincoln to use last years (factual) API data to call attention to the need to do better. I answered Rory Devine's TV questions factually and I explained my view that motivation is a problem at the school.

If your teachers are sitting in front of the class and asking you to open the book and learn and not making class work interesting and exciting, then we need some new leadership at your school. You can succeed, but the program must be designed and administered for success. I will not accept Cultural excuses for not making AYP...achievement has nothing to do with race. It has more to do with hard work, study, and keeping focused on the future.

May you all get where you want to go, and be happy and excited about your schooling. My loud voice will celebrate your successes as it did the embarrassing results from Lincoln's last year's API performance.

Love to you all. I am sorry that the truth hurt!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John de Beck". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

John de Beck, Vice President, San Diego Board of Education