

Give Lincoln A Fighting Chance

Even a Broken Clock is Right Twice a Day

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"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela

In 2025, I posted a commentary "Give Lincoln A Fighting Chance" concerned about the turnover in administration leadership. Abraham Lincoln High School, located in southeastern San Diego, has demonstrated significant accomplishments by its students, faculty, and alumni, showcasing excellence and the distinctiveness of Lincoln Proud associated with the institution.

The Lincoln catchment area makes up approximately 10% of southeastern San Diego, encompassing a diverse community of over 144,000 residents. This region is recognized as the birthplace of numerous Major League Baseball and National Basketball Association All-stars, as well as Olympic medal competitors. Lincoln has reached multiple State Championships, including two in football and two in basketball. Additionally, the surrounding area has produced four Heisman Trophy winners. The Lincoln catchment is distinguished by its array of talents, achievements, and contributions to the San Diego community.

So, it was a disappointment when a recent ChatGPT survey named Abraham Lincoln High School as the lowest-performing high school in California. The artificial intelligence (AI) survey evaluated factors such as graduation rates, proficiency in math and English, attendance, and truancy.

It is often tempting to assign blame to others. However, as my mother wisely noted, "every time you point your finger, there are three pointing back at you." So, it is common for individuals to focus on headlines rather than delving into the full narrative.

Despite low test scores, Lincoln has achieved a notable milestone with graduation rates increasing significantly to 85%, surpassing the California average of 83%. And there are several other achievements at Lincoln have not been mentioned by the AI ChatGPT.

Overlook are Lincoln students gaining engineering and programming skills through the school's robotics program. The Lincoln robotics team, "Steel Stingers," advanced to the FIRST Robotics Competition presented by Qualcomm, placing 21st out of 50 teams in its first year. Although only a few teams will progress to the world competition, Lincoln students have demonstrated success in their efforts, despite current educational challenges nationwide.

Not mentioned that Lincoln has established a new partnership with the Educational Cultural Complex offering College and Career Pathways. This collaboration provides students with certification in skilled trades, college credits, and work-ready opportunities in jobs that have an average salary of \$60,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

And beyond the field of dreams Football Coach David Dunn and Basketball Coach Jeff Harper-Harris are dedicated to preparing their student-athletes for college by encouraging them to enroll in college courses during high school and pursue early graduation. Their approach aims to create collegiate pathways that lead to postgraduate degrees, extending academic success beyond athletics.

What is confusing to me is why many parents are making a choice resulting in 10,000 students leaving the catchment seeking “quality” education somewhere else? This misconception has persisted since my high school years over five decades ago.

If schools are considered the social fabric of any community, then southeastern San Diego has stretched this fabric to its limits. The reasons parents are sending their children to schools outside of the community could be as simple as the shameful nature that white communities have it better than mine.

La Jolla, Madison, Mission Bay and Point Loma schools are implementing recruitment programs to attract students starting from elementary grades to sustain their neighborhood schools. If southeastern children did not fill those campuses, they would close. The parents in the Lincoln catchment area appear to be inadvertently contributing to this strategy. It is no surprise these schools may appear more interested in the state and federal funding associated with each student rather than prioritizing the child's well-being or educational success. Those students attending campuses outside of their southeastern neighborhoods' fair no better academically than if they had stayed in the Lincoln catchment.

A key challenge of the Lincoln catchment is establishing strong elementary and middle-grade feeder programs to enhance enrollment. Point Loma cluster parents faced a similar issue with declining middle school enrollments feeding into Point Loma High. They requested a cluster study to explore systemic issues affecting student transitions from elementary to middle school and then to high school. Parents cited concerns about the increase in non-English speakers leading some parents to withdraw their children.

I commend the parents of the Point Loma cluster for their proactive response to concerns about the quality of education their children are receiving. Could the Lincoln catchment benefit from such a study?

I propose that the southeastern San Diego community begin to address and challenge the issues affecting Lincoln. It is important to address the concerns and misconceptions that parents have regarding educational achievement within the Lincoln cluster. Collaborating with parents to develop solutions can help shift perceptions and bolster support for their neighborhood schools. It is essential to ensure that children receive a quality education and do not grow up believing their neighborhoods are inferior to others.

Let us address the issue with the broken clock and repair it. It is time that we all be more than Lincoln Proud.

The National Urban League mantra, “Not alms but opportunity”

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