



ALL these 4 are PhD "candidate" or "students" at UC Berkeley

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# Building schools, rethinking quality? Early lessons from Los Angeles

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Newly designed schools for centuries have projected fresh ideals regarding how children should learn and how human settlements should be organized. But under what conditions can forward-looking architects or education reformers trump the institutionalized practices of teachers or the political-economic constraints found within urban centers? The purpose of this paper is to ask how the designers of newly built schools in Los Angeles – midway into a \$27 billion construction initiative – may help to rethink and discernibly lift educational quality. This may be accomplished via three causal pathways that may unfold in new schools: attracting a new mix of students, recruiting stronger teachers, or raising the motivation and performance of existing teachers and students.

**Design/methodology/approach** – We track basic indicators of student movement and school quality over a five-year period (2002-2007) to understand whether gains do stem from new school construction. Qualitative field work and interviews further illuminate the mechanisms through which new schools may contribute to teacher motivation or student engagement.

**Findings** – Initial evidence shows that many students, previously bussed out of the inner city due to overcrowding, have returned to smaller schools which are staffed by younger and more ethnically diverse teachers, and benefit from slightly smaller classes. Student achievement appears to be higher in new secondary schools that are much smaller in terms of enrollment size, compared with still overcrowded schools.

**Originality/value** – We emphasize the importance of tracking student movement among schools and even across neighborhoods before attributing achievement differences to specific features of new schools, that is, guarding against selection bias. Whether new schools can hold onto, or attract new, middle-class families remains an open empirical question. Future research should also focus on the magnitude and social mechanisms through which new (or renovated) schools may attract varying mixes of students and teachers, and raise achievement.

**Keywords** Schools, School buildings, Students, Design, Architecture, United States of America

**Paper type** Research paper

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AGAIN, casual tone — doesn't reference HERE who is 'Guy Mehula.' So I looked him up. He WAS (until Sep. 2009) head of the L.A. USD Schools Facilities Division, but resigned in protest, and is now (2015ff) Pres.? of Vanir Construction. His salary at LAUSD was, it says \$224K (approaching a Sup. Ct. Judge's salary...) — See Article, and search his name for more info!  
<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/sep/29/local/me-laUSD29>

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Per: Forms 990 (IRS), its own website, and its DCRA.gov filings, the legal entity's name is  
"21st Century School [singular] Fund" not "Twenty-first Century" SchoolS [plural] Fund"