

LAUSD students start a new school year, new curriculum with Common Core

By Rob Kuznia , The Daily Breeze

DailyBreeze.com



LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy talks with a kindergarten class while touring Playa Vista Elementary on the first day of school. Los Angeles August 12, 2014. Brittany Murray — Staff photographer

Port of Los Angeles High School students exit the campus Monday August 11th, 2014. Chuck Bennett — Staff Photographer

For the third consecutive year, school got off to an ultra early start Tuesday at campuses in the Los Angeles Unified School District.



LAUSD launched the early-start calendar three years ago largely to ensure that students can complete their first semester prior to winter break, thereby ending the practice of taking finals after an extended vacation.

LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy kicked off the year with multiple ceremonial appearances at schools throughout the district.

“As with every new school year, we continue to recognize the potential of every student,” Deasy said at Solano Elementary School, the first of eight

appearances. “We have come a long way in achieving our highest graduation rates in history, seeing a dramatic upswing in the number of students taking the Advanced Placement exam, and reducing suspensions by a record amount.”

Deasy added, “We can graduate every single student college-and-career ready. We can say no to dropouts and yes to graduation for all. I’m excited to embark upon — and celebrate — this new school year.”

Tuesday not only marked the first day of school, but also the official beginning of the Common Core standards, which aim to prioritize critical thinking and real-world relevance over rote learning.

The new standards promise to keep schedules “jampacked,” school board member Tamar Galatzan said.

“I’m sure there’s going to be bumps in the road with that implementation,” she said.

Galatzan added that things are looking up for L.A. Unified in the year ahead, with the school system in rebuilding mode in the wake of a five-year streak of shrinking revenues that led to massive budget cuts and diminished programs.

“We’re in a much better budget situation,” Galatzan said. “We’ve been able to reduce some class sizes

and hire some people. They're all great things for kids and teachers."

If the early-start calendar has its academic benefits, some students complain that the middle of August still feels like summer — even seniors at LAUSD who are getting used to the idea.

"It's hot," said Khasey Enriquez, a student at Carson High, while walking home with her friend Ryan Herrera, a fellow senior.

"I just didn't like it because my mind is still on summer," Ryan said. "But I can adjust."

Another Carson High student, sophomore Cierra Gunderson, missed the first day because she is new to the area, having just moved from Orange County, where school typically starts later. She and her mother learned about the start of school when they received a notification phone call from LAUSD. Still, Cierra said she doesn't mind the change of pace.

"I play sports so my summer is always school-oriented in some way," she said, while hustling to the registration office with her mother, Iris Haynes. "So it's fine."

Starting on Monday was Port of Los Angeles High, a 10-year-old charter school in San Pedro. That school made a gradual transition to mid-August, starting with three years ago, when it ditched the post-Labor Day start in favor of a late-August kickoff.

"Really we did it for two reasons," Principal Tom Scotti said. "No. 1, to align our school year more with the community college calendar. ... And by starting the school year early, AP exams are always in May and that never changes. So by starting about three weeks earlier we typically give those kids three weeks of instruction to prepare for that exam more than they would get with a post-Labor Day start."



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