



Dr. Donald Brann: A Life Story Comes Full Circle

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Donald Brann feels right at home at Da Vinci Schools.

The former Wiseburn School District superintendent grew up in the Wiseburn community, was a student on the Da Vinci campus in the mid-1950s when it housed the old Dana Middle School, and now serves as Vice President of Da Vinci Schools Board of Trustees. Wherever he goes, he brings business acumen, innovative ideas, and a knack for relationships with him that he's honed over a 40-year career as an educator.

"It has been a dream come true to return to the community I grew up in and to help others become all they can be,"

Dr. Brann says.

Now 64 years old, the former superintendent brings the same business expertise and entrepreneurial vision to Da Vinci Schools that he brought to the Wiseburn School District, where he created a hybrid public-private school model with high quality programs, services and facilities. When he retired in 2008, Dr. Brann left the district with safe, academically successful schools (three out of four schools are California Distinguished Schools and Dana is on the national Schools To Watch list), three new school buildings, a growing enrollment, supportive community and a funding reserve. He also supported the plan to bring independent charter high schools to Wiseburn, which would offer a high school option for the first time in the K-8 district's 114-year history. After two years of in-depth planning and development, Da Vinci Schools opened in August 2009 with a rigorous, project-based "learn by doing" curriculum and an unprecedented level of commitment and involvement from businesses and education partners in the community.

Those who know Dr. Brann attribute his success to his entrepreneurial spirit, collaborative leadership style, a service-centric approach of under-promising and over-delivering, and a proven ability to make the right choice at the right time.



"You can't throw Don off rhythm," said Dr. Matthew Wunder, Da Vinci Schools' Executive Director. "He is a strategic and disciplined leader with the unique ability to anticipate the future and plan for it."

As Vice President of Da Vinci Schools Board of Trustees, Dr. Brann brings a valuable combination of educational experience, proven management skills, and extensive contacts. He is leading the effort to find a permanent home for Da Vinci Schools. He also serves as mentor to Dr. Wunder, who Dr. Brann says is a "true visionary who brings out the best in me." The two share a close bond.

"Da Vinci's early promise is amazing and I want to guide it so that it will continue to thrive," Dr. Brann said.

Dr. Brann is also known for his dedication to families and for going the extra mile.

Cheryl Cook, a Da Vinci parent who also serves on its Board of Trustees, got to know Dr. Brann in 2006 when, as superintendent, he welcomed dozens of families from Ladera Heights into the Wiseburn district when they were unsuccessful in petitioning the LA County Office of Education to reassign Ladera from the Inglewood Unified School District to Culver City schools. That shrewd strategy turned out to be far-sighted, resulting in an extra \$6,000 per student, per year in state funding (funding to the district has since been cut by \$1,419 per student due to the state's economic crisis). Today, about 42% of Wiseburn's students attend its schools on inter-district permit.

"Dr. Brann is truly motivated by a desire to provide the best educational opportunities for all children," Cook said. "He personally called every new family that came into the district to make sure we were happy. He hosted a luncheon for us (Ladera residents) when we should have thrown him a party. Most people at his level are unapproachable and detached from those who really matter -- the students and their families. Dr. Brann is a person of great integrity, and I feel fortunate to know him," she said.

Dr. Thomas Johnstone, Wiseburn's current superintendent, also has great admiration for Dr. Brann.

"Don was a visionary leader who returned the Wiseburn School District to greatness by turning around an enrollment trend and presiding over a total reconstruction of our schools, transforming them into some of the most beautiful school buildings in all of California," Dr. Johnstone said. "Don loves the Wiseburn community and will do anything to advance the cause here."

Dr. Brann moved to the Wiseburn community in 1953 with his mother after his parents' divorce. He attended Cabrillo and Peter Burnett Elementary Schools, then Dana Middle School. He met his

future wife, Sari, in Algebra 1 at Hawthorne High School, where The Beach Boys were his classmates. An excellent student, he studied business and marketing as an undergraduate, then earned both a master's degree and a doctorate. He was only 35 years old when he started a string of 27 years as superintendent. He served as Wiseburn's superintendent from 1993 to 2008. Today, he and Sari, a retired school library clerk, live in El Segundo.

It takes a lot of energy to keep up with Dr. Brann. He serves as an elected City of El Segundo council member, advises school boards on searches for new superintendents, and is intimately involved in the long-term strategic planning for Da Vinci Schools. He says he'd like to be mayor of El Segundo one day. He has walked more than a 1000 straight days since July 1, 2007.

Dr. Brann describes himself as a reformed perfectionist who still likes to focus on the details. Mostly he likes to look beyond the horizon – to plan and to dream.

"I went into education because I love learning and I love students," Dr. Brann said. "This is my home."