Long Beach Unified School District (A): Change That Leads to Improvement (1992-2002)

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ECPEL 893 – Case Study

Long Beach in the Early 1990s

-One of the most ethnically diverse cities in the nation

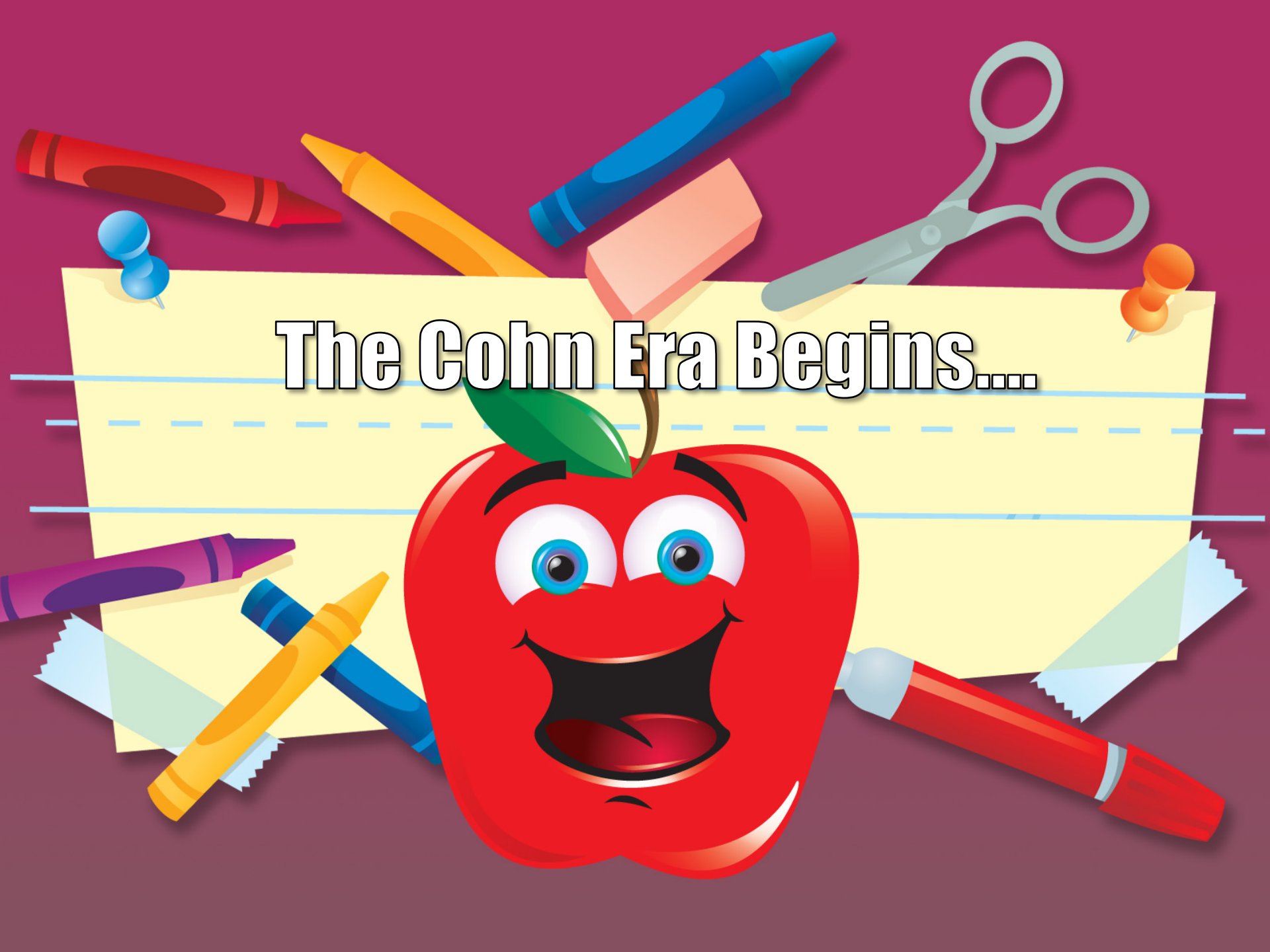
-Many immigrant from Asia and Latin America

-Gang activity on the rise threatens public safety

-”Economic tailspin” due to closing of a US Navy Base and downsizing at McDonnell Douglas

-Students spoke over 46 different languages

The Cohn Era Begins....



Background Information About Carl Cohn

-1st African American appointed as the Superintendent of the LBUSD

-Long Beach native

-Compton High School History Teacher

-LBUSC Counselor

-Worked as an area superintendent in the LBUSD for 2 years prior to his promotion

-Considered “non-traditional” since he had never been a school principal

The Mayor's Task Force

-Address 3 critical areas: Economic Development, Education, and Public Safety

-The Long Beach Educational Partnership

The goal was to "improve the existing system, not create a new one." – C. Cohn

Governance...

Board Membership and History

-5 member Board of Education

-redistricting in 1988 led to the election of 4 new members – the first Latino and African-American

-Cohn's predecessor Tom Giugni eliminated the central curriculum department, giving more responsibilities to the schools

-"Do your own thing" philosophy

-Encouraged competition

-Expectations across the district were inconsistent

A New Approach

-Quarterly retreats instead of semi-monthly meetings with LBUSD senior staff

-90 day Superintendent Review to “get problems out on the table”

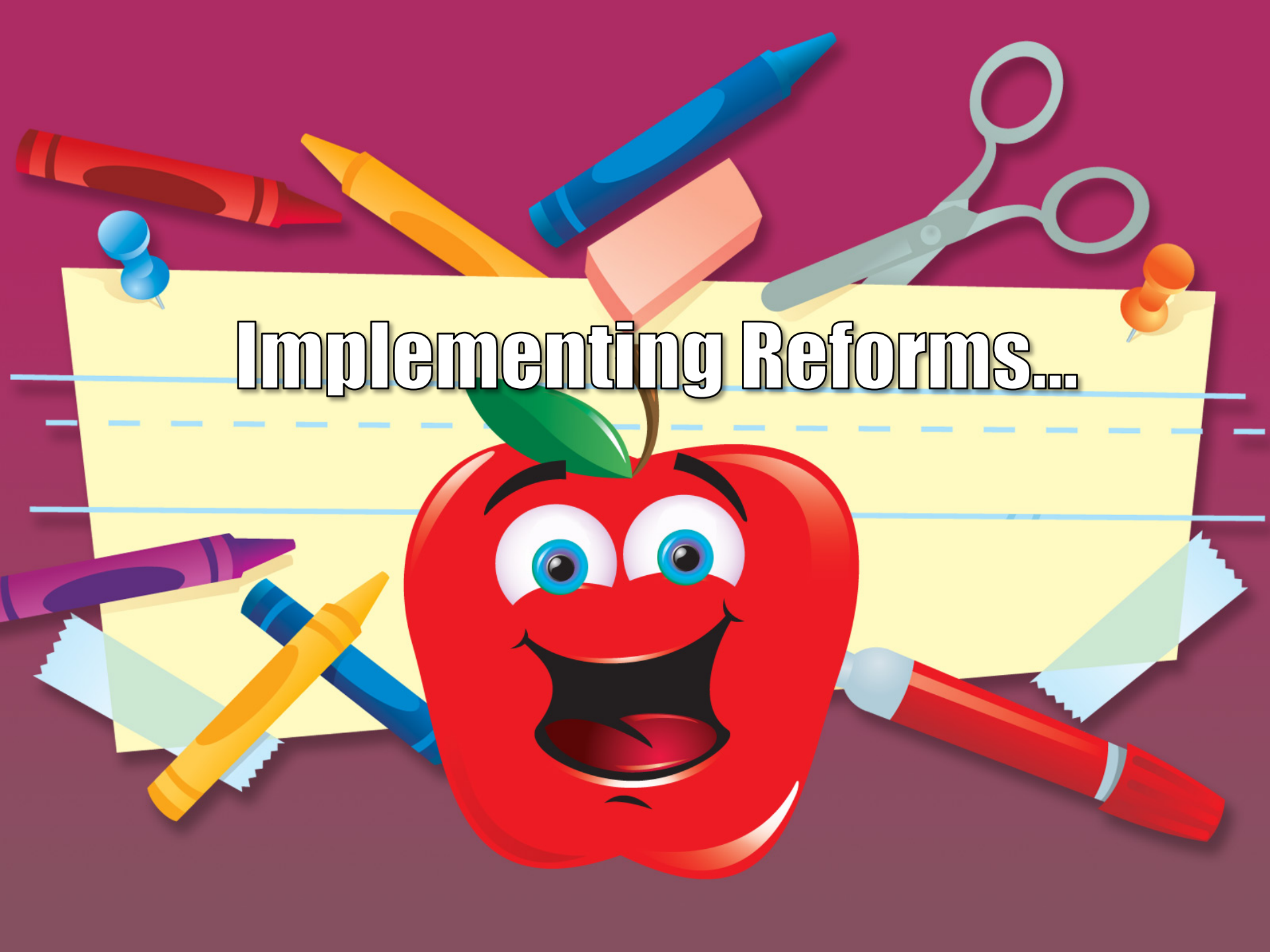
-Set 6-8 goals for Cohn to work on

-Conversations built trust

-The district would focus on 3 initiatives—

Raising standards in dress, behavior, and achievement

Implementing Reforms...



School Uniforms

-1994… implementation of MANDATORY school uniforms for elementary and middle schools

-in response to the district's anti-gang taskforce

-99% compliance by 1998

-students began to earn better grades

-students were better behaved… suspensions dropped 32% during the first year

-reduced absence rate

Standards for Academic Excellence

-1994…"Academic standards were an inevitable and important lever for school improvement."

-2/3 of LBUSD 3rd graders were reading below grade level

-LBUSD High School graduates were entering college without adequate skills in Literacy and Math

-Focus groups to determine what was wanted if a central curriculum was formed

-Consistent support and expectations

-1995 School Year

-Performance Standards, Content Standards, Performance Assessments

-Implementation began in 1996 and were in place for all grade levels by 1998.

Reforming Instruction

K-3 Literacy Initiative

"Every child would read before exiting the 3rd grade."

-Benchmark books to measure progress
-Max. of 20 students per classroom in Grades 1-3
-36 hour Early Literacy Institute professional development for teachers
-Coaches for low performing schools

Middle School Reform

-barred any student from enrolling in HS if they failed more than 1 class
-PD for teachers.. 1 day training modules → subject matter workshops
-Early promotion and and rotation of leaders
-Data driven decision making-curriculum maps, student portfolios, coaching, mentoring, classroom walkthroughs,

High School Initiative

-Not the main focus of reform…bring better prepared students to High School
-Encouraged the HS sites to experiment
-9th graders 2 or more levels behind in reading received intervention including mandatory Summer School and specialized classes

Changing Role of the Central Office...

Research Department

-13 members led by Dr. Lynn Winters

-implemented district-developed end of course exams correlated to state assessments

-Data processing of assessments for the district

-Assisted principals with understanding the massive influx of data now available to them

Special Education Department

-Led by Dr. Judy Elliott

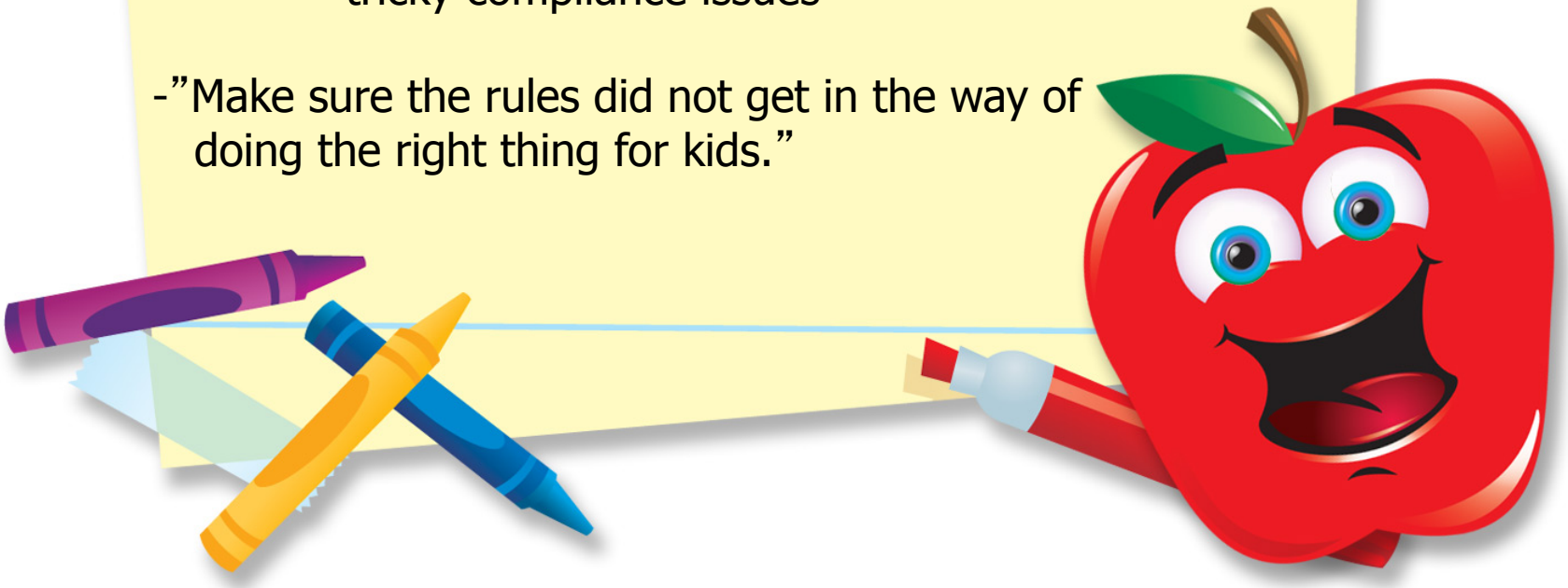
-”education for ALL kids”

-”customer service and responsiveness to site needs”

-distributed cell phones to her administrators so principals could easily reach them

-this helped to build trust and credibility with tricky compliance issues

-”Make sure the rules did not get in the way of doing the right thing for kids.”



Cohn's Philosophy

-"What's best for kids"

-Fostered a system in which one Board member stated "Nobody cares who get credit for good ideas

-Go with your own work style… top-down or bottom-up
"By doing things differently, we could learn from each other."

-Encouraged debate

-Delegated responsibilities and held people accountable

-"Cookies with Carl" open meetings

Cohn's Successor

-Board decided against a national search for a new superintendent

-They wanted continuity

-Christopher Steinhauser was a product of Long Beach

-former LBUSD student

-district Teacher's Aide

-Teacher

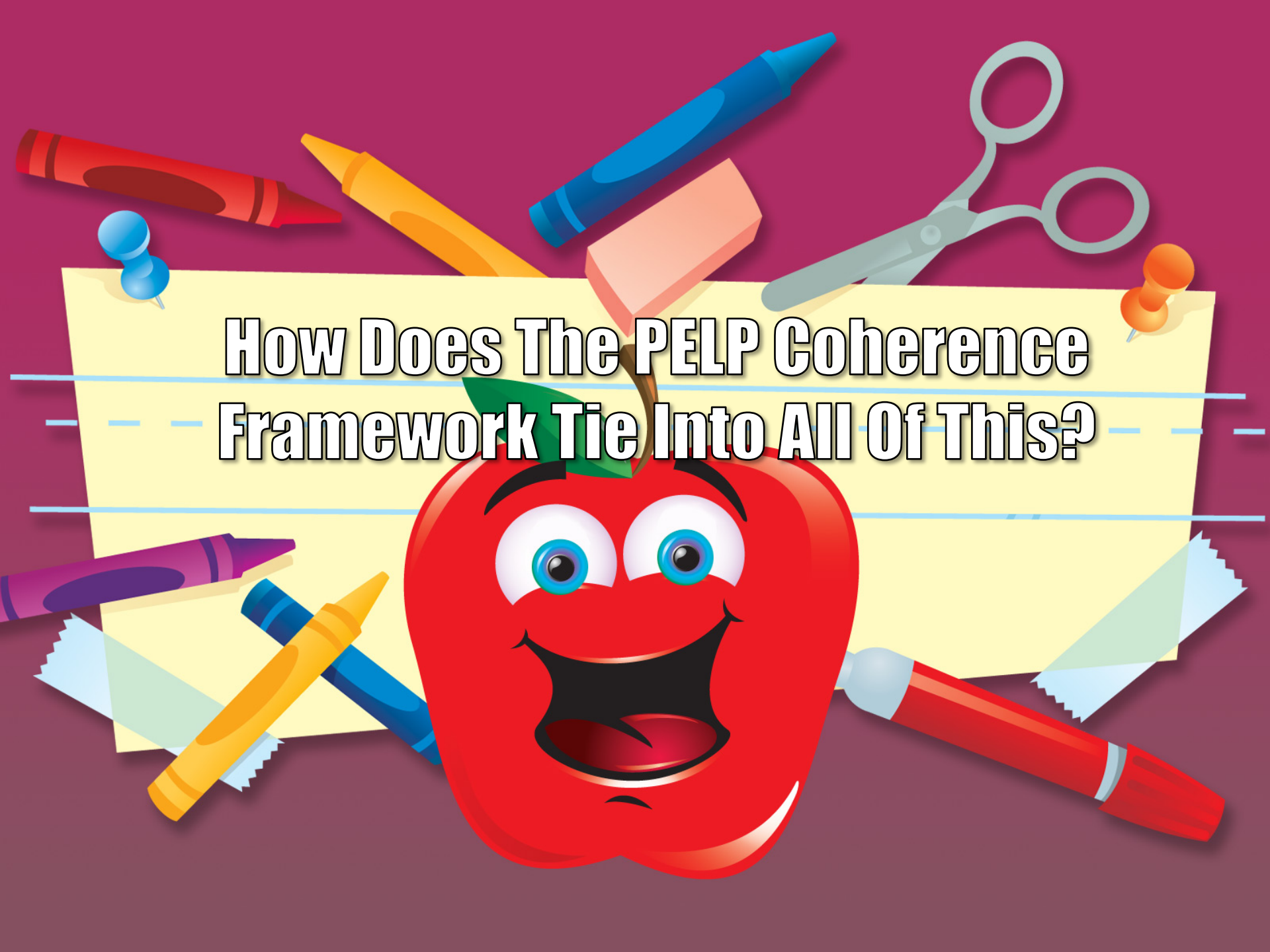
-Principal

-Area Superintendent

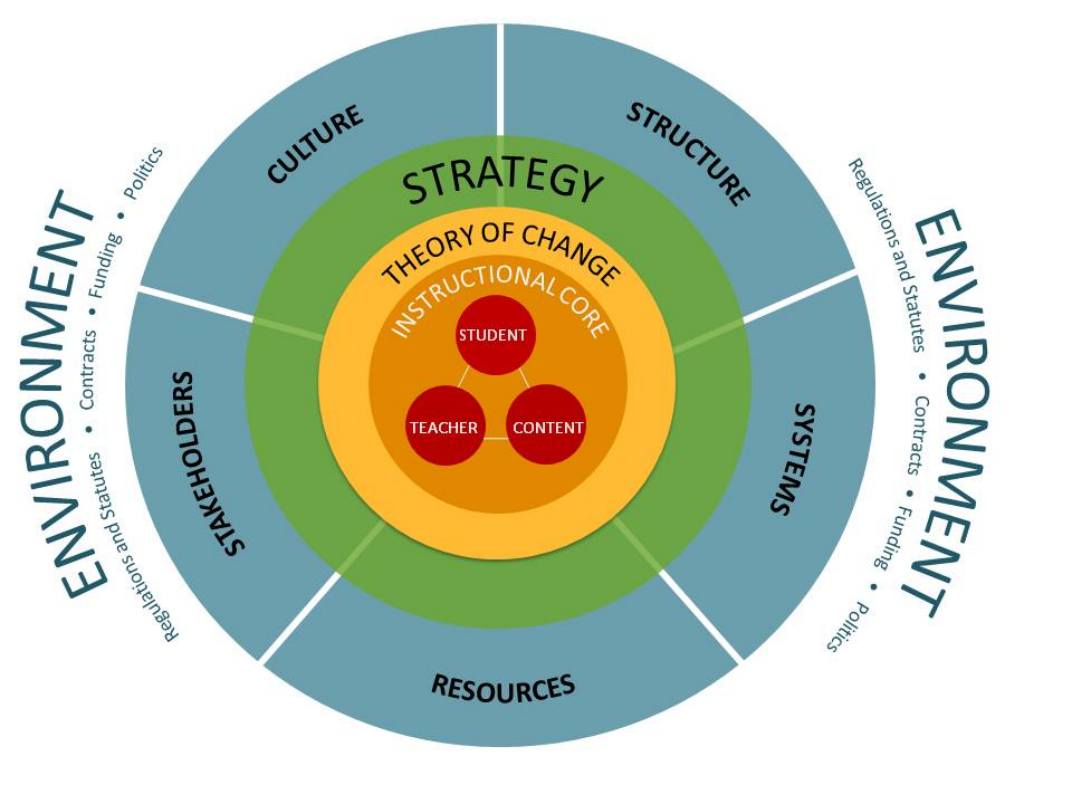
-Central Office Director

-Deputy Superintendent under Cohn

How Does The PELP Coherence Framework Tie Into All Of This?

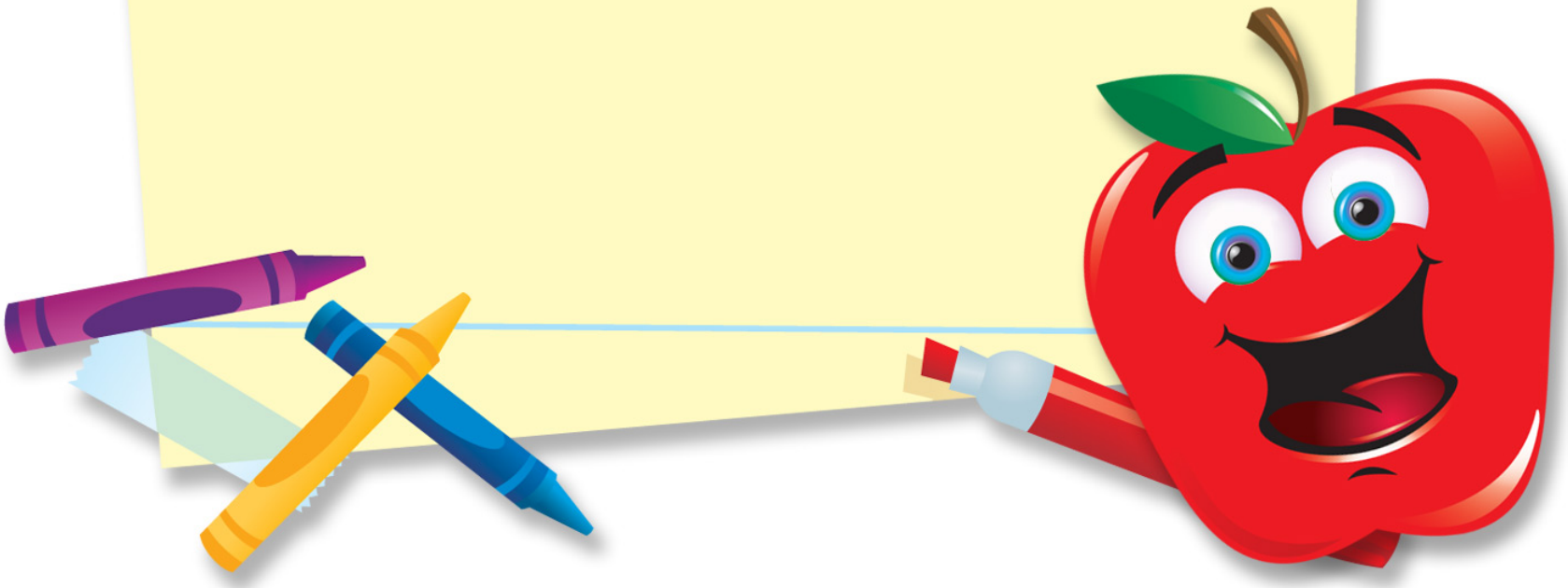


The PELP Coherence Framework



Discussion

-Break into pairs.

-Select one of the reforms implemented during Cohn's era.

-Discuss the challenges that the NYC School System might face or has faced trying to implement this reform.