

*"We want to bring a unified cluster voice  
to the district decision making table."*

November 17, 2009

Subject: Meaningful Cluster Participation in the Budget Decision Process

Dear San Diego Unified School District Board of Education,

Two weeks ago, district staff gave a budget presentation in our cluster asking for additional input from our community members via the districts website's budget crisis forum. While we appreciate the intent of this request, in reality, it is does not represent a meaningful opportunity to participate in the budget decision making process. In fact, in our experience, individual voices are all too often perceived and dismissed as minority factions (i.e. parents supporting a special interest such as athletics/VAPA/GATE/special education/technology/second language, etc.).

If, as the district staff predicts, the budget crisis is going to severely affect our students' learning environment, then we want to go beyond mere input. We want to be part of the group that frames the budget solution for our cluster; we want to bring a unified cluster voice to the district decision making table. Just as the San Diego Education Association is often asked to participate or at least observe the work, now it is time to extend that same opportunity to cluster governing organizations. Granted, seeking cluster-level solutions to district-level problems is a whole new way of thinking for San Diego Unified.

Nevertheless, since 2006 the Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation (PLCSF) has worked to unify its cluster of ten schools. Our strategic plan was developed by a group of cluster staff, parents, teachers and area superintendents to support an engaging and empowering learning environment for more than 6,000 students. Recently, other clusters have taken up similar work. Furthermore, this move towards cluster level governance is an important response to the budget crisis. In fact, it is one of the few strands of silver in an otherwise dark cloud. The work to strengthen the community voice at the cluster level speaks to addressing a critical flaw in the current system. Without meaningful participation by the cluster learning communities, the district lacks the full power of the organization to frame the right questions, let alone propose and implement a long term solution.

Consequently, the PLCSF is asking the Board of Education and the San Diego Unified School District to deliberately engage cluster communities as colleagues in the decision making process and, ultimately, to consider budget control at the cluster level. One size fits all solutions are no longer tolerable. We must do better at addressing the educational needs of our individual diverse communities.

Executive Board  
Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation

**TEN UNIFIED SCHOOLS  
ONE UNIQUE CLUSTER**

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DANA MIDDLE  
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