

# POINT LOMA CLUSTER SCHOOLS IN DIALOGUE: AN EMPOWERED SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK

*Engage • Empower • Educate*

*Point Loma Cluster Schools, through innovative practices and collaborative efforts, will be the model of educational excellence; inspiring passionate life-long learners, critical thinkers, unbounded achievers, and responsible global citizens.*

## BACKGROUND

The Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation (PLCSF) is a group of parents, teachers, and principals from the Point Loma community who convened around the central goal of advancing the cluster into an outstanding, cohesive K-12 environment for the children of Point Loma and San Diego. Grounded in a strategic plan<sup>1</sup>, the PLCSF and the cluster community engaged in a year-long dialogue to consider options for an innovative system of public school governance to better serve the goal of student achievement across all student populations.

### Cluster Quick Facts

- 10 schools
- Over 6,400 students; Grades Kinder-12
- 38% Reside outside of Point Loma
- 15% English Language Learners
- 45% Qualify For Free Lunch
- 67% Proficient in English Language Arts
- 53% Proficient in Math

From this dialogue, key elements emerged that suggest a framework that builds on a charter-school like concept of site-based management, aligns resources within the cluster, and enables schools to tailor core decisions to the needs of the community. These key elements align with research that points to a dramatic relationship between *real decentralization*, or the bottom-up organizational model in which individual schools are empowered to make core decisions, and the success of students.<sup>2</sup>

## KEY ELEMENTS OF EMPOWERED SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK

Our next step in the dialogue process is to craft a revolutionary new **Empowered Schools Agreement** that includes a significant level of decision-making at the cluster level. This agreement will take the district-led Community-Based School Reform Model to the next level and outline the key elements necessary to support a cluster-led Empowered Schools Framework—an innovative, adaptive, sustainable, and accountable learning environment.

**Essential freedoms which include the discretion to control the school budget, curriculum, staffing, and scheduling**

The Point Loma Cluster will work collaboratively to craft an *Empowered Schools Agreement* based on four essential freedoms<sup>2</sup> which include the discretion to control the **school budget, curriculum, staffing, and scheduling**, as well as the cornerstones of **accountability** and **leadership**. Over the next month, cluster stakeholders will provide input into the agreement development as we work to delineate both cluster-level autonomy and increased site-level principal authority in the following areas, among others:

### **Budget**

Control over the budgeting process for the 10 schools and for cluster-wide programs to support cluster learning priorities, align resources, and explore operating efficiencies within the cluster. Additionally, implement a school site-based, benefit-based, budgeting model to effectively account for costs by education function and program and to ensure an equitable allocation of funding from the district.

<sup>1</sup> Point Loma Cluster Council Strategic Plan (2007) accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/PLCSFplan>.

<sup>2</sup> Ouchi, W. (2009). *The secret of TSL: The revolutionary discovery that raises student performance*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

## Staffing

Development of hiring and retention processes tailored to meet the needs of individual schools and to ensure a stable, quality, team of professionals.

## Curriculum

Discretion to work with school staff to adapt district curriculum or develop engaging and relevant curriculum to meet the needs of individual schools and to:

- Provide curricular articulation between the cluster elementary and secondary school;
- Develop and provide complementary professional development aligned with curriculum; and,
- Implement cluster-wide detracking policies.

## Scheduling

Control over the master and daily school calendars, bell times, class times, and professional development days, to support a paced and personalized learning environment and to:

- Allow flexibility for a variety of student learning opportunities, such as internships or project-based classrooms;
- Allow flexibility in staff time for self-reflection, data driven instruction, on-going professional development, staff planning, and collaboration; and,
- Increase the degree of personalization that is possible between teacher and student when a teacher has fewer papers to grade and fewer students to get to know.

## Accountability

Discretion to adapt district assessment measures for all stakeholders (principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents) or develop assessment measures to meet school or cluster needs and to:

- Develop a cluster-level framework for personal accountability;
- Encourage continuous focus on improving instruction and real time assessment in the classroom; and,
- Develop fair evaluation systems and processes to improve teacher and principal effectiveness which includes subjective and objective metrics, year-to-year metrics, as well as peer evaluation.

## Leadership

Cluster approval of area superintendents, principals, cluster-wide budget and metrics officer, and the establishment of a Collaborative Cluster Committee to:

- Provide innovative, stable leadership and enable meaningful decision-making at the cluster and school-site level;
- Identify areas of strategic focus specific to the needs of the cluster and support implementation efforts;
- Strengthen communication pathways among cluster stakeholders; and,
- Formalize a specific governance structure of district staff and cluster stakeholders.

## Collaborative Cluster Committee (CCC) – A Proposed Structure

The CCC will be composed of 11 members; 9 elected by their peers and 2 appointed by the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) board member for our area. The committee will elect 1 of the 2 principals to serve as chair. The term will be 2 years. The CCC will report to the SDUSD Board of Education via the organizational structure in place.

- 2 Principals: 1 high school; 1 elementary/middle
- 3 Teachers: 1 high school; 1 middle; 1 elementary
- 4 Parents: 1 high school; 1 middle; 2 elementary
- 2 At Large: 2 parents appointed by SDUSD Board Member

**Your input is vital.**  
**Join the PLCSF in continuing**  
**the dialogue to create**  
**Empowered Schools**  
**for all students.**

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