

## POINT LOMA CLUSTER SCHOOLS

# A COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

### HISTORY & WHY WE ARE HERE

In 2006, 150 members of the Point Loma Cluster learning community met over several months to develop a vision and strategic plan for the 10 schools in our clusters. Principals, teachers, staff, and parents from all 10 schools identified five strategic areas of importance: Information, Communication and Technology Literacy; Finance; Learning Communities; Learning Environment, and Marketing.

In 2007, the Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation was formed to support the implementation of the strategic plan and a **unified vision of educational excellence**.

From 2007 to 2010, the PLSCF and members of the cluster community worked with some success to implement the strategic plans, but, the success was limited in scope. One hard lesson learned is that, in reality, the Point Loma learning community does not have the decision making authority to fully implement the elements within the strategic plan. While we are an *engaged* Cluster, we are not an *empowered* Cluster. We do not have a seat at the decision making table and, without that authority, we cannot effectively address those issues that impact the 6,400 students attending Point Loma Schools.

### Foremost issues of concern include:

#### Budget

- A fair share of the funding from the district to the cluster-level
- Budget authority for programs and facilities that meet a cluster-wide need (e.g. VAPA, professional development, multi-purpose field)
- Funding that follows the student, particularly the additional funding that goes along with students from socio-economically disadvantages families

#### Staffing

- Closing of small schools in the cluster
- Continuity of cohesive teaching teams at the school-site level
- Flexibility for professional development across school levels
- Class size and the number of students each teacher instructs per day
- Quality teaching teams across all school sites

#### Curriculum

- Alignment of curriculum across elementary, middle, and high schools
- Address tracking issues across elementary, middle, and high school performance streams

#### Scheduling

- Coordination of bell times
- Coordination of busing schedules
- Authority over daily calendars and class time to ensure flexibility for professional development and for programs such as internships and project-based learning

#### Accountability

- All ten schools and all stakeholders accountable for performance that does not meet cluster-wide standards of excellence:
  - Dropout rate: 10%
  - Graduation rate: 89%
  - Four-year university (UC/CSU) eligibility rate: 40%
  - Students at grade level in math: 53%
  - Students at grade level in English language arts: 67%
- Transitional issues for students entering and exiting the cluster, including families from military, charter, private, and outside the cluster.

## Leadership

- Area superintendent selection and retention; turnover reduction
- Principal selection and retention; turnover reduction
- Authority at the school-site level for school-site budgeting, staffing, curriculum, scheduling, accountability
- A cluster-level governance organization with decision making authority to interact with the district

In 2010, a dialogue began in the Point Loma Cluster to ask ourselves how we can move from an engaged learning community to an empowered one. The first step was a Memorandum of Understanding with the school district to look into ways in which the Point Loma Cluster might increase their authority over some of these issues of concern, particularly budgeting. As the dialogue unfolded, two main options were explored for obtaining our increasing authority and ability to impact the foremost issues of concern: 1) cluster-wide charter and 2) a strong cluster governance model.

In 2011, after a year of input from Point Loma stakeholders, an **Empowered Schools Framework draft** was developed as a starting point for framing the first steps towards empowerment and a strong cluster governance model. This framework is being developed to increase our ability at the cluster and at the school-site level to make real decisions that will move us towards our vision of cluster-wide excellence.

## TODAY: A Courageous Conversation

The Empowered Schools Framework is a work in progress. Thus far, input from the learning community has provided three clear points of order for moving forward:

- 1) The six areas of concern (Budget, Staffing, Curriculum, Scheduling, Accountability, and Leadership) are areas that do impact our vision for cluster-wide educational excellence.
- 2) There are two levels of this discussion regarding the areas of concern: one is at the cluster-level and the other at the school site-level. This effort must be designed to promote and support empowerment at both levels. School site empowerment and principal leadership is a priority component to the effort.
- 3) More dialogue is needed at the school site level to re-engage the conversation around the six areas of concern keeping in mind the support of our Strategic Plan.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- 1) Engage further dialogue at the school sites to better understand the Point Loma learning community around the topic of decision making authority at the school and cluster level in the six areas of concern
- 2) Finalize an Empowered Schools Framework to meet the needs of our cluster community
- 3) Present agreed upon Empowered Schools Framework to the school district for approval

Through this courageous conversation, our vision of cluster-wide educational excellence for all students comes into better focus.

### VISION

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

### MISSION

*To inspire in each student a joy of life-long learning and inquiry about one's individuality, community, and the world. As PLC stakeholders, our commitment is to sustain and support the best practices in education that empower each child with knowledge, skills and values necessary to become confident, self-sufficient adults and global citizens. The result is that the PLC of schools is the highest quality option for all students and stakeholders.*