

Problems needing Solution for San Diego Schools.

A Discussion Paper for community review
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EXISTING PROBLEMS:

1. Board has no consistent view (vision for) of what schools should be doing.

Possible Reasons:

The school board turnover is high, and competing special interests elect board majorities who want to assert the views of their supporters. The majority can change in two years, or in 4.

The public does not know what candidates stand for until after they are elected. They have 4 year terms.

Potential Solutions: Brainstorm!

Better interview and selection process for board members. Media coverage and community activism/passivity are important issues. If you get what you don't know, who should you blame?

Redesign the election process to avoid influence of special interests, so that the people in a board district really know candidates. The present system can be dominated by special funding in the November General Election. Maybe elections by Communities of interest such as high school attendance areas (Clusters) ... (Included in Coastal district plan)

2. There is a high turnover of superintendents.

Possible Reasons:

The school board continues to search for a "Savior Superintendent" who has a track record of success in other communities. They do not have any alternative plans for district management.

The school board doesn't have a vision that they can explain to superintendent candidates, so the candidates decide to do what they believe will work and expect the board to go along.

But, San Diego School boards want to mould the superintendent into someone he/she doesn't want to be.

Superintendents are not able to manage all the district affairs effectively, and they use their power to influence subordinates who may be more expert in Finance, Accountability, Law, or Facilities. As a result no warnings about bad decisions are ever brought forward by experts. The last superintendent in San Diego that took this kind of advice was Tom Pazant. He was one of a kind.

Possible Solutions:

Board should identify a specific district vision in advance which would include labor relations, curriculum requirements, integration policies, labor contract views, and any issues that will create potential and historical board/superintendent disagreement, such as priorities for gifted, arts, and graduation/promotion policies, selection of leadership, site governance, and budget emphasis.

The District Organization could be redesigned so that it can moderate community differences in vision, and so it can allow for regional ideas/strategies to compete. (By comparing measurable and desired outcomes).

The organization should provide for consensus and district consistency so that every child has access to the kind of effective program their parents prefer.

The organization may need multiple leaders who, as experts in their field, work directly with the school board and provide a counter balance to the views of a "savior superintendent." When changes in

leadership are needed, the remaining experts would provide stability and continuity. (CEO Option... included in Coastal District plan)

3. Varying Community Interests are not being met by the School District.

Possible Reasons:

No organized way for Community to regularly represent their interests.

No Cluster (Community) decision making process. Everything is decided centrally.

Competition for funds and influence by special regional or special civic interests...(Example is the Schoolbrary.)

Lack of a thorough information-gathering process and priority setting for district as a whole.

Attitudes of Central Office Personnel who have biases toward specific communities.

Belief that the "Rich Folks" can make up the cuts through their "Foundations." Examples; La Jolla, Pool, Turf Fields (Some form of "Robin Hood" belief ?)

Political pressure from all partisan groups.

Winner take all mentality! "To the winner belongs the spoils!"

OTHER CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES WHICH AFFECT LOCAL DECISIONS

Transporting students from one community to another creates needs that are not being met by current policies. These needs require adequate funding.

Current Title I policy puts the financial burden on receiving schools. This condition creates potential conflicts about bussing and the performance of neighborhood schools. Along with the publishing of school performance data, this condition can result in changing support for local schools.

As resources decline, the cost of providing education for non neighborhood students can create unfortunate attitudes in receiving communities..

In the sending neighborhood, the community is concerned about the success of their students in the receiving neighborhood. The receiving community is concerned about dilution of educational quality and remediation taking precedence over accelerated learning.

The resulting tension creates a pressure on both sides to abandon integration as an educational value. Yet studies show that both populations benefit in both attitudes and the ability of students to work together. Test scores are mixed, and create uncertainty.

When minority board members work their community, some propose to abandon integration as a solution for quality education. That justifies taking back the money that Title I guarantees to poverty students (in schools with poverty levels of 40% or more). This means that the receiving schools get the kids, but not the money!

Concentration of the money on kids that stay at home is exactly what the minority board member believes makes them popular. So the pressure is to resegregate public schools!

This may be supporting things that are bad for America in the long run, but doing away with bussing is becoming popular on both sides of the street (Hwy 8).

And the justification used by the elected representatives of poor "sending" communities for keeping Title I funds is that the "rich" communities can afford to set up foundations to enhance their already "better" schools. The perception is understandable and reinforced by well to do communities.

Some clusters (High school areas) want specialized programs and they want them to have continuity from kindergarten to grade 12.

Possible Solutions:

While the receiving communities do use Foundations and other means to continue to provide the services they believe in when they lose public school funding, the purpose is to continue a level of education they support, not to become "better" than others in public education. In fact, the complainants in the San Diego Carlin Case, were white and they had support from others like them that believed a quality education was one that was not separate.

Any plan to improve San Diego City Schools must take the race issue head on. It is the law. For any reorganization to succeed a legal challenge, it must provide for this factor. Therefore, separating the district into North South boundaries is doomed to defeat. An East West division is the only alternative, and since these schools are better integrated than many district schools, the need will be to convince those who decide that the integration effort will continue.

Charters might be considered as a solution to these issues. (but Charter Law specifies the school is the organizational unit. All area schools may become charters with a petition of the teachers of the school. The independence gained does not include a right to facilities, nor does it allow a taxing or bonding authority. Nor does it give the residents priority access to the charters. (Split up districts do) If charters were used as a solution to the issues represented here, then it would also require an unusual agreement between them to become affiliates and sharing funding!

Cluster budgets would allow for full continuity of programs k-12. as well as shared resources in art, music, health, and sports. That option could be attained within the current district governance, except for potential infighting by board members.

A FINAL SOLUTION...Maybe!

Splitting up the San Diego City Schools is another option. It does allow a blank page in establishing rules that cover most all of the

problems listed above. This defined initiative action allows for any or all of the solutions (and others) to be addressed with a new organization.

The decision to act is in the hands of those interested.

FINAL THOUGHT

"What would have happened if the makers of the US constitution looked for places where it was done before?"