

GRANT APPLICATION

Name of organization:

Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation

Project/program name:

Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model

Purpose of project/program:

Develop, propose, and implement a Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget for the Point Loma Cluster of Schools within the San Diego Unified School District.

Amount requested:

\$TBD

Project timeframe (start/end):

Underway - June 30, 2011

Contact Persons (Name/Title):

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Signature of proposing officer: _____ Date _____

POINT LOMA CLUSTER SCHOOLS

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.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Point Loma Cluster consists of 10 public schools located in the Point Loma area of San Diego¹. Part of the San Diego Unified School District, the Cluster employs a unique grade configuration serving over 6,000 students in grades K-12. Seven elementary schools, one 5th-6th lower middle school, one 7th-8th upper middle school, and one 9th-12th high school provide the learning

Cluster Quick Facts

- 10 schools
- Over 6,000 students
- 31% Reside outside of Point Loma
- 16% English Language Learners
- 47% Qualify For Free Lunch
- 67% Proficient in English Language Arts (2009)
- 66% Proficient in Math (2009)

environment for a socioeconomically diverse student population. Nearly 47% of the student population qualifies for the federal Free and Reduced Lunch program. Point Loma Cluster students are local residents as well as students from other parts of San Diego attending through the school district's choice or program improvement enrollment options. Sadly, as is the case throughout the school district and across the state, nearly one-third of Point Loma students are below proficient in math and reading.

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. The PLCSF is working in partnership with the San Diego City Unified School District to develop and implement an innovative system of public school governance that will serve as a model for educational excellence: The Strong Cluster Governance Model.

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The purpose of the Strong Cluster Governance Model is to improve student achievement across all student populations by designing and implementing revolutionary organizational reform at the school cluster level. This model will build on a charter school-like concept of site-based management, align resources within the cluster, enable schools to tailor core decisions to needs of their community, thereby reducing the achievement gap and better preparing our students for the 21st Century and global economy. The result will be a sustainable,

¹ San Diego Unified School District has sixteen school clusters. Each cluster is defined by a senior high school attendance boundary and the local elementary and middle schools that feed into it. The sixteen clusters include: Clairemont, Crawford, Henry, Hoover, Kearny, Lincoln, Madison, Mira Mesa, Mission Bay, Morse, La Jolla, Point Loma, San Diego, Scripps Ranch, Serra, and University City. Charter or atypical schools may also be located within a high school attendance boundary, but are not part of the cluster feeder pattern.

measurable and scalable model for public education that will improve learning environments and outcomes for all students.

In order to successfully develop and implement this model program, the PLCSF anticipates the need to conduct research, consult experts for capacity training and counseling, and develop communications infrastructure, at the total cost of \$TBD. We respectfully ask the Girard Foundation to consider a grant in this amount to assist PLCSF in launching this initiative.

II. BACKGROUND

"Quality public education is the civil rights issue of our generation."

Arnie Duncan,
US Secretary of Education

California Schools are failing in their mission to deliver quality education and equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for higher education and occupational success. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, California's eighth graders have consistently scored below the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for mathematics, reading, science, and writing from 2002 to 2009. The same is true for California fourth graders. Likewise, San Diego Unified School District students scored below the national average in the most recent Nation's Report Card - Trial Urban District Assessment for mathematics, reading, science, and writing. Moreover, a 2000 study by the RAND Corporation concluded that California ranks last in the nation when reading and math scores are compared for students of the same socio-economic categories.

Although previous attempts at school reform spanning the past two decades have failed to produce significant gains in student achievement, new organizational reform strategies promise better results. Emerging research by William Ouchi (2009)² 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. Drawing on a study of 442 schools in eight urban school districts, Ouchi finds a direct correlation between the amount of control that a principal has over the budget and increases in that school's student performance.

A dramatic relationship between real decentralization... and student success

Specifically, Ouchi highlights two key concepts associated with decentralization and improved student outcomes. The first of which, termed *Total Student Load*, is a measure of the degree of intimacy that's possible between teacher and student when a teacher has less papers to grade and less students to get to know. When teachers are able to develop stronger relationships with their students, student performance on federally mandated tests improves.

Secondly, Ouchi identifies *Four Freedoms* that are essential to empowering principals and their schools in decentralization efforts. These critical freedoms include discretion to control the

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

Critical freedoms include discretion to control the school budget, curriculum, staffing and scheduling.

school **budget, curriculum, staffing** and **scheduling**. When principals have these freedoms, they tailor expenses, staffing, and scheduling to fit the needs of their school. In doing so, total student load decreases, paving the way for increased student achievement. In Ouchi's words,

“Every school has a unique collection of students, with different proportions of gifted, special education, arts-oriented, and at-risk students. As a result, each school should have the ability to custom-design a varied curriculum that will reach each and every student.”

While school principals were key players in Ouchi's decentralization success stories, community stakeholders play an equally important role in contributing to a successful school learning environment and student achievement outcomes. Education researcher Catherine Hands (in press)³ suggests that school systems that promote stakeholder engagement have the *“potential to increase the capacity of school governance and decision-making”* and *“to be a reflection of the surrounding communities' needs and values so that the students are equipped to contribute productively to the community in which they live.”* However, she also notes that, *“to be engaged in school governance, families and community members need the skills and opportunities to directly impact decision-making.”*

Families and community members need the skills and opportunities to directly impact decision-making.

Currently, San Diego Unified School District lacks both of these crucial elements in its model of school governance: it operates under a top-down organizational model and lacks a system-wide structure that supports meaningful decision-making and engagement by community stakeholders. The result is a misalignment of programs to the needs of individual learning communities and missed opportunities for shared resources.

To tackle these deficits and improve student performance, the PLCSF is poised to take this transformational next step in public school governance.

To tackle these deficits and improve student performance, the PLCSF is poised to take this transformational next step in public school governance. The PLCSF aims to develop and implement a new model of cluster-wide public school governance – the Strong Cluster Governance Model - one which will build upon a charter school-like concept of site-level management, apply Ouchi's *real decentralization* approach at the cluster level, and incorporate the community capacity training recommended by Hands, in order to bring meaningful decision-making back to the community. To truly align the K-12 programs and resources within the cluster,

³ Hands, C. (in press). *Parent Engagement in School Decision-Making and Governance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

budgetary control must be given to the cluster stakeholders and a governance structure put into place that facilitates that process.

The first step in developing a Strong Cluster Governance Model has already been taken. On January 26, 2010, the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education approved proceeding with the development of a potential cluster governance model including more control over school budgets at the cluster level. Board members are enthusiastic about working in partnership with PLCSF to develop this new model of school governance. Board President Richard Barrera's statement is only one example of the support expressed by the Board at the January 26 meeting: *"I think the work you have done is a terrific example to the rest of the district....thank you for coming in partnership and coming to the board, I support this."*

III. METHOD: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A STRONG CLUSTER GOVERNANCE MODEL IN THE POINT LOMA SCHOOLS CLUSTER

A. The Strong Cluster Governance Model – A Bold New Approach

The PLCSF aims to develop and implement a revolutionary new Strong Cluster Governance Model that includes a significant level of decision-making at the cluster level. This grass-roots developed model will reshape how funds are distributed and used at the cluster level, allowing the cluster to customize spending and learning options to the unique needs of the learning community. These changes will have a direct and substantial effect on student learning. This bold new model will:

- 1) Afford the Cluster discretion to control the budget, curriculum, scheduling, and staffing;
- 2) Enable meaningful decision-making and leadership at the cluster and school-site level;
- 3) Align budgets and resources within the cluster;
- 4) Provide for community /school selection of area superintendent;
- 5) Provide for teacher hiring processes tailored to meet the needs of individual schools;
- 6) Identify areas of strategic focus specific to the needs of the community;
- 7) Support implementation efforts in areas of strategic focus;
- 8) Implement value-added metrics for student and teacher performance;
- 9) Strengthen communication pathways among cluster stakeholders;
- 10) Formalize a specific governance structure of district staff and cluster stakeholders; and
- 11) Serve as a model for other clusters to use in the formulating their own strong governance cluster model.

B. Critical Next Steps

The critical next steps in this process are to:

- 1) Develop a Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal that accomplishes the following:

- a) Affords the Cluster discretion to control the budget, curriculum, scheduling, and staffing;
 - b) Enables meaningful decision-making and leadership at the cluster and school-site level;
 - c) Aligns budgets and resources within the cluster;
 - d) Provides for community /school selection of area superintendent;
 - e) Provides for teacher hiring processes tailored to meet the needs of individual schools;
 - f) Identifies areas of strategic focus specific to the needs of the community;
 - g) Supports implementation efforts in areas of strategic focus;
 - h) Implements value-added metrics for student and teacher performance;
 - i) Strengthens communication pathways among cluster stakeholders;
 - j) Formalizes a specific governance structure of district staff and cluster stakeholders; and
 - k) Serves as a future model for other clusters in formulating cluster governance systems.
- 2) Present the Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal to the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education; and
 - 3) Amend the existing collective bargaining agreement with SDEA to address the specific needs of the Cluster, or negotiate a new agreement with SDEA, as necessary;
 - 4) Implement the Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget, upon Board approval.

C. Short Term Objectives

To accomplish these critical steps, PLCSF has identified the following short-term objectives:

- 1) By May 15, 2010, engage uniquely-qualified expert consultants to conduct capacity training to refine the vision of the Strong Cluster Governance Model and to develop advocacy, implementation, and evaluation strategies. Possible consultants include:
- 2) By May 15, 2010, engage uniquely-qualified expert consultants to assist PLCSF in better understanding school funding mechanisms at the state and school district levels.
- 3) By June 15, 2010, engage uniquely-qualified expert consultants to assist PLCSF in better understanding the collective bargaining process, strategize methods for tackling tough issues raised in collective bargaining agreements, and negotiate a collective bargaining agreements tailored to the unique needs of the cluster.

Possible consultants for short term objectives 1) – 3):

- a. Harry Spence, Ph.D., Harvard University
- b. William Ouchi, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles
- c. Debbie Pusher, Ph.D., University of Toronto
- d. Education Northwest (educationnorthwest.org)

- e. Bridgespan (bridgespan.org)
 - f. Center for Reinventing Public Education (crpe.org)
 - g. Pivot Learning Partners (pivotlearningpartners.org)
- 4) By August 15, 2010, conduct research to identify tools and strategies to create and implement transformational leadership, governance, student engagement, relevancy, metrics, and structure that is sustainable in the Point Loma Cluster.
 - 5) By September 15, 2010, engage legal counsel or qualified experts to 1) draft a Strong Cluster Governance Model proposal, and 2) negotiate an agreement with the Board of Education to implement the Point Loma Cluster Strong Governance Model and Budget program.
 - 6) By November 15, 2010, submit to the San Diego Education Association an agreement to address the specific needs of the Cluster.
 - 7) By December 15, 2010, submit to the Board an agreement to implement the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget program.

IV. OUTCOMES

A. Short Term Outcomes

Successful completion of the short-term objectives discussed above will result in the following outcomes:

- 1) Development of a Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal that affords discretion to control the cluster budget, curriculum, scheduling, and staffing and accomplishes the goals set forth above;
- 2) Presentation of the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal to the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education;
- 3) Ratification of a collective bargaining agreement with SDEA that address the specific needs of the Cluster;
- 4) Ratification by the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education of an agreement to implement the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget as a model program for Point Loma Cluster schools within the San Diego Unified School District.

B. Long Term Outcomes

Successful development and implementation of a Strong Cluster Governance Model in the Point Loma Cluster of schools will result in the following deliverables:

- 1) An increase in the resources available to the Point Loma Cluster of Schools;
- 2) Better shared usage of resources within the Point Loma Cluster of Schools;
- 3) Sustainable improved student performance validation using longitudinal data;
- 4) Better alignment of resources to the needs set forth in the Cluster strategic plan; and
- 5) Reduction of Total Student Load within the Point Loma Cluster Schools.

V. EVALUATION PLAN

A. Evaluation of Short-Term Objectives

Evaluation, in the first instance, will be a determination of whether the following objectives were achieved:

- 1) Development of a Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal that affords discretion to control the cluster budget, curriculum relevancy, scheduling, and staffing, accountability, hiring flexibility and accomplishes the goals set forth above;
- 2) Presentation of the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget proposal to the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education;
- 3) Ratification of a collective bargaining agreement with SDEA that address the specific needs of the Cluster;
- 4) Ratification by the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education of an agreement to implement the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model and Budget as a program for Point Loma Cluster schools within the San Diego Unified School District.

B. Evaluation of Long-Term Goals

At the end of the first year of operation of the Point Loma Strong Cluster Governance Model program, evaluation will consist of comparisons of the use and availability of resources, Total Student Load, and student and teacher performance in Point Loma Cluster schools before and after implementation of the program. Recommendations for additional methods of evaluation will be sought by expert consultants during the planning process, as discussed above.

VI. BUDGET

The total cost for this project is \$TBD, consisting of the following anticipated costs:

- a) Advocacy, Implementation, and Evaluation Strategic Plan: \$TBD
- b) Research consultant: \$TBD
- c) Legal Counsel: \$TBD

The Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation will serve as the fiscal agent for this project, and will be responsible for carrying out the objectives outlined in this proposal.

VII. ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION



In 2006, a group of parents, teachers, and principals from each public school in the Point Loma area engaged in a strategic planning process to develop a unified vision for the Point Loma Cluster. As a result of this process, the Point Loma Cluster Strategic Plan was created with the objectives to improve educational outcomes for our students, enhance the communication and synergy to facilitate an engaging, relevant and cohesive K-12 learning environment. As part of the strategic plan, Point Loma Cluster Schools Foundation (PLCSF) was created.

The PLCSF consists of over 30 board representatives from each cluster school (parent, principal and teacher). The primary objective of the group is to improve the communication between and coordinate the efforts and resources of the cluster schools, thus supporting the development of the cluster into an outstanding, cohesive K-12 environment for the children of Point Loma and San Diego.

To date, the PLCSF has received widespread support and participation not only at the local school level, but also from district staff, the area superintendents, and the area Board of Education member. The grassroots effort of the PLCSF is the first of its kind within the school district and is seen as a design model for other clusters within the district. Now, going into its fourth year of activity, the PLCSF has become a California nonprofit public benefit corporation to further its work.

The PLCSF has five main areas of strategic areas of emphasis in which to direct their efforts: Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) Literacy, Finance, Learning Communities, Learning Environment, and Marketing.

Successful efforts to-date includes:

- Advocacy work with the school district for expansion of career technical education pathways and facilities as well as dual enrollment opportunities for on-line learning and credit recovery
- Articulated program of Mandarin Chinese from Kindergarten to high school
- APEX learning pilot at middle school levels
- Cluster website, calendar, and community blog
- Cluster-wide Go Green! initiative with most schools partnering with Urban Corps for recycling
- Cluster-wide learning community meetings for Special Education, English Learner, and GATE families
- Cluster-wide parent association presidents' meetings and parent learning events
- Cluster-wide principal meetings

- Digital learning enhancement: Libraries to I-Braries; basic digital classrooms and work areas at most schools; and, digital lockers grades 5-12;
- Email communication system to over 5,000 cluster members
- Fifth – twelfth grade science collaboration among teachers
- ICT coordinators at all schools
- School and community traffic safety improvements including crosswalks, warning signage, 3-minute parking zone change, and narrowing of traffic lane

To learn more about our Point Loma Cluster, visit our website at: www.pointlomacluster.com.

TAX EXEMPT STATUS

The PLCSF is a tax-exempt charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. See determination letter attached.