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Santa Monica Malibu Schools

Extraordinary Public Education

July 11, 2008

Mr. P. Lamont Ewell
City Manager, City of Santa Monica
1685 Main St.
Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.458.8301

Dear Mr. Ewell:

Thank you for this opportunity for the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District to provide you with a summary of the District's activities to date and planned future activities to support students with special needs and their families.

On May 15, 2008, the Board of Education voted to approve the development of a multi-year comprehensive plan for special education services, including needed changes to staff, policies and practices, with the goal of creating a culture of collaboration with families and students in special education. The reform plan will address the issues identified in the independent audit performed by Barber & Associates and will be developed using an open and transparent process with opportunities with public participation. Moreover, the plan will be developed under a timetable that reflects the importance and urgency of this matter. We will bring in outside experts as needed to assist us in developing the plan, and we will pay special attention to having administrative staff in place that are committed to creating the culture of collaboration that we need.

In addition, the following critical steps have been or will soon be taken in the interim:

1. Reorganize District Central Office:

The District Central Office has been reorganized, with changes in the duties and responsibilities of the Senior Leadership Team. In particular, the former Deputy Superintendent's responsibilities have been distributed to the Senior Leadership Team with the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) overseeing the operations of the Special Education Services Department. The CAO has been meeting with Department staff regularly and responding to inquiries from school sites and parents. Two special education coordinators have since left the District and two new ones are being hired with SEDAC members serving on the interview committee. One special education coordinator will be concentrating on the effort in developing and implementing District core curriculum with strategies that meet the needs of diverse students and working with school sites in early intervention strategies.

2. Expedite Review of the Special Education Parent/Student Handbook:

This valuable handbook, prepared in collaboration with the Special Education District Advisory Committee (SEDAC), will be released in the fall of 2008 accompanied by parent informational workshops in Santa Monica and Malibu. The District's legal counsel is currently reviewing the Parent/Student Handbook for compliance with the law.

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Board of Education: Oscar de la Torre • José Escarce • Maria Leon-Vazquez • Ralph Mechur • Kelly Pye • Barry Snell • Kathy Wisnicki

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3. Contract with Certified Mediators in Alternative Dispute Resolution:

The District is in the process of contracting with the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Dispute Resolution Center to employ their experienced mediators to assist the District in amicably resolving disagreements regarding special education services.

4. Establish Special Education Design Team:

The concept of a Special Education Design Team was born from a presentation made by the San Ramon Valley Unified School District's PTA and staff in which they described how they improved the culture of their Special Education program as well as the services provided to special education families and students. The role of the Design team, which will include a broad selection of stakeholders, is to assist the District in reviewing the practices of the Special Education Services Department and in guiding the development of the special education reform plan. We are currently preparing a Board agenda item for July 24 in which we will finalize the structure of the Design Team and the process for selecting participants. Staff will be meeting with the consultants from the Claros Group and Arete Consulting and San Ramon Valley USD staff at the end of July to plan for the activities and to develop timelines for the Special Education Design Team.

5. Establish PTA Council Special Education Committee:

Our District's PTA Council is in the process of establishing a Special Education Committee to assist the parents/guardians in meeting the priority objectives of focusing on students; improving communication and collaboration among all stakeholder groups; and working toward real partnership.

6. Enact a Full Moratorium on the Use of Confidentiality Clauses:

On May 15, 2008, the Board of Education voted to place full moratorium on the use of confidentiality clauses. Parents/Guardians, staff and legal counsel have been informed of such policy change. All settlement agreements enacted since then no longer contain any confidentiality clause.

Additionally, Since April 22, 2008, the District has contacted 28 families who have signed settlement agreements with confidentiality clauses subsequent to the June 6, 2007 City Council meeting requesting their approval to have the confidentiality clause lifted from their settlement agreements. During the School Year 2007-08 until April 22, 2008, there were a total of 55 settlement agreements reached, 18 cases were settled via litigation and 37 were settled with District staff. Nine (9) of the 37 were written without confidentiality clauses.

The District sent two letters to the parents/guardians of the remaining 28 settlement agreements, one on April 30, 2008 and another one on May 13, 2008. These two letters asked these parents/guardians to contact the district only if they wish to have the confidentiality clause lifted. The District received 12 written/verbal responses requesting the confidentiality clause be lifted; and one verbally responded to keep the clause in the agreement.

District staff also continues to take an active part in Special Education District Advisory Committee (SEDAC) meetings and in the newly formed PTA Council Special Education Committee.

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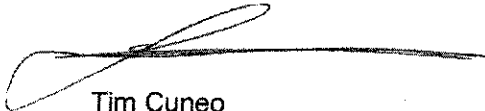
The District is working towards hiring a Special Needs Liaison to serve as a neutral resource to parents and District staff in support of the District's special education program. SEDAC has been working with the Superintendent's Office and the Chief Academic Officer to develop a job description for the position of a Special Needs Liaison. The District is also beginning to seek

consultants to assist us in the effective and efficient operation of the Special Education Services Department and in the development of a comprehensive plan.

We hope the City of Santa Monica will recognize that the District is committed to improving the delivery of services to students with special needs, and that we are putting the pieces in place that will enable us to develop a comprehensive special education plan to meet the needs of special education families and students. Therefore, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District is formally requesting the release of the withheld \$529,779.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Tim Cuneo
Interim Superintendent

Copy to: Board of Education Members
Dr. Chiung-Sally Chou, Chief Academic Officer