



# Santa Monica Malibu Schools

Extraordinary Public Education

January 5, 2009

Mayor Ken Genser  
City of Santa Monica  
1685 Main St.  
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Dear Mayor Genser:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the City Council with a summary of the actions taken by the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) in response to Council motions of May 24 and June 12, 2007 to place approximately \$530,000 in a reserve account until the school district has taken positive steps towards resolving Special Education issues and to request the release of these dollars.

In summary, the District initiated an independent review of its special education policies and practices. Following this review, the District hired an independent facilitator to reaffirm the key issues within the report with staff, parents and community members and provide the District with recommendations to address these issues. The following are the chronological actions taken by the District.

1. The Board of Education, on May 15, 2008, voted to approve a contract with Barber and Associates to provide a review of the district's Special Education policies and practices. As a result of this review, twenty-seven recommendations were submitted to the Board for consideration. The Board at that time directed then Superintendent Dianne Talarico to immediately address some of the major concerns expressed by parents and the community and implement the recommendations. Twenty-six of the recommendations have been fully or partially implemented. One will not be implemented at this time due to budgetary constraints.
2. As part of implementing the recommendations, Interim Superintendent Cuneo sought out the group that assisted San Ramon Valley Unified School District in resolving their similar special education challenges. On September 4, 2008, Interim Superintendent Cuneo recommended and the Board approved a contract with the Claros Group to assist in the development of a process to address the special education issues and facilitate in the development of an action plan. Four key areas to address were identified through interviews of special and general education parents, Board Members, special and general education staff, school principals and, district administration: the IEP process, roles and expectations of the key stakeholders, capacity building, and communications.

As a result of the work referenced above, the District has taken the following actions:

- **Confidentiality clauses:** Settlement agreements no longer contain confidentiality clauses unless requested by parents or required by legal actions.
- **District Special Education staffing:** The Special Education Department is now under the supervision of the Chief Academic Officer, a member of the senior cabinet. Members of the department have also evolved by attrition.
- **Individual Educational Plan:** The process for the development of an IEP has been reviewed, modified and published in the Special Education Parent Handbook. The

## Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District

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**Board of Education:** Ben Allen • Oscar de la Torre • José Escarce • Maria Leon-Vazquez • Ralph Mechur • Kelly Pye • Barry Snell  
Tim Cuneo, Superintendent of Schools

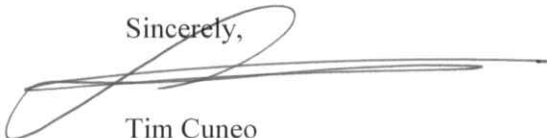
District established an evaluation instrument that is used after each IEP meeting and is collecting data from all participants. This data will be used to evaluate the process and make changes as appropriate.

- **Parent Handbook:** In collaboration with the SEDAC (Special Education District Advisory Committee), the District Special Education staff and the Chief Academic Officer, the District published the Special Education Parent Handbook in English and Spanish. This handbook serves as a guide to parents to assist them in understanding Special Education services and programs.
- **Special Education Forum:** In collaboration with the SMMUSD PTA Council Special Education Committee, a Special Education Forum was held on November 15 to introduce the Special Education Parent Handbook. The forum was attended by over 150 parents, community members and staff. The District Special Education and Educational Services Departments staff with the PTA Council Special Education Committee are currently designing a Spring Forum based on the results of a parent needs survey conducted early this year.
- **Special Education Parent Network:** Developed in partnership with the SMMUSD PTA Council Special Education Committee, the Special Education Parent Resource Network is designed to provide resources and support to Special Education parents at individual school sites. Two-day training was provided for parent volunteers, principals and special education staff. Starting early February, the program will be piloted at SAMOHI, John Adams Middle School, Lincoln Middle School, Grant Elementary School and Cabrillo Elementary School. Once evaluated, it will then be introduced at additional sites in the district over the course of this year. It is the design that every school in the District will have the resources and support to parents regarding special education services.
- **Special Education Collaborative Group:** In October 2008 the superintendent established the Special Education Collaborative Group, a sixteen member task force comprised of eight parents and eight staff members. The Group is charged with reviewing past reports/studies and recommending strategies that will strengthen the quality and climate of Special Education throughout the district. The Collaborative Group will complete its work and provide a report to the Superintendent in early February. They will also present their report to the Board at one of their regular meetings.

Through the leadership of the SMMUSD Board of Education, the collaborative efforts of the SEDAC, PTA and District staff, and the literally thousands of hours contributed by parents and staff, I am proud to say that we have addressed the requests by the Council as it relates to Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Special Education services.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the Council take action to release the funds held in reserve as a result of the motions of May 24, and June 12, 2007.

Sincerely,



Tim Cuneo  
Interim Superintendent

CC: Lamont Ewell, City Manager  
SMMUSD Board of Education