

“COLLEGE READINESS FOR ALL- GATEWAY TO OUR STUDENTS’ FUTURE” ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT’S ACCOMPLISHMENT

INTRODUCTION

In the process of evaluating the concept of “Free Education” and “Quality Education” for all students, the 2011/2012 San Diego County Grand Jury became aware of the success and awards that Poway Unified School District (PUSD) has earned over the past several years. In particular, the United States Department of Education named one of the District’s elementary schools as a 2011 Blue Ribbon School. Los Penasquitos Elementary (Los Pen) received this award as a part of a larger Department of Education effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about the best school leadership and teaching practices.

Each year since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education has sought out schools where students attain and maintain high academic goals. This is the second time that Los Pen has been recognized as a Blue Ribbon School, joining fifteen other Poway schools that have received this top honor in the past.

In order to understand the significance of this award the Grand Jury decided to explore the efforts and education philosophy of the school and the district by meeting with administration, staff, teachers and students to learn more about the accomplishments of Los Pen and PUSD.

PROCEDURE

The Grand Jury toured Los Pen and met with staff, teachers and students and witnessed firsthand the concept and philosophy of PUSD and its educational program. Additionally, the Grand Jury interviewed senior PUSD administrators, Poway Federation of Teachers (PFT) staff, reviewed historical data, examined teaching materials and studied background information.

DISCUSSION

The question “What is a quality education?” has been the subject of numerous reports and studies. The Grand Jury focused on Poway Unified School District’s “Strategic Vision”¹ which is “College Readiness for All—Gateway to our Students’ Future.”²

“Serving as the gateway to our students’ future, we will open, not restrict, the range of opportunities and choices and prepare them for success as they pursue their interests and passions upon graduation”³ is the District’s philosophy. Every student without excuse and without exception will be proficient or advanced in reading, language arts, and math.

The Los Pen staff, as well as those of the other 37 schools in the district, has made the following pledge: “We are committed to creating a school that knows no limits to the academic success of each student.”⁴

¹ Poway Unified School District Strategic Vision 2008-2014

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Garden Road Elementary School Newsletter, January 26, 2012

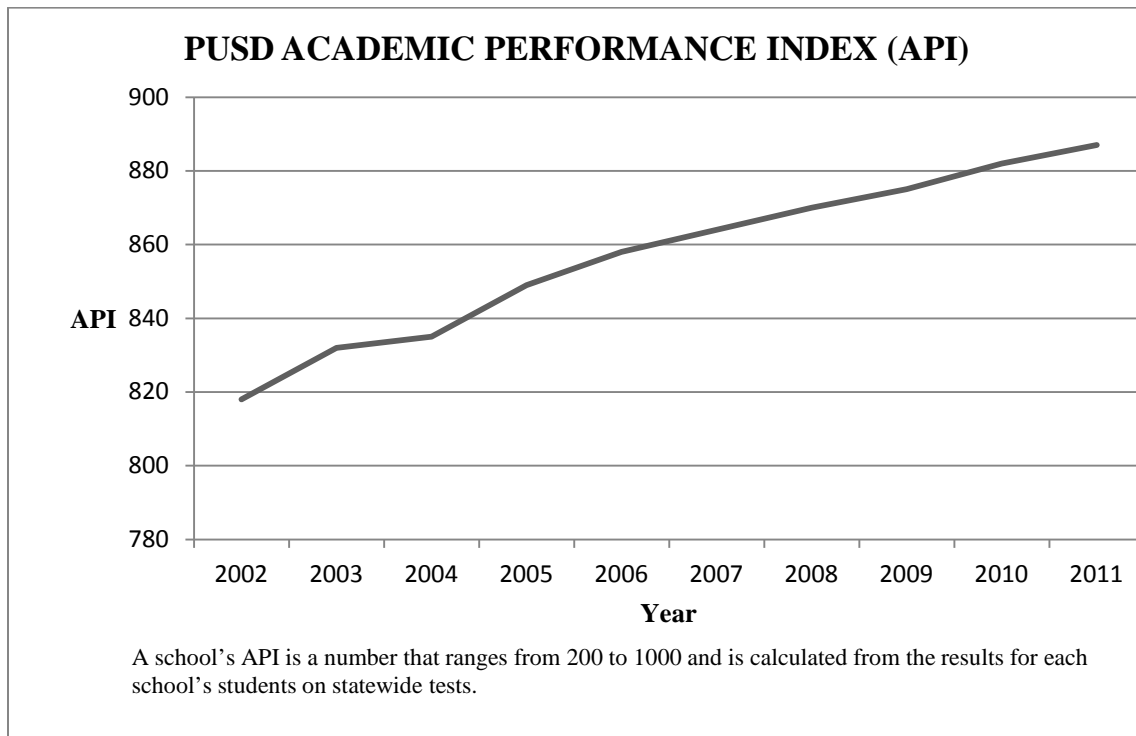
While the Grand Jury appreciated the honor of the National Blue Ribbon Award presented to Los Pen, it was also evident the overall philosophy and strategic vision of the PUSD needs to be commended. The Board, administration, staff, and teachers truly believe the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and habits of mind that prepare a student for success in college are the same skills needed to pursue post-secondary education/training or success in the workplace. They also state, “We need to think Pre-K-16, recognizing that our task is not simply to get students into college or other post-secondary education/training, but rather to prepare them for success following high school graduation.”⁵ The majority of Poway Unified Schools currently use key aspects of the “No Excuses University Program.”⁶ Key administration staff told the Grand Jury they have a goal to have all schools in the district use the program in the near future.

PUSD and the Poway Federation of Teachers (PFT) established a unique system where they jointly make recommendations whether or not to retain their new teachers in the Poway Professional Assistance Program (PAP).⁷ Additionally, PUSD/PFT has a Peer Assistance and Review Program that includes:

- Multiple accountability measures,
- Support when teachers fail to meet those measures,
- Ensuring that administration is well-trained in evaluation and working with others, and
- The ability to move those who do not improve in a timely manner out of the profession, while retaining due process.⁸

Poway Unified School District’s significant accomplishments for the past ten years include:

- The District increased API scores every year for the past ten years



⁵ Senior Administrator, Poway Unified School District

⁶ <http://turnaroundschools.com>

⁷ Poway Federation of Teachers, <http://powayteachers.org>

⁸ Ibid

- Twenty-one PUSD schools exceeded API of 900 (Index; target is 800);
- Percentage of students scoring “Proficient” or “Advanced” at the elementary, middle and high school levels has increased in all academic areas;
- Percentage of graduates completing the college entrance requirements has increased from 51.7% to 69%;
- Participation in one or more AP (Advanced Placement) classes has risen from 29% in 2003 to 61% in 2011;
- In 2010/2011, 99.99% of seniors (all but 5 seniors) who had sufficient course credits toward graduation passed the California High School Exit Examination;
- At 2.4% Poway has the lowest dropout percentage in the county, based on the most recent data from the California Department of Education, 2010/2011; and
- Overall—The District has seen steady growth in targeted academic measurements.⁹

COMMENDATION

The 2011/2012 San Diego County Grand Jury commends Poway Unified School District for the numerous accomplishments they have obtained in their history, particularly the last ten years and the fact that this year Los Penasquitos Elementary School has received the National Blue Ribbon Award a second time. Quality education is manifested in the American philosophy of education. PUSD has a genuine and successful plan with their “Strategic Vision 2008-2014.” The Blue Ribbon Award (the highest honor for our nation’s schools) represents the total commitment, caring, sense of community and academic achievement at Los Pen that exists every day.

The ability of the administration and the Poway Federation of Teachers to work together to ensure that only the best and most qualified teachers are employed and remain in the Poway school system is a program that could be a model for other school districts. PUSD’s capacity to include the students, parents, teachers, staff, administration, union, and the school board in the commitment to provide a quality education is superb.

PUSD’s College Readiness Progress statistics for the past ten years and the overall steady growth in all of their targeted academic measurements are a testament to their successful “Strategic Vision.” “College Readiness for all—Gateway to our Students’ Future” is a major success—specifically “Quality Education.” To this fact—the Grand Jury commends everyone associated with the Poway Unified School District.

Filed: June 5, 2012

⁹ PUSD supplied data