



Sacramento City Unified School District
5735 47th Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95824
916.643.9040
916.643.9049 FAX

News Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2008

Contacts: Maria L. Lopez (916) 643-9043 or (916) 752-3705
Kate Fisher: (916) 231-5333, Ext. 19 or (916) 730-9440

In 2002, high school students in the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) attended five comprehensive sites—some with enrollments of 2,700; 2,600 or 2,400—or they might attend one of two alternative programs. They were graduating at a rate of slightly more than 76 percent. First time passage rate for 10th graders of the California High School Exit Exam English Language Arts and math was 68 percent in 2003.

Today, the District's nearly 14,000 high school pupils have 42 options from which to choose. They may attend one of the 36 Small Learning Communities (SLCs) within the six comprehensive high schools or one of six, soon to be seven, small theme-based high schools. None of the campuses has more than 2,250 students, even though more high school students are enrolled district wide. In 2005-06, despite increased graduation requirements and greater enrollment, 86.8 percent of the District's youth graduated. In 2006-07, 73 percent of 10th graders passed the exit exam's English Language Arts, and 74 percent of 10th graders passed the math portion.

The changes—which affected every student in each of the high schools—occurred after implementation of the e21 Students First High School Redesign Initiative launched in 2003 after three years of planning with the assistance of local partner, LEED-Linking Education and Economic Development (LEED), and more than \$12 million in grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Sac City was one of seven school systems selected by the two philanthropic organizations to better prepare youth for the 21st Century.

On Friday, April 11 District and LEED officials will release “Education for the 21st Century (e21) High School Redesign Initiative: Report to the Community 2002-2007 and Beyond” at a 10:30 a.m. news conference in the Luther Burbank High School Library. Burbank is located at 3500 Florin Road. They will be joined by Mayor Heather Fargo and school teams of students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members.

Superintendent M. Magdalena Carrillo Mejia, Ph.D. said the initiative was about increasing the number of graduates and much more; it is also focused on success after graduation by preparing students to meet the rapidly changing skills required for thriving in the new century. “Our students are living in a global community. They can enjoy communication with people all over the world via new technologies. They will compete for jobs regionally, and globally. They will need to work well with others, be able to adapt to change, and contribute to their communities,” Dr. Mejia said. “The redesign of our high schools was a major collaborative effort that resulted in more of the positive outcomes we

-MORE: Page 1 of 3-

want for students to prepare them for bright futures: more rigorous academic skills, leadership development, stronger community relationships, and the creation of more options when they enter high school and after they graduate.”

LEED Chief Executive Officer David Butler said, “The major role of schools is to equip all students with the education and skills needed to compete and succeed in the 21st Century and the SCUSD high school redesign initiative is doing just that.” He added, “Transformational change truly takes root when an initiative survives and thrives despite changes in leadership, staff, and partners.”

High school design built around seven essential elements determined by stakeholders

SCUSD adopted seven “essential elements” in redesigning each school and then created two basic structures: SLCs at large comprehensive schools and small high schools with enrollments of 500 or fewer pupils. At the core of the redesign, the District focused on rigor, relevance and relationships. Under this new set of “three R’s,” the seven essential elements that guided the District’s plan are small, caring, personalized learning communities; student-centered systems with supports and safety nets; pathways to the world of work and post-secondary education; rigorous, relevant, standards-driven teaching and learning; a culture of continuous learning; collective responsibility; and home-school-community alliances. The seven essential elements and the smaller learning structures were determined by public planning meetings that began in October 2000. The District conducted a series of town hall meetings, a conference attended by more than 500 students, monthly school meeting and bi-monthly team meetings, all open to the public. The town halls gatherings were conducted on a Saturday in three locations for the convenience of working parents. The half-day events included brainstorming sessions, question and answer segments and background presentations. Several schools also conducted additional town hall meetings targeting non-English speaking parents. Newsletters were also distributed to parents, students, and other interested parties.

National model in career and technical education

In adhering to these elements, Sac City’s redesign resulted in the progress and changes noted, but also in creating common planning time for teachers and administrators which allows site educators to meet together to discuss student data, engage in staff development, and share information about their pupils and school. Sac City has also become a national model in career and technical preparation education (CTE). Almost every student participates in a career or technical pathway, contrary to what is occurring in districts both nationally and in the state. Sac City has increased its CTE classes by almost 25 percent over the past five years, and students may select classes from five fields: arts, media and entertainment; business and information technology; health; human and public service; and engineering and industrial technology. Through an entrepreneurial model, one District staff person, an entrepreneur recruited from business and industry, works with high school faculty and students to determine needs. The entrepreneur then works to create connections with business partners to site meet needs.

Personalizing the high school experience to engage students resulted in instructional changes and greater community engagement as the District reached out to offer students more opportunities with mentors, work and community service opportunities. New “student voice” opportunities were

created for students to develop leadership skills and participate in school and District governance.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell praised the District for its progress and innovation. "The Sacramento City Unified School District has created a model for public schools working with community and foundation partners to create options for successful learning," O'Connell said. "The District's high school reform plan is sensitive to the diverse needs of a diverse student population. It also addresses the need to connect to students with rigorous courses, relevant learning opportunities, and relationships with adults who care about their future. I applaud the District for producing their report and implementing its recommendations that will lead to future student success."

Lessons learned and challenges

In addition to successes, the report also cites "lessons learned" that include investing time to engage all stakeholders, creating multiple opportunities for student and staff learning, prioritizing communication and recognizing the complexity and importance of facilities.

An ongoing challenge is California's education funding. The District's ability to maintain common planning for teachers and provide additional counseling services that have increased graduation rates, increased first time passage of the California High School Exit Exam and enhanced teacher collaboration are all dependent on adequate funding.

"We are pioneers in the national call to redesign our high schools, and our mantra has been continuous learning, continuous improvement. We began implementation of our redesign in the fall of 2003. As we near completion of our fifth year of implementation, I'm proud of our progress and proud of the greater personalization and engagement of our students and community," Dr. Mejia said. "Our high school redesign has made a difference in the lives of our students and the fabric of our community. We need to ensure its sustainability."

The "Education for the 21st Century (e21) High School Redesign Initiative: Report to the Community 2002-2007 and Beyond" and Executive Summary will be available on the District website (www.scusd.edu) after 1 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. Copies may also be obtained by calling the District Communications Office at (916) 643-9043.

###