

**Sacramento
City Unified
School District
*Media Release***



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For Immediate Release

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Rosa Parks Middle School Targeted For Turnaround as Seventh ‘Priority School’

March 17, 2011 (Sacramento) – Rosa Parks Middle School has been named Sacramento’s seventh Superintendent’s Priority School, expanding SCUSD’s bold school improvement effort that is already seeing positive results on six other campuses, Superintendent Jonathan Raymond announced Thursday.

As a Priority School, Rosa Parks will get extra resources and innovations to boost learning through improved teaching, engaging curriculum and strong family and community connections.

Superintendent Raymond created the Priority Schools program last spring to improve low-performing schools through the use of proven strategies for raising student achievement. Already, principals at the six original Priority Schools report better attendance, greater family participation, fewer suspensions and generally happier students, which they attribute to a better learning environment.

“Rosa Parks has tremendous potential to be the kind of campus where every student enjoys coming to class every day because they know they’re going to learn something meaningful that will help them achieve their dreams,” said Superintendent Raymond. “Our Priority Schools are great examples of what can happen when a determined principal, an energized faculty and a caring community get the support they need.”

Superintendent Raymond took the first step in Rosa Parks’ turnaround on Wednesday by naming John Sloat Elementary School Principal Robert Sullivan to lead the middle school next year. Sullivan has a successful track record of improving student learning, narrowing achievement gaps and forging relationships with students, staff and parents.

“It all starts with leadership and building a vision for this community,” Superintendent Raymond said. “I want our leaders to take risks for kids.”

Sullivan began with SCUSD at age 17, when he landed a job as a custodian at Tahoe Elementary to help pay for college, eventually working his way up to instructional aide and then teacher. He was an assistant principal at John Still K-8 School until taking over as principal at John Sloat seven years ago.

Under Sullivan's tenure at John Sloat, student test scores have risen dramatically. The school improved its Academic Performance Index (API) base from 664 in 2005 to 761 in 2009 – a 97-point gain. John Sloat is ranked 9 out of 10 on the API scale when compared to similar schools. In 2005-06, 39.7 percent of students achieved proficiency on the California Standards Tests in math. In 2009-10, that grew to 61.2 percent. In 2009-10, Hispanic student scores rose a remarkable 38 points.

Sullivan will remain at John Sloat for the rest of this school year. The district is now meeting with the John Sloat community to begin the process for finding his replacement.

The decision to include Rosa Parks in the Priority Schools program was made after weighing several factors, including student academic performance. The middle school, which serves about 475 students, dropped 33 points on the API scale last year. With an API of 624, it has the lowest student tests scores of any middle school in SCUSD. The school has also struggled to close achievement gaps. Scores for African American students plummeted 57 points last year; scores for students with disabilities fell 39 points. The school is in its fifth year of Program Improvement status.

Superintendent Raymond emphasized that funding for Rosa Parks' addition to the Priority School program will come from so-called "categorical" funds – money from the federal government earmarked for high-poverty schools. At Rosa Parks, 100 percent of students qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch, the federal poverty threshold. Because the Priority Schools are funded categorically, Rosa Parks' inclusion will have no effect on the district's anticipated budget deficit of \$22.35 million – the projected shortfall if current temporary taxes are not extended by voters.

The Superintendent's Priority Schools Program is a centerpiece of SCUSD's *Strategic Plan 2010-2014: Putting Children First*. As "incubators of innovation," Priority Schools are piloting research-based, successful instructional strategies and curriculum to be replicated later on other SCUSD campuses. The district's other Priority Schools are: Father Keith B. Kenny Elementary, Jedediah Smith Elementary, Oak Ridge Elementary, Will C. Wood Middle School, Fern Bacon Middle School and Hiram Johnson High School.

"Despite budget uncertainty and pink slips, we can't take our eye off of what is most important – quality teaching and learning in our schools, particularly in our most needy communities," Superintendent Raymond said. "Now is the time to focus on eliminating achievement gaps. Our students cannot wait."

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