



December 14, 2011

An Open Letter to San Diego Business Leaders:

As the newly elected President of the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education, I hope to press the reset button on the relationship between the San Diego business community and our public schools. Our generation benefited greatly from a strong public education system and we can do no less for the next generation. We all have a mutual interest in strong San Diego schools that are so critical to develop a thriving San Diego economy.

We all want San Diego to be known for a world-class school system. In many ways, San Diego Unified schools are nationally recognized for student achievement and innovative educational programs. We are already leading the nation in the use of educational technology to transform our classrooms. We are in the process of obtaining a laptop computer for every student in the district. We have put in place programs to prepare students from all neighborhoods for a college education. We are coordinating with early education programs to close the achievement gap. We have a high school that has students spending 40% of their time in internships with San Diego businesses and nonprofits. And, this year we are launching a process to have a quality school in every neighborhood within the next five years. Our schools will be stronger when they are an integral part of every neighborhood.

In our free market society we rely on universal, free public education as the pathway to opportunity for individuals at all levels of society. While a public school is not a business, there are some things we can learn from the private sector. Since I came onto the board we have focused on establishing stable steady leadership from the top and student achievement.

We hired an admiral who has experience in large organizations to steady the ship as Superintendent. We hired one of the leading national cost-cutting consultants to school districts as the Deputy Superintendent for Business. We hired a very successful principal as the Deputy Superintendent for Academics. These great leaders are supporting and holding accountable our principals for increased student achievement. They in turn are supporting and holding accountable our teachers and staff. We are highlighting all of the best practices to share between teachers and schools.

In spite of budget woes, San Diego Unified has made steady progress in state and national test scores. San Diego Schools students outperform other large urban districts on the California Standards tests and on the national achievement test (NAEP) taken by students in large districts across the country. San Diego schools are showing success that is worth investing in.

When it comes to the managing through our ongoing budget crisis, we have made many tough choices. We are operating our district with 2,000 fewer employees than a few years ago. We have streamlined many processes, but deeper cuts will force us to cut further into many academic programs that will harm our students.

As a Board we will take the necessary steps to balance our budget. We will absolutely not allow the district to become insolvent. We must maintain local control of the school district. We must also work with the state to protect minimal levels of funding that allow us to meet our basic mission.

As the new President of the Board of Education, I am committed to strengthen and expand our ties with the business community. There are many ways that businesses can partner with our schools. I encourage your organization to contact me directly or our Superintendent to learn more how you can become more involved in supporting our schools to help us prepare the future workforce for local jobs created by our business community

As we work together in the year ahead, I hope to develop a new coalition of business, labor and educational leaders to support the development of the world-class school system we want for a vibrant San Diego economy. I look forward to working very closely with you in 2012.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lee Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Lee Evans
President
Board of Education