

**State of the District Speech
San Diego Unified School District
03/24/09
Shelia Jackson, President, Board of Education**

Thank you State Superintendent O'Connell for that introduction and for all that you do for the children throughout our state.

And thank all of you for attending this special meeting of the San Diego Unified School District.

Before I begin, I would like to thank each member of the Board of Education. I appreciate your support and the trust that you placed in me as the president of the board.

I would like to thank our Superintendent Terry Grier for his leadership of our district.

I also want to thank the students who have contributed to this evening's program and a special thank you to Rabbi Cosky for her blessings.

This is the first time that our board has invited our school community to hear a presentation about the state of our school district.

I am honored to present my remarks this evening here at Lincoln High School. This high school has breathed new life into this neighborhood and new hope into the minds of the young students who attend school on this campus.

I want to thank Mel Collins, the principal of Lincoln High School; as our host tonight and all of our principals, teachers and support staff throughout our district for all that they do for our students.

Why have we all come together this evening?

What are you expecting, hoping, to hear about the state of education in the San Diego Unified School District?

Are you expecting a message of despair and fear about our budget crisis and its impacts on our educational programs?

Or are you hoping for a message of optimism, a vision for the future, about the determination, the dedication and resilience of our students, teachers, administrators, and every member of our team at the San Diego Unified School District?

Are you expecting to hear how far we have to go to bring the levels of student achievement in our district to where they should be?

Yes, we are in difficult times for public education in our nation, our state and here in San Diego.

"These are times that try men's souls". Those were the opening words of the series of pamphlets The American Crisis, by Thomas Paine in late 1776.

He was seeking to stir up revolutionary spirit in the colonies. He continued by saying,

"The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot may, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

That was when our country was just beginning.

And today, more than 200 years later, this economic crisis presents us all with another challenge that try's our souls.

Just as Thomas Paine was rallying patriots to the cause of the American Revolution, our current president; Barack Obama, is rallying us today to the cause of public education.

In his remarks about the American Economic Recovery Act of 2009 he said:

“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity- it is a pre-requisite.

The countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow.”

This is a call to action that we must all rally around

- If we are to meet this challenge, we cannot look back
- If we are to meet this challenge, we cannot hold our heads down.
- If we are to meet this challenge, we have to look forward
- If we are to meet this challenge, we have to remember, that it is all about the children!

They are our future...

They are all that matters...

They are entitled to all of our efforts.

Earlier this month, our board made some of the most difficult decisions that we have ever faced in our lives. To protect the financial viability of our school district, we

were forced to cut more than \$100 million out of our school district budget for the 2009/10 school year.

We were offered what is often called a "Hobson's Choice", or really no choice at all. For you students of history, Thomas Hobson was a real historical figure from the early 1600s who ran a horse rental business in Cambridge, England. Hobson rented horses to Cambridge University students but he refused to let them select the horse of their own choice. The choice his customers were given was 'this one or none at all' which became known as the "Hobson's choice".

Our Board was also given no real choices in dealing with our budget deficit.

The cuts that we were given from the state were massive.

We had to propose cutting programs that made a difference in the lives of our students.

We had to propose increases in class sizes.

And we had to propose a reduction to pay and benefits of our employees.

There really were no good choices.

But if we are to ever come out of this economic recession, if we are to ever once again lead the world in innovation, it will be the students today, who make that happen.

So tonight, rather than dwell on the problems that we face, I want to dwell on our opportunities.

I want to share with you the state of our district as we move forward into the future. The San Diego Unified School District is ready to take on the challenge. We are

ready to become a smarter, a healthier and a greener district to support our communities and our city in the years ahead.

Because we know that it takes the entire city and all of our communities to produce well-educated children!

How can we become smarter?

How can we get better at what we do?

Those are the questions that this Board of Education is pushing our superintendent, our administrators, our principals, and our teachers to come up with innovative answers.

We have to become a smarter district in many ways if we are to meet the challenge of America's finest City producing America's best educated children.

We will become a smarter district in the way we run our business, in the way we teach, and in the ways that we partner with our parents, the school community and the public at large.

We will become a smarter district to improve education for all students in every part of our district from North to South, East to West. We now have 33% or 67 of the district's 178 schools with an API rating of higher than 800. It is our goal to add more schools to this "800 Club" each and every year!

We have to become a smarter district if we are to reduce our high school dropout rate from its embarrassingly high level of 20% overall, and 25% for our Latino and African-American students.

As a community, we cannot tolerate losing our young people to a life of low wages, poor jobs, were their only option might be crime and incarceration.

This year we launched "Project Recovery". Project Recovery teams up central office administrators with school site administrators to identify children who don't show up for class at the beginning of each semester.

Our teams look these kids up, they call them, they go to their homes, and we work with them to get them back into school or to offer them options to get them a high school diploma.

During this school year more than 1,000 students were identified and worked to bring them back to school as a result of Project Recovery efforts. Crawford IDEA, Lincoln and other schools went a step further to involve community and business leaders in this door to door quest to reach students. Councilmember Young's Gang Commission worked closely with the District on our dropout prevention efforts and I want to thank them for their support.

But getting potential dropouts back in school isn't enough.

A US Department of Education survey a few years ago found that only 28% of high school students thought that school was meaningful in their lives. It also found that only 39% of students believed that their schoolwork had any real bearing on their success in later life. What this means is that we need to make the educational experience in high schools more relevant and more meaningful.

That is why we continue to offer educational options for high school students.

We're offering online credit recovery programs that allow students who fall behind or who just lost interest in school the opportunity to get their high school diplomas in an alternative setting. This year our on-line credit recovery programs have allowed our students to recover more than 2,000 high school courses.

We will become a smarter district so that we can close the student achievement gap of nearly 40% that separates the achievement levels of our white students from our students of color.

We must accelerate academic achievement for every student and make every school a great school, from our preschools to our high schools.

Let me stress, that is the goal of this Board of Education to provide all of our students an A. through G. curriculum that will prepare all of our students for success in college.

Having rigorous coursework is essential to preparing our students for success in their college and career choices. We thank our principals and teachers for their commitment to this cause.

We are also working hard as a district to improve our special education programs. Under the leadership of Arun Ramanathan, the district is undertaking a major reorganization of special education programs to more closely align instruction with the needs of special education students.

There are several exciting programs underway at San Diego Unified that will make us a smarter district to benefit our students. Let me share just a few exciting innovations with you.

This year, our Board of Education declared 2009 as the Year of Literacy in our district. It is a year that all of our staff is focusing on increasing reading skills and reading enjoyment in the classroom and in our leisure time. We are working closely with the San Diego Council on Literacy to promote literacy events in the community and have highlighted literacy on our website.

To address our student attendance challenges, this year we started an attendance incentive program called "Game On". In this program we are providing incentives to ninth grade students in several selected schools as a way to teach our students that being in school will make a difference in their future. And we are partnering with community organizations like **PAZZAZ**, to reach out to our parents to communicate the importance of school attendance.

Tonight, I would like to announce a new program that will provide an incentive for students to take rigorous advanced placement courses during their high school years.

I am pleased to announce that Mossy Automotive has stepped forward to partner with the San Diego Unified School District in a program that we will call, "Cool to be Smart".

At the end of next year, Mossy will be donating two new cars that will be given away to two of our graduating seniors from a group of all seniors who have completed a total of at least four AP courses during their high school years. With this exciting incentive from Mossy Automotive, we hope to encourage many more of our students to stretch themselves to take rigorous AP courses during the coming school year.

I would like to recognize the Mossy Family and thank Mr. Owen Mossy, the GM of Mossy Ford who's in the audience this evening.

Another example of becoming a smarter district is our work to use technology.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of our new IT director, Darryl LaGace and all of his staff, for his efforts to transform the outdated technology systems that we use throughout the district.

An exciting example of his work to make our students smarter is our new iHigh Virtual Academy. iHigh is a new online high school that offers our students every high school course needed to graduate in an online environment.

We now have more than 200 students taking online courses through the iHigh Virtual Academy and we hope to expand that to more than 300 students next year. This innovative program is a step into the future of education.

I expect that within 10 years more than half of our high school students will be taking some or all of their high school courses in an online environment. Technology will be changing the classroom environment in many other exciting ways all around San Diego Unified in the years ahead.

Thanks to the voter approval of Proposition S last November, San Diego Unified will be investing nearly \$200 million dollars on classroom technology during the next three years.

Every classroom throughout the district will have interactive learning boards, wireless Internet access, laptop computers for students and, most importantly, teachers trained to use that technology effectively in the classroom.

And technology must be used to change our business systems to save money and how we operate our district. Thanks to the leadership of James Masias our new CFO and all of his hard working staff, we are beginning to use technology to transform our finance division into one of the best in the nation.

We made a huge step forward in becoming smarter about how we run the district in the budget that we will be adopting for the next fiscal year. We were able to trim an additional \$20 million from our central office operations next year by becoming more efficient. We simply must continue this effort in the future.

We also need to become a healthier district in the years ahead. By healthier I mean improve our fiscal health of the district and the physical health of our students.

Our first step should be setting a goal for California to get our K-12 public schools fully funded within the next four years.

With the billions of dollars that have been cut from public education, this will be a major mountain for us all to climb. But we need to climb that mountain for our children.

Every parent and every resident of our district needs to join together to tell our state representatives that public education must be funded in a way that allows us to give our children not just an education but a great education.

We need to let our legislators know that the future of the state depends on a healthy public education system.

In the short term, we need the help of our state representatives to push for a fair and balanced transfer of the federal stabilization dollars to districts like SDUSD.

I want to thank Board Member Dr. John Lee Evans for his leadership in working with our state representatives to push them for more flexibility in how we use those dollars and to gain more local control in making educational decisions for our students.

We applaud the support of Senator Kehoe, Assemblymembers Block, Saldana and Salas for their support.

I urge you to join us in this effort. Visit our website at www.Sandi.net/budget to learn more about our budget challenges and to e-mail your opinions about public education funding to your elected representatives.

We may also be facing additional budget cuts in the months ahead, so your action is needed now to get our voices heard in Sacramento.

Another way to be a healthy district is to care about the health of our students. And, at San Diego Unified we are doing this in a wide range of programs.

Thanks to board member Richard Barrera, we are working on a program that will provide our school families with information about the food stamp program as part of our free and reduced lunch applications.

On this effort we are working closely with the Hunger Coalition, Councilmembers Marti Emerald and Todd Gloria to encourage the County of San Diego to help bring this important information to our school families.

We are also expanding the Breakfast in the Classroom program to more than 40 of our elementary schools. This program provides a healthy breakfast to young elementary students in our most disadvantaged schools, allowing them to be alert and ready to learn in their classrooms after a healthy meal.

For many of our students, this breakfast and lunch may be their only meals during these hard economic times.

I want to thank our food services director, Gary Petill and all of his staff, for their dedication to offer healthy food for our students.

And, thanks to Board Member Katherine Nakamura, we are supporting the physical fitness of our students by encouraging a wide range of healthy programs including marching band and JROTC activities.

Katherine has spearheaded our efforts to sponsor legislation, AB 351, that will ensure that students in our marching band and JROTC programs can receive PE Credit for their healthy activities.

Finally, to be a truly great school district we need to make San Diego Unified the "**greenest**" school district in the nation.

I want to thank Board Member John Debeck for his leadership over the years to support environmental and energy programs in our district.

Our solar roof program, and Mr. DeBeck's own home, is already one of the models for school districts across the nation. Located at 28 schools, we have solar panels generating a combined 4.3 megawatts of clean local electricity. We accomplished this by going into partnership with the solar company that allowed us to install solar panels with no up-front cost. We were also able to complete more than \$30 million of roof replacements at about 10 cents on the dollar and receive reliable electricity for 28 schools for the next 20 years.

But this year, we once again saw an increase in the district's utility bill. That says to me that we need to partner with San Diego Gas and Electric to find even more ways to be energy efficient.

I want to thank SDG&E, not only for their sponsorship of our reception this evening, but also for their willingness to work with us on this challenge.

And while I'm talking about SDG&E, I am pleased to announce that we are currently developing a unique program with them for our disadvantaged school families in our free and reduced lunch programs, which will automatically give those families a 20% discount on their energy bill. We look forward to having this program in place by the

beginning of the next school year, saving our school families as much as \$4 million in utility costs during the coming year.

We are also working to be a Green school district by making sure that our kids enjoy the outdoors and learn about the environment. Our board also recently approved our involvement in the "No Child Left Inside Coalition". This national coalition of more than 1000 organizations across the country is working together to expand our green education and outdoor experiences for our young people. We are proud of our partnerships and programs such as Groundworks, the Renewable Energy Leadership Institute and Aquatic Adventures, to name just a few.

So, those are just a few of the ways that the San Diego Unified School District is working to become a Smarter, Healthier, and Greener school district.

Public education in our state is in a deep hole and we have a huge mountain to climb to get out of it. But, I believe that this school board and every employee throughout the district are committed to giving our children the best education, with whatever resources we have.

But we can't be satisfied. We cannot accept excuses like..."it's a bad economy".

We need to avoid the temptation to point fingers. Let me say once again, our immediate economic problem lies in Sacramento and that is where our voices need to be heard!

We need a complete reform of the education funding in our state.

Let me close by urging all of us to come together for the cause of public education.

It takes a community to produce a well educated child. Our community must have a culture of learning at its heart.

This education driven mindset is at the core of this Board of Education.

That is why our Board members have been hosting community meetings with various stakeholders throughout our district.

We want to ignite and spread the educational mindset throughout the City of San Diego.

It takes committed Board members and other elected officials.

We are working with the County Board of Education, community colleges and local universities.

It takes committed educators.

We applaud the Chamber of Commerce Education Committee and our more than 1,500 business school partnerships for their dollars and volunteer efforts.

It takes an entire city.

Foundations in Scripps Ranch, University City and others work hard to raise funds to support their local schools. Even here in the Lincoln community, a local group recently raised more than \$1,000 for Porter elementary.

It takes a community.

This Board is not only committed to being accountable, transparent and a strong advocate for our students on the state and national level, but also to cultivate an educational culture throughout the city because we know it takes a community to produce well-educated children.

Thank you.

God bless America and God bless our schools.

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