



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles**

ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 17, 2007**

**Contact: Janelle Erickson
(213) 978-0741**

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA UNVEILS EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

Mayor Villaraigosa Hosts an Education Town Hall to Discuss Initiatives for Improving Every School in the LAUSD

LOS ANGELES - Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa hosted an education town hall and released a detailed, written policy framework for improving every school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Remarks (as prepared) by Mayor Villaraigosa at the Education Town Hall follow:

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

I want to thank all of the students, teachers, principals, and community leaders for coming out to the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy this evening.

I am looking forward to a conversation tonight that- is as lively as it is enlightening

By now, after over a year of debate I think most of us agree: The issue is no longer whether we need fundamental change in our public schools. The question is how.

How do we bring change to life as quickly as possible for the children and families who are depending so desperately on reform?

Over the last year and a half, my team and I have visited dozens and dozens of schools that are working for our kids. We've met with some of most accomplished educators in the country. We've hit the books ourselves, examining – often late into the night - the lessons to be gleaned from cities like New York, Boston, Chicago, San Diego and everywhere in between.

We've closely analyzed successful reform efforts. We've weighed the challenges that make LA's situation so unique. And we've talked to thousands of people on the ground.

People who know what works – who understand how kids learn: Parents and principals. Academics and adolescents. People from the boardrooms to the classrooms.

They told us many things.

They told us that no matter how many dropouts we're losing, that we are unquestionably losing as a city, as a region, and as a society. They told us that we don't pay enough attention to many of the most obvious problems. Like the thousands of kids who slip away every year as they make that tough and treacherous transition through the middle school grades.

They told us that they don't feel safe on and around many of our campuses. They told us that we often spend our money on the wrong things and for the wrong reasons. And, in the final analysis, what they told us is we don't expect enough from our schools or our children.

So, I'm here tonight to report back.

To report that after over eighteen months of listening, learning and study, we have developed a framework for reform and we are calling it *The Schoolhouse*.

I want to say it here and now and right upfront: These ideas didn't come from the mountaintop, and they're not etched in stone. But I believe our *Schoolhouse* provides a framework for reform that the entire Los Angeles Unified School District should follow.

In these pages, you'll find fifty-two initiatives. And over the coming weeks, we'll be discussing each one of these ideas in deeper programmatic detail. But tonight I want to talk for a moment about the bigger picture.

We began by asking the basic question: How do you build a great school from the ground up?

Let me show you how we went about constructing our *Schoolhouse*: As nearly anyone can tell you: in order to build anything of permanence you have to start with a great foundation. And nearly everywhere we went over the last eighteen months, people reminded us that in both a metaphoric and literal sense we are all the foundation of this work.

Bringing dramatic improvement to our public schools is going to require an unprecedented commitment of community resolve, community action, and community resources.

That's why I believe it's so important that we get our cities and our mayors into the act - to create a real foundation for change, we're going to need to get everyone involved!

We're going to need to bring to bear the will and the wealth of a city with more than a quarter million millionaires. We're going to need to challenge and engage our business, philanthropic and faith leaders in a way we never have before. We're going to have find new ways to apply the abundant genius of the world's creative and entertainment capital.

And each and every one of us is going to have to play a part.

On top of this foundation, our framework identifies six essential pillars – we're calling them “Pillars of Excellence” – that we believe will raise the roof on student achievement in Los Angeles.

The first pillar stands for the idea that we need to build our schools on a culture of high expectations... and a stubborn insistence on every student's worth. That means demanding -- it means believing-- that we can create schools that prepare every student for college and a career. And it means putting real accountability measures in place to make that promise real.

Like ending social promotion once and for all.

Like creating family-friendly school report cards that are clear and transparent and written in plain language that we can all understand.

Like bringing uniforms into our public schools to instill a culture of respect and to take some of the social pressures off of our kids.

And we're going to need to restructure schools that are chronically failing.

We can no longer avoid this question or tinker around the edges of reform.

At one high school in South LA, just three out of every one hundred ninth graders currently graduate with the prerequisites they need to even apply to a Cal State or UC school.

For too many of our young people, the game is over.... before the first whistle is ever blown. And, there should be no mistaking: this not THEIR failure. This is a community responsibility.

Second, we need to insist that every school in Los Angeles is safe, clean, and small.

We've already made fighting violent street gangs our number one public safety priority, and we're putting together a comprehensive anti-gang strategy to attack the problem in every facet and from every possible angle.

One school board candidate, who happens to be a neighborhood prosecutor, told me she never met a gang member who wasn't first a truant - and then a dropout.

Our schools need to begin to work together with our city and county governments in seamless coordination. We need to create a network of safe havens and safe passages around every campus. We need to build on the work we've already done and expand the availability of youth mediation programs. We need to insist that every bathroom stall has a door. That every quad is free from litter and garbage. And that every campus is clean and orderly.

And we need to re-imagine both the scale and the structure of our current schools.

We've got the largest schools in the nation. It's almost like we never stopped to realize... how size and safety go hand-in-hand.

How in a small school it's harder for a kid to fall through the cracks.

That's what students say.

They say it's elementary.

They say that in smaller schools they feel like people know who they are. That on smaller campuses, they feel like people understand them and care about them as individuals.

So, we are recommending taking our largest underperforming schools and breaking them down into smaller units.

And – on a strategic basis – we're recommending transforming our most-troubled middle schools and folding them into smaller K-through-8 schools, where students and teachers alike enjoy greater continuity.

Today we are losing too many middle class families who feel our middle schools are wholly inadequate.

The next pillar represents the idea that we need to value and reward the very people most responsible for student achievement.

It's time to acknowledge the elephant in the room:

We simply have to pay our teachers better.

Our teachers make less than almost every other profession with comparable education and responsibility. In the last six years, teacher pay in Los Angeles Unified has remained stagnant. Our teacher salaries now rank behind nearly every surrounding school system.

And we need to give teachers and principals greater responsibility for decision-making at the school site.

Principals should have real budget authority.

They know what their schools need far better than some bureaucrat sitting in a cubicle downtown.

I know that some people don't agree with this, but teachers should be allowed to exercise reasonable discretion in how they teach the state and board-approved curriculum.

Teaching is an art as well as a science!

In return, and across the board, there needs to be greater accountability and responsibility for job performance.

And we need to expand the talent pool.

We're recommending creating a Los Angeles Leadership Academy to cultivate and train great principals and school leaders.

And we're recommending leading a national campaign to challenge the best young teachers to enlist in the educational revolution that.... We will drive in LA's - schools.

Next, we need to beef up the curriculum.

Today in Los Angeles Unified just 22% of our kids graduate with the basic courses they need to apply for college.

At some schools it's as low as 3%.

And because the achievement gap starts before kindergarten, we need to fight for funding for universal pre-K instruction. Our framework calls for a rigorous, relevant college preparatory curriculum for all students. It will expand the school day and week with supplemental intervention and enrichment programs.

It will deepen opportunities for career training.

We need to offer summer bridge programs and create 9th grade learning academies to help kids with the transition between middle and high schools.

We need to bring back funding for arts and Physical Education.

And we need to track every drop-out and create a system of real-time intervention so that no student ever disappears from the radar screen.

Of course, family is the central pillar in any good school.

We need to bring parents and the community in to engage them more fully in the educational lives of their children.

That means parent compacts that demand accountability and service.

Our school campuses should be neighborhood centers, where families and young people have access to a wide range of support services.

We're recommending a family resource center at every school.

And we need to address the needs of the 40% of our kids who are English Language Learners.

English is the language of commerce, opportunity and success!

We need to expand opportunities for parents to study English at night.

We need to spread the word... parents can help their kids immeasurably - in school - by improving their own English language skills.

Finally, we need to insist that our schools have the resources that they need.

We need to spend less on bureaucracy and more on classroom instruction.

The statistics tell the real story.

While teacher staffing has remained flat over the last six years, non-teacher positions have increased by twelve percent!

It's time to change the equation.

We are recommending an independent state audit to immediately target bureaucratic waste and redundancy in the LAUSD and to identify the regulatory changes necessary to put more dollars to work for our kids.

At the same time, we need to fight for our fair share of state and federal dollars. We can put more money to work for kids by working to improve our attendance rates.

There is 3 billion dollars in new state funding on the table for low-performing schools.

We cannot afford to let this opportunity pass us by.

And we need to launch a philanthropic campaign to support our schools that matches the efforts of New York and Chicago.

Together, we can all see what's under our Schoolhouse roof – a future in which every kid in the Los Angeles Unified School District has a genuine opportunity to realize his or her dreams.

Our possibilities rest on this foundation and on these pillars.

Let's roll up our sleeves. Let's get to work. Let's lay the foundation. Let's build the supporting frame. Let's raise the roof of high expectations – together.!

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