

THE ADVOCATE

Special Edition: Spotlight on SDEA Site Successes!

SDEA Members—

This special edition of The Advocate is dedicated to spotlighting and celebrating our successes as a union in 2011. This has been one of the most challenging years that members of the teaching profession nationwide have faced. Our battles both in and out of the classroom have intensified, as we struggle on one hand to support our students whose families have been decimated by the economy, and on the other to defend the very institution of public education itself from those who would see it privatized.

Fortunately, teacher unions continue to serve as one of the greatest organized forces protecting public schools and our students. Members of SDEA have spent the past year building from our strong internal union structures to reach out to the broader education community. In this month's Advocate, we highlight five examples of the excellent community organizing work that SDEA members are doing throughout our District.

One example is at Mira Mesa High School, where



Letters in Solidarity

Bill Freeman
SDEA President

Camille Zombro
SDEA Vice President



SDEA members worked with parents and administration to successfully become the first school recognized by the School Board as a Community School (see page 2). Teachers at Hoover High School are beginning to engage in similar parent outreach efforts in response to a recent attempt to convert their school to a charter school under the new Parent Trigger Law (see page 4).

Another example is the successful fight against the District's school closure plan. This issue features members in the Mission Bay Cluster and at Cubberley Elementary (see page 3), where the involvement of teachers and parents in the school closure decision highlights the power of educators and communities coming together around common issues. It has been a pleasure to attend the

community meetings organized and conducted by site teams and community parents. As a result of these community organizing efforts, the SDUSD School Board of Trustees drastically reduced their school closure and consolidation plans.

As we expand our organizing efforts into the community, it is important that we continue to strengthen our site union structures. Building a union site team and enforcing our contract forms the backbone of a strong union, and allows us to engage in the work of broader external organizing. And so the final organizing example we are highlighting is at EB Scripps (see page 2), where teachers came

together around the District's new Exceed/Rtl program. Teachers at EB Scripps believe that by enforcing our contractual workload rights District-wide, SDEA members can force the District to implement this new program in a way that will actually work for kids.

SDEA members, it is time for us to reclaim the partnership that has existed between educators and parents for many years. Community organizing allows us to strengthen communication, student achievement, and provide a voice for parents in the sometime complex education system. Let us never forget that **together we are all stronger.**

In Solidarity,

Bill Freeman
Bill Freeman
SDEA President

Camille Zombro
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SDEA Vice President

Teachers at Nubia, America's Finest charters unionize

Last month teachers at Nubia Leadership Academy overwhelmingly decided to organize a union at their site with SDEA. This is the second charter school that has organized already

this school year, following America's Finest Charter School, where teachers will be exchanging initial bargaining proposals next week. Teachers at Nubia and America's Finest

look forward to following in Tubman Village Charter's footsteps in bargaining a strong union contract this year. Also, the teachers at Nubia want to work with parents, their union

and school administration to get their charter renewed at the end of the year. There may be ways many of you can help with both goals over the course of the year. Stay tuned!



10393 San Diego Mission Rd. Ste.
100, San Diego, 92108

Phone (619) 283-4411 Fax (619) 282-7659

Web www.sdea.net Email advocate@sdea.net

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Mira Mesa leads community reform

Throughout the past year, SDEA members at several sites have discussed engaging parents and community members in an effort to strengthen their schools. The project, known as Community School Reform, underwent significant challenges following the District's decision to needlessly lay off more than 1,300 educators last spring. Led by Association Representative (AR) Ben Phillips, SDEA members at Mira Mesa High School decided to continue working on their reform plan, reaching out to parents, their site administrator and other members of the Mira Mesa community to design a unique template for their school's future. On Oct. 11, Mira Mesa successfully became the first school to officially change its structure as a "community school" when the School Board unanimously approved their plan.

Mira Mesa's community schools reform template grants the school's Principal and Site Governance Team (SGT) much more independence and authority to manage and administer their educational programs. While implementation of the plan is the next hurdle, the members at Mira Mesa have already started to discuss creating courses that are tied with local businesses or community colleges, as well as changing current course offerings.

"We needed this plan in order to create the best learning environment for our students," said site SDEA Council Representative Catherine Fox-Copeland. "What that is has yet to be determined, but we know it needs to be decided by departments, teachers, community and students."

The success in developing the reform plan came because the members organized and allowed the plan to be created organically amongst all stakeholders. Initial meetings took place with the school's union



Mira Mesa site team members Mark Snow, Chris Lawrence, Catherine Fox-Copeland, Ben Phillips and Mike Maheu show off their Board-approved reform template!

site team, department chairs and members who volunteered to serve as a steering committee. Once consensus was reached on what teachers wanted to see as an outcome, the group decided to move forward and engage the site administration.

The next step was to reach out to the PTSA, SGT and Foundation presidents to incorporate their feedback on what "reform" would look like. As a group, all involved stakeholders developed questionnaires for parents, students and the faculty to ensure their voices were also being heard. As the members moved from abstract ideas to a tangible plan, they found they were bringing together people with many different goals to a common interest point of improving the school.

"The group was looking at the past, present and future of public education and what they wanted Mira Mesa to look like," said Fox-Copeland. Due to the efforts of SDEA members at Mira Mesa, they now have a plan to determine their own future.

EB Scripps pushes for Exceed to be rolled out right

At the beginning of the year, the District began rolling out the Exceed Student Management System (also known as Exceed/RtI). It quickly became clear that this was another example of top-down decision-making by the District that would negatively impact current workload. It was also clear that the District had clearly not involved classroom teachers in the decision-making regarding this new process.

EB Scripps is a strong union site where members meet regularly to discuss site issues. Members at EB Scripps immediately came together to discuss the impact of Exceed/RtI at their site. They organized a training on our new contractual workload language, which requires the District to consider existing workload before implementing new programs or requirements, and prohibits the District from increasing groups of members' workload without removing something comparable from their plates.

The EB Scripps Association Representative

(AR) Lindsay Burningham sees the workload protections as a tool to make sure that when the District implements new programs, they do so with the planning and support necessary to make those programs succeed. "We are not against Response to Intervention," said Burningham. "The problem here is that once again the District has implemented a huge new program without getting input from classroom teachers and without providing the training or resources to make it work. If we don't require the District to do this right, it will be a huge disaster and will negatively impact teachers and students."

As a site, EB Scripps was able to come together and work with their principal to continue using their SST structure, and hold off implementing a new program everyone agreed would distract from teaching and learning if not rolled out properly. During the first SDEA Representative Council of the

See SCRIPPS, page 4

Mission Bay teachers, parents win on closures

Few things cause as much distress and anxiety for a school community than the threat of the school's closure. When the District revealed earlier this fall that they were considering closing approximately 30 schools over the next two years, parents, teachers and students across the District were up in arms. Among those protesting the District's poorly planned closures were SDEA members in the Mission Bay Cluster, where the District was considering closing or collapsing four of the Cluster's six schools. The District's closure plan was further complicated by the fact that Pacific Beach Middle School is one of the 30 schools in our District eligible for conversion to a charter school under the new Parent Trigger Law, making the need for teacher-parent outreach even more pressing.

The night after the District revealed their proposal for the Cluster, SDEA member leaders across the Cluster jumped into action. The Association Representatives (ARs) in the Cluster had already decided this year that they would be meeting as a group of Cluster

union leaders every other month this year. They dedicated their upcoming meeting to planning how to respond to the closure plan. All of the Cluster ARs—Barry Dancher (MBHS AR and SDEA Board Member), Luis Villanueva (MBHS Council Representative), Kim Oliver (PBMS AR), Megan Sussman (Sessions AR), Dave Weaks (Bayview Terrace AR), Claudia Weimer (Bayview Terrace CR), Steve Luchs (Crown Point/VAPA AR) and Tracy Petti (PB Elementary AR)—scheduled and conducted a site union meeting. The ARs invited their SDEA Field Organizer to help discuss the District's closure plan and the Parent Trigger Law with members.

After the six site meetings, members from across the Cluster attended a Cluster-wide planning meeting at Mission Bay High School, where they committed to reaching out to parents about the proposed closures and the Parent Trigger Law. Members distributed leaflets to parents inviting them to attend one of three informational meetings about the threats facing the Mission Bay Cluster. The evening meetings were held at Mission



Parents and teachers discuss the best ways to work together to protect the future of Mission Bay's schools.

Bay HS, Hoover HS and Perkins K-8 School to accommodate the needs of parents of Mission Bay Cluster students who live throughout the city. Members reached out to parents through existing teacher-parent-student networks such as PTSA, ELAC, MEChA and Foundation groups to encourage attendance.

After the teacher-parent meetings, teachers, parents and students from throughout the Cluster addressed the School Board on Nov. 29 demanding that the Board remove the Mission Bay Cluster schools from the proposed closure/consolidation list. While the Board will not vote until Dec. 13 (after the printing of The Advocate), it appears that the District has decided to remove all of the Mission Bay schools from the closure/consolidation list, demonstrating yet again

that when educators, parents and students unite together to defend our schools, we succeed.

SDEA members in the Mission Bay Cluster will continue working with parents throughout the year. Members at PBMS have discussed hosting a parent night to further educate the community about the Parent Trigger Law. And despite the fact that the District has agreed not to close any schools in the Cluster, parents and teachers remain concerned about the Board's plans for Mission Bay's schools, and intend to continue making sure their voices are heard.

"What we've learned from this latest episode with the District, is that when parents and teachers work together toward a common goal, the School Board listens very carefully," Dancher said.

Parents, teachers protect Cubberley Elementary

Cubberley Elementary in the Serra Mesa neighborhood was one of the schools on the District's potential closure list for next year. Like those in the Mission Bay Cluster (see above), Cubberley SDEA members kicked into gear. They wanted the School Board to understand that Cubberley's small size is one of its greatest assets, not a reason for shuttering the school, and that communities deserve neighborhood schools. The Cubberley community sent

the message loud and clear when, on Nov. 4, more than 80 parents from its community of roughly 150 students attended a community speak-out meeting with Board of Education Trustee Kevin Beiser. Here's how they did it:

SDEA members got organized Cubberley SDEA members met as soon as they heard the news about closure to discuss if they'd fight the closure and, if so, the action steps needed to be victorious in keeping the school. *See CUBBERLEY, page 4*



Parents and teachers from Cubberley Elementary address Trustee Kevin Beiser, explaining the detrimental impact that closure proposals have on a school community.

Hoover teachers stave off charter conversion

With the passing of the Parent Trigger Law (see November Advocate for more details), 30 schools in our District are now eligible to be converted to a charter school by a majority vote of the parents. While it is tempting to adopt a “that can’t happen here” attitude, a group targeting Hoover High School, one of the 30 eligible schools, has already begun circulating a petition to convert the school to a charter. Calling itself the “Hoover Community High Charter School,” the group (whose origins remain unknown) sent out a draft copy of its charter petition to members of the Hoover community, including teachers at Hoover High School. The 145-page document that was to be submitted to the Board of Education was the first legal step in their attempt to convert the school to a charter.

The petitioners, who are neither parents nor teachers, are allowed under the law to submit a conversion petition despite not having any real stake in the school community. Their lack of roots within the school community was laid bare when teachers and parents from Hoover went to the group’s first public forums. These forums were ostensibly held to broaden the base of the group given the dearth in real stakeholders within the petitioning group.

Norma Sandoval, a Hoover teacher who was present at one of the forums,

said that the teachers “posed very genuine and meaningful questions” to the petitioners. The answers that the teachers got in response as to the group’s intent were deeply unsatisfactory, lacking detail and clarity about the group’s plans for Hoover. “Long story short, they are claiming to implement programs that we already have,” said Sandoval, who is not only a teacher at Hoover but is also a graduate of the school herself. In addition to the contingent of teachers who went to these meetings, there was a group of vocal students who are opposed to the proposed changes. The teacher-student contingent represented a majority of the participants at these meetings.

In response to the ongoing threat of a corporate charter takeover, teachers at Hoover have been holding weekly meetings to discuss a wide range of outside-the-classroom education policy issues that impact their students and classrooms. The consensus is that teachers must be involved in the surrounding community and bring attention to issues like chronic underfunding of education. If members at schools on the Parent Trigger list are going to successfully protect their schools from a charter conversion, engaging in the sort of parent outreach underway at Hoover is crucial. Teachers and parents must work together to protect our public schools from those who view them solely as potential profit streams.

Cubberley

open. Union members decided to fight to keep their special school open, but also said that teachers couldn’t do it alone—they’d need parents, too. The first step was to organize a meeting with parents to tell them about SDUSD’s proposed closure of Cubberley, and to move parents to join with union members.

Reaching out to parent allies to build the organizing effort

Turnout at the parent-teacher meeting was low, which can probably be attributed to communication. A sign posted in the hallway of the small school did not compel many parents to the meeting. Still, five motivated and passionate parents did attend, and with teachers they planned a community speak-out meeting about school closure with Trustee Beiser. In the meeting the group set a date for the speak-out meeting, planned outreach for turnout (who would talk to whom), set shifts for passing out flyers before and after school, and signed up parents and teachers to cover each flyer shift. SDEA Association Representative (AR) Debbie Redenbaugh called Beiser to extend an invitation to meet with their community.

Turning parents and teachers out to the speak-out meeting

How did Cubberley SDEA members grow parent involvement in the movement to save Cubberley from closure? The key was in communication

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methods. Broadcasting a message through a posted sign hadn’t worked, so this time parent and teacher organizers used a more personalized and direct approach. Parents and teachers talked to parents dropping off or picking up students at school about the speak-out meeting and why their attendance mattered, and handed out a flyer. Parent organizers called other parents on the telephone to reach out.

Keeping on message

On the night of the speak-out meeting on Nov. 4, more than 80 parents and teachers filled the school’s small auditorium. By this time, the School Board had pulled back on school closures, but parents and teachers felt that educating Trustee Beiser about the importance of keeping Cubberley’s doors open was a way to prevent talk of closing Cubberley later—maybe next year, or the year after. To make sure that the speak-out effectively carried their message of keeping schools open, parent and teacher participants met for about 15 minutes before Trustee Beiser arrived. That preparation paid off later when in the speak-out meeting Trustee Beiser steered the conversation away from Cubberley, but one after another parents stood and told their stories of how Cubberley had touched their families, moving the dialogue back to keeping Cubberley (and all schools!) open.

Scripps

year, educators from schools across the District raised similar issues regarding Exceed/RtI. Using SDEA’s new workload language, discussions with the District were initiated to address these concerns throughout the

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District. Discussions are still ongoing, but the District has already pulled back the rollout of Exceed/RtI and has stated that they will start to address concerns related to training and computers/technology.