



Los Angeles Area
Chamber of Commerce

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L.A. AREA CHAMBER ANNOUNCES SUPPORT FOR MAYOR'S INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNING LAUSD

L.A. businesses commend Mayor for bold leadership on school reform, call for long-term community engagement to create nation's best urban school district

LOS ANGELES – Calling it a positive first step in changing the trajectory of L.A.'s public schools, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce today voted to support Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's plan to gain oversight of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

After seven months of dialogue with the school district, state and local elected officials and community leaders, the Chamber Board endorsed AB 1381, the state legislation that will give the Mayor a role in governing LAUSD. The Board had appointed a special task force to study the issue, which recommended support of the measure. Chamber leaders concluded that while the legislation is not as extensive as the Chamber would've preferred, the drawbacks are outweighed by the potential benefits of outside intervention by L.A.'s most visible elected official to bring about internal reforms and accountability to L.A.'s public schools.

"This bill is not a cure, it's the beginning of a treatment to make LAUSD the best urban school district in the nation," said L.A. Area Chamber President & CEO Gary Toebben. "In order to do that, the entire community must be engaged in this issue--and the Mayor has galvanized the community around education as never before. We are joining him in setting the bar high, and we are in this for the long haul."

In addition to endorsing the bill, Chamber leaders voiced appreciation for the work of LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer for improving elementary grade student performance and building much-needed new schools, but expressed frustration with the district's current governance model and its slow pace of reform.

In a comprehensive position paper (attached), the Chamber expressed preference for an LAUSD governance structure with clear accountability, in which the Mayor would appoint a Board of Trustees with fixed terms of office. The Trustees would appoint the Superintendent. However, the Chamber recognized that in the near-term, there are political obstacles in creating this key reform, and agreed that AB1381 is an acceptable start.

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“Improving student achievement in our public schools and preparing youth for today’s jobs is perhaps the most important issue facing our community,” Toebben continued, “and the Mayor has made a persuasive case that the reforms of AB1381 are steps in the right direction.”

“AB 1381 should be the beginning of a new compact to set clear roles, achievement goals and measurements of success for all stakeholders in our community,” said Toebben. “Boston’s success in school reforms has been a 15-year process that happened largely because of such a compact.”

The Chamber has a long history of involvement in strengthening L.A.’s workforce. The Chamber was a founder of UNITE-LA to expand occupational education in schools. With UNITE-LA, the Chamber serves over 30,000 youth each year through programs including Cash for College financial aid workshops and career fairs; internships and job shadowing programs; and the acclaimed Principal for a Day program. On the policy front, the Chamber has become a leader in guiding implementation of small learning communities in L.A. high schools; championed local bond issues to invest over \$19 billion in new school construction; and promotes community understanding and advocacy for effective education and workforce policies.

The Chamber’s position paper and a timeline of Chamber deliberations on the issue are attached.

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The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.org.

**Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
Position Paper on AB 1381**

INTRODUCTION

We believe K-12 education to be one of the most important– perhaps the most important issue – facing our community. An educated populace, capable of meeting the needs of the 21st Century, is central to our quality of life and economic opportunity. The future consequences of an under-educated, unemployed population would be catastrophic.

Major Findings:

1. There can be no dispute that various indicia reflect profound problems with our educational system - test scores are too low, dropout rates are too high and other indicators clearly demonstrate that we are failing. We recognize that under the leadership of Superintendent Roy Romer there have been many improvements at lower grade levels which may begin to make their way slowly up the ladder. However, the pace of constructive reform has been painfully slow and those reforms are often achieved over the objections of the school board, teachers' union, and the entrenched bureaucracy.
2. The failure of K-12 education is not limited to Los Angeles. This is a national phenomenon. Urban areas across the country are facing many of the same issues. Los Angeles' challenges are intensified due to the number of languages spoken by students, the proportion of populations of students and parents that are English language learners, high poverty rates and other factors. We are not unique but it makes the challenge all the more difficult.
3. The problems in our K-12 education system will not be solved overnight. It will take a long-term, sustained effort by everyone in our community. Success will come over time, but dramatic action must begin immediately.
4. There are some well-recognized, vital elements to a successful educational system. LAUSD must be a magnet for world class leadership, managerial and educational talent. It must operate more efficiently to attract and retain qualified teachers, remove underperforming teachers and administrators, develop and maintain qualified school principals, create a safe, positive and personalized learning environment, and engage students and parents.
5. The low test scores, high drop-out rate, and other indicia of performance are not the fault of any single person or group. We all bear responsibility for where we are today. The magnitude of the task ahead requires that we are all engaged in where we go tomorrow.
6. Teachers are underpaid and under appreciated. Unless we appropriately compensate and recognize their hard work, the task will be greater still.
7. We must restore the public's confidence in LAUSD beginning at the very top of the organization, from the school board to the classroom teacher.

8. Union influence needs to be limited on issues unrelated to wages, benefits, and associated issues. It is not appropriate for unions to continue exercising significant control over almost every aspect of district operations. Trade unions have an important job to do, but that job is not to run the schools.
9. Elected school boards no longer serve the purpose for which they were intended. School boards no longer have the authority to raise taxes; they must simply accept state-mandated funding decisions. Elections of school board members occur on “down-ticket” ballots and voters often have little or no information on the various candidates’ qualifications and background. There are no limits on campaign contributions and elections are dominated by the teachers’ union. The advantages of an elected school board in Los Angeles are overwhelmed by the disadvantages.
10. As the most visible, important elected official in Los Angeles, the Mayor can be the best spokesperson for community aspirations and the needs of the school district. It is appropriate for the Mayor to have a major role in K-12 education.
11. Based on our research and findings, we prefer a governance structure with clear accountability. Such is not the case with AB1381. In our preferred system, the Mayor would appoint a Board of Trustees for fixed terms of office and the Trustees would appoint the Superintendent. We recognize, however, that there may be legal and political obstacles to creating such a structure – certainly over the near term. The Mayor has made a judgment regarding what is politically possible and we are not in a position to disagree. In addition, he has made a persuasive case that AB1381 is a step in the right direction and with that we do agree.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce has supported every LAUSD bond measure put before the voters for the building of new schools during the past ten years and hereby commends the District on the progress of its current school construction program; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding recent progress, it has become evident that outside intervention is needed to begin to bring about internal reforms and accountability within the District for its 750,000 students, their parents and the taxpayers of the District; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor has made this effort the most important of his administration and has proposed to take responsibility for student achievement in 30 of the lowest performing schools in the district;

NOW THEREFORE, this Chamber supports and urges the state legislature to adopt AB1381, which we see as the initial step in structuring a new compact among all Los Angeles stakeholders that will set achievement goals and appropriate measurements of success, and will commit the Mayor and all stakeholders to specific actions necessary to reach these goals.

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The Chamber calls on the Mayor, the School Board, and all key stakeholders to commit to specific roles and obligations that create a collective community commitment to excellence. We believe the public will support increased funding for schools in general and for teacher salaries in particular, but only if such a compact is established and it is evident that significant progress is being made. Examples of roles and obligations include:

1. The role and obligation of students is to seek and commit themselves to a strong education and to attend school in this pursuit.
2. The role and obligation of parents is to be involved in their children's education at every level both at home and in the classroom.
3. The role of teachers and teacher unions is to work with the Superintendent in a creative, flexible and collaborative fashion; and to support a constructive reinvention of the management rights for effective placement and assignment of teachers and principals in return for improved compensation and general working conditions
4. The role of the School Board is to work with the Mayor to select a strong Superintendent and set high goals to hold him/her accountable; approve the budget, set policies, and work with the Mayor to develop a new community compact that commits all stakeholders to excellence in education.
5. The role of the Mayor is to engage the community and build support for education and educational reform, initiate the joint use of city facilities and other resources with the district, engender other elected leaders to become involved in K-12 education and leverage state and federal resources to better support LAUSD.
6. The role and obligation of the higher education community is to collaborate with K-12 schools to prepare, recruit and place the best teachers and administrative leaders in our schools.
7. The role of the business community is to articulate workplace needs and career opportunities and to connect schools and students to internships, job shadowing and summer jobs that support academic and career education.
8. Areas outside of the City of Los Angeles should have the option of a) remaining attached to the LAUSD school system and its governance model; b) forming a separate district; or c) attaching to another district.

Mayoral Involvement in LAUSD – AB 1381 Chamber Process for Deliberation

The Chamber's leadership and staff have been diligently engaged in evaluating the implications of mayoral involvement in LAUSD and AB1381. Below is a recap of the major steps:

January 24, 2006: The Chamber's Education and Workforce Policy Committee conducted a meeting with LAUSD School Board President Marlene Canter and Mayor's Associate Director of Education, Marcus Castain to debate mayoral involvement in LAUSD.

March 9, 2006: LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer addressed the Chamber Board of Directors.

May 11, 2006: Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Chief of Staff, Robin Kramer addressed the Chamber Executive Committee and Board of Directors. The Chamber Board of Directors approved the establishment of a high level Task Force of Board Members to address this issue and make a recommendation to the Board.

July 24, 2006: Members of the Task Force along with the Chamber's Education and Workforce Policy Committee met with LAUSD School Board President Marlene Canter and Senator Gloria Romero (bill co author) to hear both sides of AB 1381. The Chamber's Task Force then met to discuss AB1381 and the merits of each option open to the Chamber.

August 7, 2006: The Special Task Force voted to recommend to the Chamber Board of Directors that it support AB1381.

August 10, 2006: The Chamber's Board of Directors voted to support AB1381 as outlined in the Chamber's position paper.