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School Safety

Through collaborative school safety programs, we have a number of prevention and intervention programs in place as safety nets to catch at-risk students. It's troubling - children today are exposed to a myriad of societal challenges and negative external factors. Yet when our students come to school each morning, the challenges and influences in their day-to-day lives do not get left outside the campus gate. Even so, the majority of students do attend school with a willingness to learn and with attitudes of understanding and acceptance.

We have built partnerships and shared tools and resources in this county to ensure the safety of schools through our Law Enforcement Education Partnership and the Gangs and Drugs Task Force. I want to acknowledge districts and communities in our county for steps taken to calm recent incidents of violence and bring about discussion and healing in their communities and on school campuses. These tragic events deeply sadden and touch us all, and we grieve for the families and communities directly affected. District administration, school staff, board members, government officials, local law enforcement, church leaders, parents and students have all been willing to band together and lift their community back up. Lack of knowledge and understanding can bring about fear, distrust and intolerance, often times at a great cost. We must continually envision schools without prejudice, intolerance and bullying and strive for that vision. The future of our children is dependent upon it.

State Education Budget

I do appreciate that Gov. Jerry Brown recognizes that education has born a disproportionate share of the budget reductions during our state's fiscal crisis, however, his 2011-12 budget proposal to hold K-12 education harmless is tenuous at best. The governor is banking on voter approval of the five-year extension of tax revenues to shore up \$12 billion to cover roughly half of the state's \$25.4 billion shortfall. The revenue extension will hold our resource-starved schools steady in a best-case scenario.

We've heard these stats before, but they're worth repeating: \$18 billion in cuts over the last 3 budget years; \$1 out of every \$5 going to districts is now being deferred, that's 20 percent of revenue for our cash-strapped districts; also over the course of 3 years - 30,000 teachers and 10,000 classified employees laid off statewide; 174 districts in qualified or negative status statewide and eight of 33 districts self-certified as qualified at first interim in our county.

California schools have one of shortest school years in developed countries, and there's concern it could get shorter. Plus, our students sit in the most crowded classrooms in the nation. If voters in June reject Brown's request to extend the tax revenues - or the Legislature cannot muster a two-thirds majority to put the question on the ballot - K-12 schools stand to lose \$2 billion in funding at a minimum. That's \$330 per student.

California's disinvestment in education is choking the economic engine of this state and breaking the promise of opportunity for our students. Until the Legislature can agree that a disinvestment in public education robs our students of the opportunities to prepare them for productive citizenry; and until this state delivers a school finance system that adequately funds our schools; I encourage us to rally resources and work toward a common vision where access, equality and opportunities abound for every student in San Bernardino County. An investment in education is an investment in our common future.

Envisioning The Future

In a time of shrinking resources, it challenges us to take courageous steps to not only improve, but to rethink, our public schools. I look forward to the next four years of working together. We have a great deal of hard work ahead of us; and we cannot do it without a vision - a common vision for the future.

With a common vision, more of our students will be successful in school. With a common vision, more of our students will graduate prepared for work and college. With a common vision, our schools will be safer and our communities will grow stronger. With a common vision, we will graduate highly trained, skilled employees and get this economy back on its feet. With a common vision, families will thrive and communities will prosper. With a common vision, we can achieve equity and excellence for all students. Envision the future.



Envision the Future

State of Education Address sees opportunities to improve public education in county

From the view of Gary S. Thomas, Ed.D. County Superintendent

The Future for Public Schools

In an interview for Edutopia, futuristic author Alvin Toffler offers us a glimpse into his vision of public schools in the future. Schools are open 24 hours a day. They are integrated

into the community. Different kids arrive at different times. The bells don't just ring all at the same time. That's because the children are different. They have different potentials. Teachers work with non-teachers. Teachers alternate working in schools and in the business world. Local businesses have offices in the schools. Technology is infused into every aspect of the environment. Curriculum is integrated across the disciplines.

Improving Student Performance

As we look toward the future, it's important to note our progress to date. Schools in San Bernardino County made notable gains in

academic achievement and outpaced the state average in terms of growth on California's measure of school performance, the Academic Performance Index (API) last year. With 22 more schools surpassing the state standard of 800 for API from the prior year, a record 169 county schools have reached the state standard. Plus, the county's API rose to a record-high of 746, an increase of 14 points and the county's third consecutive year of double-digit growth. There were nine additional

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As I begin my first full term as San Bernardino County superintendent, I remain inspired by the teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms throughout our communities to prepare our students for this world. I am moved by the dedication and collaboration of so many to see that all of our students have access to high quality and innovative educational opportunities in which learning can flourish. Our communities can be encouraged by the tremendous strides made by students, staff and families to raise student performance, close achievement gaps and improve dropout rates. Educators in our county remain dedicated to overcoming the impediments our schools, students and families face, and seizing the opportunities before us with boldness and a renewed sense of purpose and direction. We are committed to building a common vision in San Bernardino County to prepare all of our students to take their place as productive, contributing members of a 21st century global community. Let's envision the future of what public education can be and what it can do.



Chaffey College President Henry Shannon (left) with County Supervisor Gary Ovitt and County Superintendent Gary Thomas at Dr. Thomas' State of Education Address



schools that passed 900 in API growth for the first time. There are now a record 26 schools countywide that are at or above 900, more than 2 1/2 times the total from two years ago.

Addressing the Access and Achievement Gap

This past school year, there were 10 schools from our county that worked hard to exit Program Improvement (PI), which is the federal intervention for schools that do not meet their accountability measurements for two consecutive years. Four of those schools were in Year 5 of PI. They were among only 28 statewide that exited PI from Year 5. I want to acknowledge teachers, principals, district administrators, board members, support staff and parents for your hard work to help students achieve academically.

The dichotomy for us is that three county schools celebrated the fact that they reached the state standard of 800 for the first time, but at the same time also fell into Program Improvement for not meeting federal targets. All totaled countywide, seven 800 schools were placed in PI last year, a dubious first. It's a mixed message when schools can be deemed successful on the one hand, but labeled failing on the other.

In terms of closing the achievement gap, there was very encouraging growth measured by Hispanic and African American subgroups of county students - both were above state averages for those meeting growth targets. Hispanic students were three points higher than state averages at 74 percent. African American students in the county were five points higher than the state averages for those who met their growth targets at 68 percent. In addition, socioeconomically disadvantaged students finished higher than their peers statewide by 1 percent with 71 percent meeting their API growth targets. We celebrate the growth and accomplishments of all of our schools and districts on academic performance indicators.

The Future of High Schools

Improving dropout and college-going rates in San Bernardino County has been at the forefront of our work. When we envision the future for our students, region, state and nation, we know we've got to step-up our growth at every level in order to be competitive, viable and successful. In the most recent data reported by the state, county schools have made improvements in our dropout rates decreasing from 22.5 percent for 2007-08 to 21.6 percent in 2008-09. Meanwhile, the state dropout rate increased from 18.9 percent to 21.5 percent. Not only is San Bernardino County moving in the right direction, we are bucking the state trend!

Three years ago when the first set of data came out, the dropout numbers were abysmal for our county - 26.3 percent



spots in the state rankings. While it's better, it still is not where our students need to be to make our area more attractive to employers and businesses, and it's certainly not where our students need to be in order to be prepared for a global economy.

A Call to Action—Everyone Counts

Reducing dropout rates and increasing high school graduates is the goal of the Call to Action - Everyone Counts initiative. Already, since this partnership of educators, business, labor, government, community and faith-based stakeholders formed 19 months ago, we've seen improvement in countywide dropout rates. Key research shows that effective dropout prevention and intervention strategies are systems of support for all students that include school, family and community efforts. Ultimately, districts and schools are the architects when designing what programs work best to target student populations.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is intricately woven into our Call to Action initiative and our Alliance for Education work because we know when students have strong support for learning in the home, and schools work together with families to support learning, children succeed better in school and throughout life. It's the common thread.

Through our Family Involvement Network, families are trained in parenting skills and how to be advocates for their children's education. Also, when we talk about family involvement, I want to make sure I acknowledge our faith-based community who have supported the importance of education in the home through homework and literacy center partnerships. The 12 Powers of Family Business training continues to grow as part of the Alliance for Education's commitment to family involvement. The training helps families set goals and communicate effectively. This program is offered in partnership with the Diocese of San Bernardino and addresses the Call to Action efforts to reduce the dropout rate in the county.

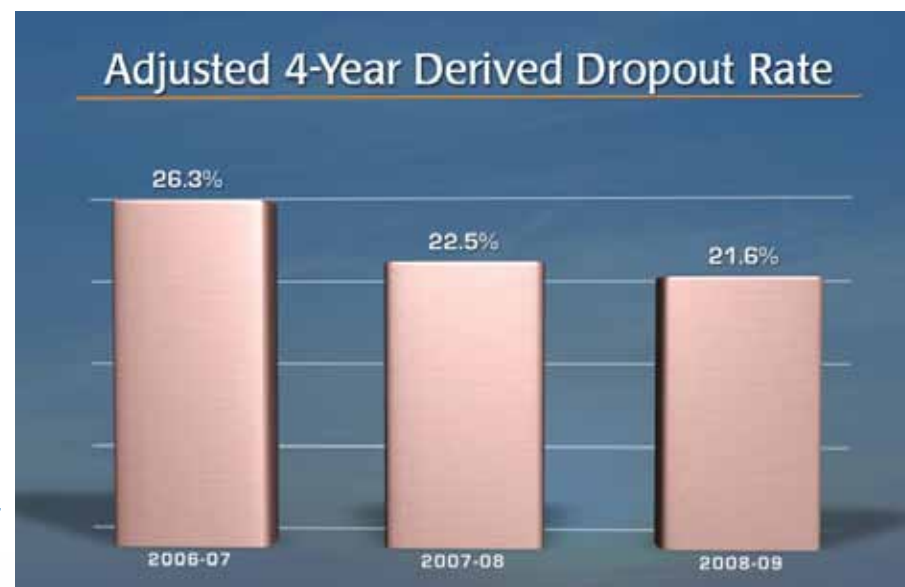
of our high school students were leaving over four-year periods. That ranked us fifth from the bottom among California's 58 counties. As our dropout rates have improved over the past two years, San Bernardino County has jumped 15

Early Assessment Program

High school graduation and college readiness are connected, whether a student enters into community college or the University of California/Cal State University systems. In 2008-09, 22.4 percent more high school seniors in San Bernardino County graduated with UC/CSU required courses from the prior year. These numbers show significant strides. Ensuring that high school graduates on a college path are truly ready to succeed in college is the goal of the Early Assessment Program (EAP).

The 11th grade assessment is designed to give high school students an early indication of college readiness in English language arts and math, and to avoid incoming college students' need for remediation. A student who is deemed by the program to be college-ready will be exempt from taking UC/CSU placement tests and can enroll directly into college level classes upon admission. Together with our school districts, community colleges, Cal State San Bernardino, Cal Poly Pomona and UC Riverside, we are working with school leaders to continue to increase student participation in the EAP.

Additionally, our office is working with Chaffey Joint Union High School District and Cal State San Bernardino to develop a pilot for students who do not pass EAP in their junior year, providing high school counselors and teachers with a gauge for course placement. In this era of limited resources, envision a future where high schools, community colleges and universities align coursework, teacher training, tests and college entrance expectations so students are prepared, at graduation, for the next stage of their education.



Alliance for Education

There can't be a conversation about a vision of schools for the future and not touch on the need for graduates, teachers and professionals in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics - or what's commonly referred to as STEM. County Schools' Alliance for Education continues to grow and expand efforts in developing STEM focused

programs in elementary through post-secondary levels across the county. This year's expansion has involved increasing elementary-level participation in STEM-focused activities. STEM programs of study have expanded to 10 districts and 19 school sites with over 1,500 enrolled students.

Real world learning not only makes learning relevant for students, it also inspires and excites them. Some 600 middle school students from nine school districts had their engines revved up at the first NASCAR Math and Science Day at the Auto Club Speedway in Fontana. They had an opportunity to hear from Gil Martin - he's the crew chief of the No. 29 car for driver Kevin Harvick - and got the opportunity to meet Rutledge Wood of Speed TV. For those who are NASCAR fans, those names are meaningful. But students also got excited about conducting math and science labs on speed, acceleration, mass, force and friction with professor Dr. Diandra Leslie-Pelecky, who wrote the book "The Physics of NASCAR." Talk about relevance!

Regional Occupational Programs

We've moved toward great clarity in the education community that all students need to graduate high school with preparation for post-secondary opportunities—whether that be a four-year institution, a community college, training for a career or directly into the workforce. I'm a strong believer in Regional Occupational Programs (ROP) and its role in the future of our public schools. Data shows that ROP courses reinforce academic standards, provide relevance and help to reduce the dropout rate. Over 35,000 high school students were served through the three county ROPs during the 2009-10 school year. Funding for these programs is precious and crucial to our economy, and we all need to fight the good fight to protect it.

Student Services

Equally critical to districts, families and communities are our Student Services programs, as they serve the most vulnerable of student populations. I am proud to say the deliveries of services in these programs are models statewide. The California Department of Education selected our Juvenile Court Schools' Special Education Records Collection System as a statewide model. The office was awarded a grant to present the system to County Offices throughout the state.

Because of the range of student populations served in our alternative and special education classrooms, a variety of innovative technological solutions are being used to support teaching and learning. Audio enhancement systems help deaf and hard of hearing students understand verbal communications while iPods and iPads are used to visually enforce teaching strategies with visual learners in special education classrooms. In our Juvenile Court Schools programs, on-line college courses are helping students not only get back on track for high school graduation, but bound for college.

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