

**Celebrating
America's
most improved
public school
districts.**

The 2013 Broad Prize

About the Finalist

San Diego Unified School District *California*

DISTRICT PROFILE

Superintendent William Kowba, a former admiral in the U.S. Navy, served as superintendent from June 2010 to his retirement in June 2013. He previously served as temporary superintendent from September 2009 to May 2010 and from August 2006 to March 2008. Before that, he was the district's chief financial officer, chief special projects officer and chief logistics officer. From March 2008 to September 2009, the district was led by Terry Grier, who then resigned to become superintendent of the Houston Independent School District. San Diego Unified is currently led by Cindy Marten, who became superintendent on July 1, 2013. She has been a teacher and administrator for more than 25 years, serving for the past six years as an elementary school principal.

Governance Five-member school board, elected at large to serve staggered four-year terms

Teachers Union San Diego Education Association

\$1.09 billion
Annual Budget

\$9,676
Per Pupil Expenditures

19
Rank Among U.S. School Districts

112,230
Number of Students (district-managed schools)

5,924
Number of Teachers (district-managed schools)

178
Number of Schools (district-managed schools)

27%
Students Designated as English Language Learners (district-managed schools)

65%
Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch (district-managed schools)

Student Demographics

10%
African-American

15%
Asian

46%
Hispanic

5%
Multi-ethnic

1%
Other

24%
White

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

San Diego Unified School District students performed better than expected compared to other California districts with similar demographics.

In 2012, proficiency rates for San Diego Unified School District students exceeded expectations relative to other California districts, given the district's poverty level across all subjects (reading, math and science) and all schools levels (elementary, middle and high school).

San Diego Unified narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic students and white students and between low-income students and their more affluent peers.

In recent years, San Diego Unified narrowed achievement gaps between its Hispanic students and the state's white students in elementary, middle and high school reading, math and science and between its Hispanic and white students in elementary, middle and high school reading and science and in elementary and

high school math. The district also narrowed achievement gaps between its low-income students and the state's non-low-income students in elementary, middle and high school science and in elementary and high school reading and math.

Low-income, Hispanic and African-American high school students in San Diego Unified improved more in science than other students in California.

In recent years, San Diego Unified was in the top 30 percent of California districts for increasing the percentage of low-income, Hispanic and African-American high school students performing at the highest achievement levels on the state science assessment. For example, between 2010 and 2012, the percentage of low-income students performing at the highest achievement levels increased by 8 percentage points in high school science, while the increase for the rest of California was 3 percentage points during that period.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES RELATED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The district has focused on community-based education, with an emphasis on revitalizing neighborhood schools.

Since 2009, San Diego Unified has been working toward a community-based approach to school reform, with an emphasis on revitalizing neighborhood schools. In this district with substantial pockets of poverty, school leaders view a system of neighborhood schools—where every school is a quality school—as an issue of equity. Neighborhood schools also are prudent financially, as they transportation costs, helping the budget-strapped district when it eliminated bus service for 4,000 students.

To achieve quality neighborhood schools, the board of education developed a strategic plan called Vision 2020 to guide policy and practice in the district along five focus areas: 1) creating improved and broader measures of student achievement; 2) developing schools as neighborhood learning centers; 3) ensuring effective teaching in the classroom; 4) engaging parents and the community; and 5) facilitating district-wide communication and support.

The plan includes a full range of academic programs in each of the 16 geographic “clusters”—a pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade community of schools with established feeder patterns. Councils in each of the clusters—comprised of the schools’ principals, parents and community representatives—are a forum for stakeholders to discuss common needs, concerns and challenges.

In 2011, the board directed the superintendent to translate the vision into a collaborative plan that would ensure the district has a quality school in every neighborhood by 2020. The board strongly believes in site-based management and asked the superintendent to ensure that the bulk of decision-making reside at the school level. A strategic plan was put in place with a dozen indicators that included such items as quality teaching, quality leadership, professional learning for all staff, closing the achievement gap with high expectations for all, high enrollment of neighborhood schools, digital learning and others.

With an emphasis on quality neighborhood schools and schools serving as neighborhood centers, San Diego Unified has established multiple programs to involve parents and the community. In addition to parent education programs, like literacy and math nights, schools also offer college information nights, programs

for newcomers and refugees, special outreach to military families and partnerships with community organizations. Parents report that there are ample opportunities for meaningful involvement.

In addition to expanded partnerships with community organizations and parent engagement programs, the district also engages instructional leaders in the vision by offering professional development, organizing professional learning communities and instructional leadership teams at each school.

Implementing technology in every classroom is a key toward making every school a quality school.

Digital literacy and technology in every classroom is one of a dozen indicators the district developed to reach San Diego’s Vision 2020. To that end, the district successfully garnered community support to pass a \$2.1 billion bond, that earmarked \$344 million to fund 5,000 digital classrooms known as the i-21 initiative. In 2009, San Diego Unified initiated a five-year roll out of the initiative, designed to connect 5,000 classrooms and provide, iPads, laptops or other devices for all 131,000 students.

The bond pays for the devices and for ongoing professional development for teachers to help them learn how to use high-quality digital teaching and learning tools, embed technology into curriculum and classrooms, and meet the needs of digital learners.

San Diego Unified has a robust and comprehensive assessment system that is completely aligned with content standards.

In the district, summative, benchmark and formative assessments are all administered and reviewed on a routine basis. San Diego Unified administers three levels of assessments: federal and state mandated assessments, district assessments and common formative assessments.

Data is easily accessible for administrators, teachers, students and parents, with multiple systems available that generate user-friendly reports and results. The district offers in-depth professional development to help educators learn how to use the system and provides an “angel” in every building who can help struggling staff members with the system. Data are routinely accessed and used by district- and school-level administrators and teachers. An achievement gap taskforce also is deployed

in many schools to help teachers understand how to access and interpret data.

The district prepares teachers to work effectively with English language learners.

Every San Diego Unified elementary school, along with targeted secondary schools, has English language support teachers to assist the classroom teachers with lesson planning and instructional strategies. The district offers professional development in English language development for all staff. A Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) guide was developed and is frequently used by teachers to plan lessons for English learners. The QTEL approach emphasizes rigor, high expectations, and opportunities to practice language and acquire academic vocabulary.

In addition to providing more in-depth professional development using the quality teaching approach, the district also emphasizes fluency, helps families to become more fluent and celebrates progress publicly to encourage others. For example, when students pass a fluency test, schools hold public reclassification ceremonies to celebrate student success.

Operationally, San Diego Unified successfully studies processes and improves on them, from improving teaching ELLs to its innovative approach to food services. The district provides food trucks to many high schools to increase the number of students who participate in the free- and reduced-price student lunch program. The district also has an elementary school program that stresses farm to table, with cards that have pictures of local farmers and their contributions to food services. The community has supported the district's embrace of the healthy food movement.

The district puts a strong emphasis on creating a positive climate and has developed multiple partnerships to engage community stakeholders.

In recent years, San Diego Unified has encouraged a community-wide effort to support a positive school climate. In addition to its "cluster councils," which regularly solicit feedback and input from a wide variety of stakeholders the district expanded its partnerships with the African American Educators' Association, Latino Taskforce and Safe Schools Taskforce. These groups include district staff, parents, post-secondary educators, elected officials and community members

with a focus on the needs of high-risk student populations. The African American Educators' Association and Latino Taskforce are focused on closing the achievement gap; The Safe Schools Taskforce developed strong policies and procedures for schools to ensure that all students can interact in a safe and secure learning environment, one free from any threat to their safety and well-being from their peers or any others in the school setting. Administrators are accountable for ensuring that the school climate is positive and that students and their parents feel welcome and valued. The climate is measured through parent, student and staff surveys; phone logs managed by parent support liaisons; Family Friendly Schools feedback ; and the district's fraud hotline.

The district places a priority on parent involvement and community engagement. Most efforts are fostered at the school level, but are centrally supported through the provision of initiatives like Family Friendly Schools, a training program that encourages school staff to be more welcoming and service-oriented when interacting with families. San Diego also instituted parent engagement programs such as the Parent Institute for Quality Education, which teaches parenting skills and techniques for helping students perform well academically. In Raising a Reader classes, parents are taught how to facilitate fluency and comprehension activities. Other programs and services offered through the district's Parent Outreach and Engagement Department include San Diego Parent University (SDPU), which offers parent workshops to support student learning; Project Ujima, which provides workshops, resources, and networks that support African-American families to improve the academic, social and behavioral environment with the family and community; and the Family Engagement Network (FEN), which helps staff, parents and community members plan or receive training to increase the engagement of parents as part of the school improvement strategy.

The district's office on race and human relations supports the schools in ensuring respectful and caring environments. Special programs have been put into place to help students with disabilities to develop social skills and self-efficacy. Youth leadership opportunities are offered through school site councils, after-school programs and service opportunities. The district has put in place anti-bullying programs, and students report that bullying incidents are immediately addressed.