

Hello,

June 15, 2010

I am writing to say thank you and to invite you to help us build our strategic plan. I am so impressed by the good work I have seen this year. I appreciate the wonderful progress and celebrate the experiences I have shared with so many of our students, families, staff, and community throughout the 2009-10 school year. Working together, I know we will make Oakland Unified School District the organization we need to serve all our families and our community well.

When I began as Superintendent in July of 2009 I knew I would have to learn what people wanted and needed from me as a leader. In person and in written correspondence, I heard many times over that, “we need to come together,” that “we are more divided than we are united,” that, “we need to take care of students and employees,” that “sometimes I don’t think people remember that we are here to make sure students learn,” and, “we need to do more than focus on test scores.” I agree. I also heard that we have incredible teachers, amazing office staff, gifted principals, and that there are remarkable, “‘go-to’ people in central office that demonstrate excellent customer service even when the answer is no.”

We have so many strengths to build on as we go forward together. And, as all of you know, the challenges we face are extreme. Our communities are suffering the loss of life and the on-going threat of violence. Too many children and families don’t have adequate resources. And the unprecedented budget cuts are a supreme test. Reducing our budget by more than \$100 Million dollars for next year is both heartbreaking and very difficult technical work. However, I believe we must clarify and intensify our shared purpose in these challenging times. I believe we must:

1. Build community and connect those communities so resources are maximized on behalf of children and families.
2. Ensure a caring and high quality teacher in every classroom by caring for and developing the teachers we have.
3. Articulate an Oakland-wide vision, and set of expectations, for all 18 year olds in our city.

The collective work of caring for and educating every student, turning towards each other, of creating more community, and connecting those communities across our city is work that OUSD is uniquely positioned to do.

The documents that follow this letter represent a framework for engaging each other and working together to create a shared strategic plan. I know we have the energy, capacity, and resources to make our Oakland Unified School District the organization it must be in order to serve our children well.

As we embark on this planning work over the next year, I invite you to share your ideas, offer your leadership, and continue to make a positive difference in the lives of students. I believe that by working together to unify Oakland for the academic and social success of our children, we will see students thrive.

All of Oakland’s children deserve an outstanding education. Each child has a right to experience the care and guidance of a high quality teacher. We need to treat every child and family with respect and dignity. And we need to care for our employees in ways that make it possible to achieve our goals. Please join us in making a path that leads to an Oakland Unified where every student reaches his or her potential.

With respect and appreciation



Tony Smith