

San Diego High Cluster Proposal for Stimulus Package Funding

Background

The San Diego High School Cluster comprises fifteen elementary schools, two middle schools and a complex of six small autonomous high schools with API ranges from one to ten. The majority of the student population is comprised of Latino, English Learner, and low income students. The overwhelming majority of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Within the cluster, we have six International Baccalaureate schools yet many high-performing students leave the cluster to attend schools in other areas of the district, as well as private and charter schools. In order to retain greater numbers of high performing students and increase the achievement of those who are not performing at grade level, our professional community will embrace a common set of social and academic skills that are based on the framework put forward by **The Partnership for 21st Century Skills¹** and the **State Content Standards**.

Attempts to “reform” our schools, particularly high schools, have yielded disappointing results in many cases. Rarely do reform efforts span the K-12 continuum in a specific geographic area of the district. What makes this proposal unique is that *all* of the members of the San Diego High Cluster will work in consort to develop and maintain a culture of high achievement, personal accomplishment, and service to the community while preparing for post secondary education or career training. After discussion and review of both the 21st Century Skills and the IB frameworks, the group found that no conflict exists between the two. This will allow the entire professional community to have a common focus and language based on the essential skills our students need to succeed as citizens and workers in the new global society.

Rationale

The members of the San Diego High (SDH) Cluster planning group identified five areas in which to invest portions of the stimulus funds allocated. In addition, members of the group agreed to commit to the following:

Commitments by the Members of the San Diego High Cluster Professional Community

Within the 21st Century/IB frameworks, we will focus our efforts on developing the following:

- A common calendar that is aligned to support the needs of our students and families
- Vertical Pre-K-12 teams to plan for strong cluster alignment and articulation
- Professional development that is both site-based and cluster-wide
- Cluster leadership/advisory teams
- Parent outreach and support
- Community and university partnerships
- Character education and civics education that is consistent cluster-wide
- Cultural and linguistic proficiency among all members of the cluster
- Sustainability

Teaching and Learning

Cluster representatives agree that in order to raise achievement, teaching needs to be tied to specific learning outcomes. Therefore, there will be a cluster-wide emphasis on writing across the curriculum Pre-K through 12. This will be one of our primary instructional foci for both our students’ learning and our professional development. Classroom teachers and school leaders supported by parents, district staff and community members will:

- Vertically align the standards and the curriculum
- Develop common rubrics and assessments that are vertically aligned
- Design cooperative project-based units of study that developmentally increase the rigor and complexity of tasks
- Develop curriculum pacing guides to address the specific needs of diverse students
- Articulate the Response to Intervention strategies Pre-K through grade 12
- Implement strategic grouping
- Fund smaller class sizes across the cluster where appropriate

¹ <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>

- Fund cluster-wide access to full-day pre-K with community outreach

Professional Development

Teachers, school leaders and other members of the SDH Cluster realize that a set of common goals leading to the achievement of the state standards is crucial to the success of this work. Furthermore, it is understood that in order for our students to be prepared for college and/or the workplace there needs to be a cohesive approach to the teaching of 21st Century skills. Therefore a significant part of the funding will be allocated so that members of the cluster can:

- Participate in teacher and expert-led professional development that can be site-based but also cluster-wide on cooperative learning, use of graphic organizers, effective strategies to accelerate English acquisition, and effective strategies for teaching across the core subjects
- Obtain training in 21st Century content which includes
 - Global awareness
 - Financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy
 - Civic literacy
 - Health and wellness awareness
- Obtain training in 21st Century learning and thinking skills which are comprised of:
 - Critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
 - Communication skills
 - Creativity and innovation skills
 - Collaboration skills
 - Contextual learning skills
 - Information and media literacy skills

Student Engagement

Members of the San Diego High Cluster realize students need to be engaged in the learning process in order to achieve high standards. An aspect of 21st Century learning and thinking is the development of essential skills that will be deliberately and strategically taught which include: leadership, ethics, accountability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction, and social responsibility. Funds from the Stimulus program will be used to develop strategies, activities, and forums for student engagement through:

- Increased enrichment activities
- Student-initiated, inquiry driven projects and assignments
- Cross-age tutoring
- Intramural sports
- Cluster-dedicated transportation for vocational, enrichment, and cultural events
- Authentic assessments
- Real-life connections and community focused learning expeditions

Technology

The use of technology in the 21st Century involves much more than the use of tools. Students must be able to use technology to help them learn content and skills. They need to be able to know how to learn, think critically, solve problems, use information, communicate, innovate and collaborate.² In order for our students to compete in a global economy, they need to master technology skills and use technology to foster academic, social, and cultural learning. In order to achieve this goal, members of the San Diego High Cluster will provide:

- 1:1 computers for each student
- Smart classrooms
- Instruction in the literacy, language, and ethics of technology
- Extended opportunities for students and families to use technology

Community and Parent Connections

Students achieve best when their academic, emotional and social needs are met through a collaborative effort involving staff, parents and the community. To ensure healthy, productive students we will provide:

² A Vision for 21st Century Learning

- Health and social services within the cluster
- Cluster dedicated transportation to improve attendance, allow for inter-school activities, and explore the richness of our community
- Cluster-wide curriculum and technology involving family and community members
- Cluster-wide curriculum and technology family literacy or *learning together nights* with transportation, child care and refreshments
- A plan to welcome new families into our learning community.
- A Cluster Advisory Board comprised of parents, community members, staff, and students to monitor implementation and pursue modes of sustainability

Conclusion

Members of the San Diego High Cluster recognize that in order for students to be equipped with 21st Century skills and be prepared to enter college or join the workforce, we will need to work differently with them. No longer will the tried and true methods and pedagogies suffice if we are to prepare them for jobs that may not yet exist. We are committing to become learners ourselves and to do so across grade levels and content areas.

Employers and college professors have stated for years that our high school graduates are not prepared to join the university ranks or the job force. There is plenty of data that indicates that many high school graduates must enroll in remedial courses for several semesters because they have not acquired the necessary skills to be successful in college level courses. We are prepared to change that data. With the support of Stimulus dollars, it will be done.