



Los Angeles Area
Chamber of Commerce

MONDAY | August 14, 2006

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE:

AB 1381: A Step in the Right Direction



Coming up at the Chamber

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TUE | Aug. 15
Southern California
Leadership Network
Recruitment Reception
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WED | Aug. 16
Fixing Our Schools - An
Education Action Summit
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THU | Aug. 17
Export Seminar Session #8
Freight and Logistics -
Delivering Goods
[more info](#)

TUE | Aug. 22
Referral Network
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The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce is the voice 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

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We believe K-12 education to be one of the most important— perhaps **the** most important – issue facing our community and that's why the Chamber [decided last week to support AB 1381](#), Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's school reform effort. 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 are catastrophic. Following are some key issues that informed our decision.

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 Supt. 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.

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. L.A.'s challenges are intensified due to the number of languages spoken by students, high poverty rates and other factors.

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, but dramatic action must begin immediately.

There are some well-recognized, vital elements to a successful educational system. LAUSD must be a magnet for world-class leadership and educational talent. It must operate more efficiently to attract and retain qualified teachers and principals, remove underperforming teachers and administrators, create a safe, positive and personalized learning environment, and engage students and parents.

The low-test scores, high dropout 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 all be engaged in where we go tomorrow.

Teachers are underpaid and underappreciated. Unless we appropriately compensate and recognize their hard work, the task will be greater still.

Union influence needs to be limited on issues unrelated to wages, benefits and associated issues. It is not appropriate for unions to exercise 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.

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 the teachers' union dominates elections. The advantages of an elected school board in L.A. are overwhelmed by the disadvantages.

As the most visible, important elected official in L.A., Mayor Villaraigosa 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.

Based on our research and findings, we prefer a governance structure with clear accountability. Such is not the case with AB 1381. 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 AB 1381 is a step in the right direction and with that, we do agree.

The Chamber has supported every LAUSD bond measure put before the voters for the building of new schools during the past 10 years and commends the district on the progress of its current school construction program.

Notwithstanding recent progress, it has become evident that outside

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L.A. Business THIS WEEK

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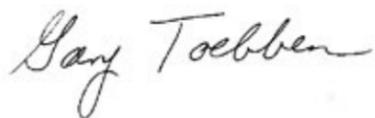
intervention is needed to begin to bring about internal reforms and accountability within the district for its 750,000 students, their parents and the taxpayers of the district.

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.

The Chamber supports and urges the state legislature to adopt AB 1381, which we see as the initial step in structuring a new compact among all L.A. stakeholders that will set high achievement goals and appropriate measurements of success, and will commit the Mayor and all stakeholders to specific actions necessary to reach these goals.

Next week I'll discuss the first steps to creating a collective community effort for the future of our students.

And that's *The Business Perspective*.



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The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben, President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.

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