

Spring, 2008



# The Brunner Report

*A newsletter from Councilwoman Jane Brunner*

*jbrunner@oaklandnet.com; (510) 238-7001*

## A Message from Jane Brunner:

As a parent of children who attended Oakland public schools and a teacher for 12 years in public schools, I understand the importance of having good education available to all children.

I believe a great school has a great principal, as well as good teachers and active parents. In order to have great principals, the School District must be careful in choosing its leaders and evaluate them closely. We also need to give principals the tools they need, by permitting them to control their budget and hire teachers.

I am pleased that the School Board has gained back some of its power and I think the new District Superintendent, Vincent Matthews, is starting to work with our communities.

I hope you will be able to come to my Community Meeting on April 12th, to meet Superintendent Matthews, hear what he is doing and what his plans are, and express your opinions.

We will also be featuring Stephen Wesley, Superintendent of the Emery Unified School District, Sheila Jordan, Superintendent for Alameda County, and Kerry Hamill, District 1's representative on the School Board.

Councilwoman Jane Brunner  
5111 Telegraph Avenue, #105  
Oakland, CA 94609

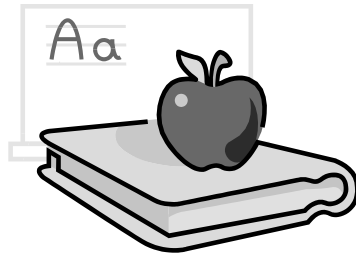
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# Interview with State Administrator Vincent Matthews

Vincent Matthews was appointed as the Interim State Administrator for the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in September 2007. The Brunner Report conducted this interview with him.

## What makes a great school?

Three things contribute to making a great school:



1. High levels of student achievement. When students leave a school, they should be at or above grade level.
2. Parental and community involvement. There should be pride in a school and a culture that supports not only academics but also good citizenship.
3. A well-managed site. Schools should be fiscally solvent and should offer a clean, safe and healthy place for children to learn.

## What can parents do to improve their school?

Get involved. By that, I don't just mean volunteering on-site. I know that many parents are working multiple jobs and that that kind of a time commitment can be difficult, but parents should have an active understanding of what their children are learning. They should help them with their homework and create a good place to learn and do homework at home.

Obviously, if parents are able, I would encourage them to volunteer at their children's school as well. Numerous opportunities exist, like being a tutor in the classroom or volunteering on school trips or even just helping with supplies. Parents should also hold their schools to high standards and challenge them to do more. Too many parents are satisfied with a safe school. They should be pushing for a safe and an academically rigorous school.

## How will your Administration turn Oakland's schools around?

When the State takes over a school district, we have three main goals; to improve student achievement; re-store fiscal solvency; and work towards returning control to the local board.



In terms of student achievement, OUSD has been one of the lowest performing school districts in the state but we are improving. In fact in the last year, OUSD had the largest improvement in test scores in the State.

Through our Expect Success program, we are seeking to improve student achievement by focusing on three objectives:

- All students read and write at or above grade level by the end of third grade.
- All students succeed in algebra by the end of ninth grade.
- All students graduate prepared to succeed in college and the workplace.



Performance levels in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade are key indicators for success in college. So far our second graders are testing at higher levels and we should see increases in the scores of the later grades.

In terms of financial issues, we have made a lot of progress. This past budget, with a deficit of only \$121,000, was the closest that we have come to a balanced budget. Each year we are improving our fiscal systems. Unfortunately, the Governor is calling for a \$4 billion dollar cut to the education budget which would mean a \$15-\$21 million cut to the OUSD budget resulting in massive cuts across the board. It would be devastating.

# Interview with State Administrator Vincent Matthews

(continued)

As for returning power to the School Board, at this point, the areas of community relations, school facilities and human resources are being turned over to the School Board. This will give the Board the right to begin the process of hiring a new Superintendent this Spring.

Fiscal matters will remain under State control until the State's loan to the District is repaid (about 20 years). With the large increases in our test scores, we expect that the Board will regain control of student achievement when the State does their audit next fall.



## How does Oakland differ from the other cities that you have worked in?

There is real passion in Oakland about students and student achievement. The community clearly cares about education. Measure G, which passed with 78% of the vote, is a testament to that commitment. There are also a number of non-profits dedicated to education. I'm consistently amazed and delighted at the community's response. Sometimes they agree with me and sometimes they don't, but, either way, the community is engaged and is passionate about education and the school system.

## You have worked in charter schools in the past, what role do you think charter schools should have in Oakland?

Charter schools are just one part of our portfolio of schools. We have traditional schools, small schools, charter schools and

alternative schools. Our goal is to have a diverse mix of schools to meet the needs of students. We need to share best practices between all the different types of schools to find the best ways to teach students, particularly low-income students of color.

## How does OUSD deal with truancy issues?

Obviously, we need to have kids in the classroom in order to meet our achievement goals and deliver on our promise to the community. We work with counselors and parent liaisons to meet with kids and their parents when they have more than 3 absences. We also have Oakland Truancy Attendance Program, a center for kids that are picked up by the police. We work with the Truancy Task Force, a body made up of community members, board members, elected officials etc. Fundamentally, we understand that the best way to keep kids in school is to provide instruction that is interesting, challenging and relevant to their lives and to help kids to understand that education will help them in their lives.

## Any final thoughts you'd like to share with the community?

There have been three State Administrators. As the third, my role is to help facilitate a transition back to the local School Board. I am focused on helping to train the School Board to help them learn the financial skills and the kinds of questions they should be asking of their staff in order to run the District well. The fighting between the State and the School Board is just a distraction from our real mission. We need to focus on making sure that school is a meaningful experience for kids, one that truly prepares them for the future.



# Oakland Responds To Truancy

Truancy is a serious problem both for chronic truants, who are much less likely to succeed later in life, and for community members, who are victims of robberies and other crimes that are committed by young people who should be in school.

In Oakland schools, when a student misses a day, an automated message is sent to their home. When a student accumulates three unexcused absences, the school holds a meeting with the parent.



When all other efforts have been exhausted, the student is referred to School Attendance Review Board (SARB), which refers students to Social Services, Child Protective Services, Center for Family counseling, Scotlan Center or the Alameda County District Attorney's office depending on the student's needs. SARB also offers support groups in anger management, and parent support.

Schools also conduct prevention programs, such as the Second Step Program, a nationally renowned violence prevention effort that teaches students social skills including, impulse control, non-violent problem-solving and anger management.

The Oakland Police Department (OPD) works in conjunction with the School District to get truants off the street and back into the classroom. Police officers stationed at Oakland high schools, provide mentoring for students and student/parent/teacher counseling.

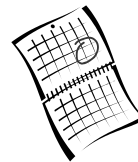
Officers conduct regular truancy sweeps to pick up kids on the streets during school hours. After being picked up, truants are brought to the Oakland Truancy Attendance Program, where they can complete a day of school and get the resources they need from community agencies. In North Oakland, Captain Anthony Toribio has ex-

panded truancy sweeps.

In dealing with juveniles who commit crimes, OPD has shifted to a more prevention-oriented philosophy. Some offenders are directed to programs like Project First, an informal probation for first-time offenders. Another program, Pathways to Change, is a diversion initiative that pairs repeat offenders with case managers who serve as mentors and role models.



Community members are also part of the solution. If you see school age children during school hours that are not in school, leave a message on the Truancy Tip Line (510) 879-8172.



## **JANE BRUNNER'S Community Advisory Meeting**

**Saturday, April 12, 2008**

**10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

***Peralta Elementary School, 460 63rd Street***

April's Topic

**What Makes a Great Urban Public School?**

*With*

Vincent Matthews, State Administrator

Oakland Unified School District

*And*

Stephen Wesley, Superintendent Emery

Unified School District

Sheila Jordan, Superintendent Alameda County

Kerry Hamill, Oakland School Board, District 1

(Parking on Alcatraz, east of Telegraph)