

Regular Board Meeting – March 18, 2008

**SUBJECT: TURNAROUND SCHOOLS: NO EXCUSES UNIVERSITY**

**Overview**

*No Excuses University* is a national network of elementary schools which promotes college readiness for all students. The network is sponsored through TurnAround Consulting, LLC, an organization founded three years ago by Damen Lopez and Jeff King, co-principals at Los Penasquitos Elementary School in San Diego. With the understanding that post-secondary education is essential for moving children out of generational poverty, *No Excuses University* schools target all students, but specifically low-income and minority students, through college awareness activities and an instructional focus on preparation for post-secondary education. TurnAround Consulting, LLC sponsors workshops around the country to promote the essential systems in elementary schools which support academic achievement leading to college attendance.

**No Excuses: School Culture of Universal Achievement**

*No Excuses University* schools create a culture of universal academic achievement by accepting no less than steady academic growth for each student. This growth is monitored by specific, ongoing analysis of individual student achievement data coupled with immediate instructional interventions. Teachers and administrators in *No Excuses University* schools commit to collaborative efforts to develop and implement highly aligned curriculum and instructional practices, ongoing assessment practices, detailed analysis of achievement data, and coordinated intervention efforts. Student achievement data, from classroom tests through district wide standardized assessments, are openly published and displayed within the school for easy access by professional staff. Dialogue on specific data points, interventions, and longitudinal achievement patterns becomes part of the daily work in these schools.

Parents also play a key role in *No Excuses University* schools. Parents participate in annually setting both student achievement goals as well as parenting goals focused on academics. Schools establish “Parent Universities” to encourage ongoing parenting education and to offer information on post-secondary educational opportunities.

Along with this heightened focus on individualized student achievement is a powerful, symbolic embrace of college life. Beginning in the kindergarten year, a non-negotiable expectation that each child will attend college is promoted. Individual classrooms seek sponsorship by a college or university, with donations of college/university apparel to be worn by students and staff on a regular basis. Classroom and hallway displays of college/university pennants and other motivational items are commonplace. Specific vocabulary words associated with college admissions and college life are directly taught and used daily. Conversations among school staff and between staff and parents focus directly on learning and preparing for college to reinforce the commitment of college attendance for all.

Schools must apply to TurnAround Consulting, LLC, to become members of the *No Excuses University* network. Prior to making application, a school team comprised of the building principal and representatives from each grade must attend a TurnAround Schools workshop, and must submit written evidence that a culture of universal achievement is underway. Schools in the network are linked together across the country to share ideas and resources.

### **District 68 and No Excuses University**

To date, our K-5 principals and both the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and the District Superintendent have attended a TurnAround Schools workshop. This past January, representative teachers from each of our four schools visited a *No Excuses University* school in a nearby community. At both the August, 2007 and the February, 2008 Teacher Institute Days, teachers heard presentations about TurnAround Schools and the *No Excuses University* network.

For the past several years, District 68 has been engaged in an intense, collaborative process of revising and aligning our K-8 curriculum. More recently, efforts have been focused on student assessment, the monitoring of student achievement data, and efficient means to warehouse and access achievement data for direct application to instructional practice. We clearly have evidence of our efforts to develop a culture of universal achievement.

Much enthusiasm exists among our faculty to pursue application to the *No Excuses University network*. To this end, Jeff King and Damen Lopez of TurnAround Consulting, LLC will host a two day workshop on August 13 and 14, 2008 in District 68. The social worker from Los Penasquitos Elementary School will join Damen and Jeff, and will focus her presentation on how to engage parents in the student achievement process.

### **Conclusion**

The *No Excuses University* initiative holds much promise for District 68. With a strong collaborative culture already in place in our schools, we are well on our way to refining the K-8 alignment of our curriculum, assessment practices, data management, and intervention strategies which are the hallmarks of effective systems in schools with high achieving students. The symbols associated with college life in *No Excuses University* schools and the expectation that all our students will be prepared to attend college will provide exciting motivation for students, their parents, and our faculty.

*No Excuses University* serves the goals of our 2006 District 68 Strategic Plan, addresses Board goals outlined in our District Performance Scorecard, and incorporates the foundations of Response to Intervention (RtI) in every aspect. We look forward to becoming a *No Excuses University* district during the 2008-2009 school year.