

State of the District for East Side Union: Challenges and Opportunities

By Eddie Garcia, Board President

(The following is adapted from Mr. Garcia's State of the District speech at the Board's Regular Meeting held on January 21, 2010.)

On Sept. 14, 1950, the East Side Union High School District opened its first school — James Lick High School — to serve the rural families of our agricultural valley. For the past six decades, our teachers and district employees have prepared students for the future. More than 200,000 East Side Union alumni have formed the backbone of Silicon Valley's work force and have made major contributions to our nation and the world.

Though 2010 will give the district a chance to celebrate its achievements of the past 60 years, the uncertain financial situation at the state Capitol will pose challenges to its future. Despite this uncertainty, East Side Union's dedicated employees and proud tradition will ensure that it continues to play a prominent role in educating and preparing the valley's next generation of leaders, innovators, and newsmakers.

As we begin the second decade of the 21st century, the state of East Side Union is both challenging and promising. To overcome the challenges and to capitalize on the promises, I'm asking the board to support three priorities for the upcoming year.

First, we must focus on student achievement with effective policies, not just words. We need to continue the work this board started in the fall to identify the achievement gaps within our system. Equitable funding within the district's budget should address the deficiencies, and before the year is out, this board should adopt a policy ensuring that all East Side graduates meet college entrance requirements by 2015.

Second, we must establish a reliable revenue source to counterbalance the instability of state funding. Teachers deserve to maintain a competitive compensation package, student-athletes need a quality sports program to enrich the educational experience and students require guidance counselors to ensure that they are prepared for college and a career.

We can achieve these goals if students, parents, employees and the entire East Side Union family work together to secure passage of a parcel tax. The amount will be prudent and responsible, taking into account the economic challenges we are all facing, and the measure should include citizen oversight to ensure the dollars are spent appropriately.

Third, we must be deliberate and thoughtful in choosing a permanent superintendent. Our next superintendent must have a track record in increasing student achievement and must have experience meeting the needs of a diverse student body like East Side Union's. But we don't have to be in a hurry. Our interim superintendent, Dan Moser, is a 36-year veteran of East Side Union and has earned the respect of administrators and teachers. He has been a steady hand during these turbulent times.

This year will also be one of celebration. Well-respected former Superintendents Frank Fiscalini (1955-82) and Joe Coto (1989-2003) will co-lead the district's 60th anniversary celebration to honor the achievements of East Side Union alumni, who include the likes of Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang (Piedmont Hills '86), Heisman Trophy winner and Super Bowl MVP Jim Plunkett (James Lick '65), and Kahled Hosseni (Independence '84), best-selling author of "The Kite Runner."

When you add the Olympians and the tens of thousands of teachers, doctors, lawyers, firefighters, business people, construction workers, nurses, politicians and others, the accomplishments of alumni give our community much to celebrate.

East Side Union will begin its 60th year with great challenges and even greater opportunities. With clear direction from the board and solid support from the community, we will overcome those challenges. Then we can look forward to the next 60 years to continue our legacy of preparing students for the bright future ahead.
