

## Villaraigosa flunks again

### LAUSD officials say mayor won't control schools until fall 2008

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Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's two-year drive for a role over Los Angeles schools has hit another obstacle: District officials say they won't give him even a small group of schools to oversee until the fall semester 2008.

With Villaraigosa now having support from a majority of the new board in the Los Angeles Unified School District, it was widely assumed — even by the mayor — that he would gain control of some campuses this fall.

But school officials said in interviews Friday that such a partnership would require extensive planning, and the earliest it could begin would be September 2008.

LAUSD Superintendent David Brewer III and board President Marlene Canter said it was made clear in their conversations with the mayor that a year of planning will be needed.

"This is the conversation I had with the mayor: There's a process to this, and it's about autonomy and choice, and one of the things about choice is you have to go in and work with the faculties and communities to convince them to partner with you," Brewer said.

"He's got a little bit of work to do on his own, and he knows it. You have to have buy in at that level. ... Everybody thinks this is just 'Kumbaya, I'm getting to partner,' and it happens. No, no, no. You've got to go in there and talk to teachers and faculty."

Brewer's comments come just a day after Villaraigosa pointedly said in an interview that he is "looking for a cluster of schools beginning in September."

"We're going to have a great partnership with the school board," the mayor said. "I've been meeting with (district officials), and we are committed to a partnership, and I'm looking forward to what will develop."

The difference on time frames set up the first potential conflict between the mayor and Brewer, who has been superintendent just eight months.

The mayor's staff downplayed any discord. Villaraigosa spokesman Matt Szabo said the mayor was instead speaking about beginning the process toward partnership schools this year.

"He fully intends to begin the process of parent, teacher and community involvement as quickly as possible so that the new partnership schools will be ready for launch in the fall of 2008," Szabo said. "There is absolutely no discord between the superintendent and the mayor on this issue."

Szabo added that the mayor is looking forward to working with a new school board with whom he shares a sense of urgency for reform.

School board member and Villaraigosa ally Monica Garcia, who will likely be elected the board's president at its meeting Tuesday, said she was unaware there had been any timelines set for when the mayor could oversee a cluster of schools.

Garcia said she would support a partnership with Villaraigosa as soon as possible.

"I want to see how soon we can do it," Garcia said. "We have built an energy around reform that I want to see maximized, and I'm committed to reform."

LAUSD and mayor's staff members have been in regular talks trying to structure a partnership. After Brewer and Villaraigosa met two weeks ago, aides for both men said an announcement could be made in the coming weeks.

"We're very optimistic the mayor will have a significant role in the school district working with the board and the superintendent, and we expect to be announcing this in the coming weeks," said Janelle Erickson, a spokeswoman for the mayor.

Once details of the partnership are announced, the plan is for the mayor and superintendent to begin grass-roots organizing in communities where schools are struggling.

To avoid problems with the teachers union and ease the perception that the mayor "took over" schools, the faculty and community surrounding a school or group of schools must ask the mayor to get involved, she said.

So far, organizations in the Crenshaw and Boyle Heights communities have reached out to the mayor, Erickson said.

Brewer, who recently succeeded in getting the school board to unanimously pass his first budget, is treading carefully with his own wide-ranging reform efforts.

His budget includes more than \$11 million to promote innovation in the LAUSD to speed up progress by creating benchmarks and replicating successes.

He said a special innovation division will review all partnership proposals — from the mayor or any group or school — using a measured and methodical approach covering everything from planning budgets and curriculum to roles and responsibilities.

Brewer also has said he's going to start small, with no more than four partnerships the first year.

While the mayor and Brewer have long said they are aligned in their visions for LAUSD reform, the potential difference of opinion on timing of mayoral involvement raised questions about whether Villaraigosa would try to use his new majority support on the school board to push forward.

The first signal of the new school board's alliance to the mayor will be its July 10 meeting — the final one before a scheduled summer recess.

Michael Kirst, professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford University, said majority support on a school board could help the mayor get schools by September, but the majority board members would be setting themselves up for a great deal of criticism for overt backing of a plan that hasn't been fully vetted.

With the board scheduled to recess for the summer after July 10, Kirst said it would be difficult to have the kind of public participation needed to reassure parents and others in the communities around the schools the mayor would oversee.

"If they do that, they really have agreed to a strong support and backing of him because there's going to be criticism of doing it so quickly in the summer before they've gotten any kind of public input from parents and the community," Kirst said. "It would be unusual."

Garcia said the new school board is driven by urgency and accountability, and those will be considerations in policy discussions in its first two meetings.

Eight resolutions on the board's agenda for the meetings — all proposed by Garcia — suggest that a focus on immediately boosting student achievement is a high the priorities of the new school boardstudent achievement.

The resolutions grapple with weighty topics: district accountability, involving parents in schools, graduation rates, English learners and creating smaller community schools and more schools in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The new board has a retreat planned July 9 — the day before it is expected to take action on several of the items Garcia proposed.

"Personally, I see the work has to be around increasing graduation rates and employing multiple strategies to meet the needs of different populations and being aggressive about change," Garcia said.

"We're expecting the superintendent to go to work with his team to develop a plan on how to get this done."

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