

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY INTO THE CLASSROOM



SAN LEANDRO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ly ing just south of Oakland, California, San Leandro’s school district has an enrollment of about 9,000 students in 12 schools, plus an adult school. But, like all school districts, San Leandro Unified School District (SLUSD) has felt the sting of budget cuts. And like all California cities, there have been significant demographic shifts over recent years. As the city’s population stabilized at just about 100,000, there was a growing perception that the District had been negatively impacted by these changes which prompted more families to choose private or non-local alternatives.

In 2005, SLUSD reached out to Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) for assistance in rethinking its communication efforts to the broad community. The District was familiar with FTA’s previous work with schools in Berkeley and Marin, so they asked FTA to assess the perceptions held by the community of the District and the schools, and to develop recommendations for SLUSD to chart a course toward broader public support.

FTA proceeded to conduct an intense round of interviews with local opinion leaders, business leaders, elected officials, the District itself (administration, teachers, staff), along with parents and grandparents of students or former students – taking special care to include residents with no primary connection to the school system.

The SAN LEANDRO SCHOOL DISTRICT consists of 12 schools serving approximately 9,000 students in grades K-12. Students are taught by 500 teachers and supported by 250 personnel, with a general District budget of approximately \$66.5 million.

PROJECT DATE: 2005

SECTOR: K-12 Public Education

KEY SKILLS AND SERVICES:

Interviewing, analysis, strategy development, communication solutions, graphics, writing, photography, design



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FTA also provided programmatic and administrative support for a series of community-wide meetings.

It quickly became clear that most residents knew little-to-nothing about SLUSD, as there had been little, if any, outreach to the general public. For example, several years earlier, SLUSD placed a successful bond measure on the ballot to provide much-needed physical improvements to the public schools throughout the city. But FTA discovered that there had been very little communication going out from the District about the improvements made through the use of these funds.

Out of this process, FTA produced a comprehensive and actionable communications and outreach plan, *Engaging the San Leandro Community in its Schools*. It was through this process that the District embraced the importance of reaching out to everyone in the city – including those who did not have children in the school system or any direct connection to SLUSD. The reality is that most people agree that a healthy school system is vitally important to any city's reputation and growth.

FTA recommended – and later designed, researched, wrote, and produced *Focus: San Leandro Schools* – an 8-page 'newspaper' mailed to every San Leandro address – laying out the progress of Measure A implementation at each school. There were stories in the real voices of students, teachers, administrators, and parents, explaining what San Leandro schools meant to them.

In addition, the formal plan drafted by FTA recommended several key structural improvements to the school district's approach to communications.

The 1997 school bond – Measure A – was approved by more than two thirds of San Leandro voters. It directed \$53.8 million for specific school construction and renovation projects. Part of the FTA communications plan recommended keeping the community well informed of the District's use of the funds to modernize the schools.

