

## Sweetwater Union High School District Leading the Way in Green School Building



*By: Hon. John McCann, President, Board of Trustees and Dr. Edward M. Brand, Superintendent*

*After serving eight years on the Chula Vista City Council, John McCann was overwhelmingly elected to the Board of Trustees of Sweetwater Union High School District in November 2010. An independent leader, John McCann as a parent himself is committed to be the voice of parents and students and is working for academic excellence, fiscal responsibility and resources for the district's classrooms.*

*Dr. Ed Brand spent most of his education career in the Sweetwater District serving as a teacher and coach. He later served as Sweetwater's superintendent for 11 years before leaving in 2005 to become superintendent of the San Marcos Unified School District. In June 2011, Sweetwater's Board of Trustees appointed him acting superintendent where he continues to work with staff, parents, and community members to provide a quality education for all students.*

Approximately one out of every four Americans step foot on the campus of an educational institution each day as students, teachers, staff, faculty and administrators. With such a significant percentage

of the country affected by the state of the nation's educational institutions, building state-of-the-art schools is more critical than ever. However, many campuses that currently exist are in need of repairs and constructed with outdated and potentially harmful materials. Today, a concerted effort is being made to supply school districts with the funds to build sustainable educational facilities. These green facilities not only provide a safe and healthy environment for students and teachers, but they also have long-term positive effects on the environment and reduce the overall operational costs of the facility. Currently, Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego County is leading the way in building sustainable educational institutions.

Founded in 1920, the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) has grown to include more than 43,000 students and 32,000 adult learners, making it the second largest secondary school district in California. Abutting the U.S./Mexico border, the district encompasses a population with a rich and diverse cultural makeup. More than 72 percent of district students are Hispanic and more than half speak a language other than English at home. Many of the campuses where these students are currently attending classes are nearly a century old and lack the 21st century technologies that are vital to preparing them for future success in post-secondary education. As a result, the Sweetwater community voted to begin building a brighter future for SUHSD students and passed Prop O in November 2006.

Prop O, the \$644 million school construction bond, is now funding the repairs and improvements needed to ensure that the district's students are in a safe, healthy and quality learning environment. The first phase of Prop O construction addresses the critical

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and urgent needs of nine of the oldest schools in the 32-campus district. While specific modernization projects vary from campus to campus, each site will be enhanced to include university-grade classrooms and laboratories as well as Smart Boards with wireless technology in many classrooms. Under the district's leadership and direction to implement green building practices where possible, Prop O has resulted in California's largest school construction program designed to be 100 percent LEED certified.

One of the first schools to undergo Prop O construction, Sweetwater High School, recently unveiled its modernized educational facilities. As National City's only high school, the nearly 100-year-old campus was in dire need of the new 87,000-square-foot building that features 34 classrooms, a counseling and health center, a student services office, a library and a 200-seat theater.

"Every room inside of the new building gives students a state-of-the-art learning environment with the latest technologies," said SUHi Principal Dr. Roman Del Rosario. "SUHi students now have facilities that will provide them with the first class education they deserve."

The overall design of SUHi's new three-story structure emphasizes energy efficiency. Wrapped in floor to ceiling glass windows, the new building maximizes student exposure to natural sunlight. The prevalence of openly-lit spaces is not only visually appealing but also works to create a more harmonious classroom environment. Research indicates that teachers are happier when they have the ability to control their environments and healthy, happy teachers save our schools money. These seemingly non-monetary benefits are integral to the overall cost savings for the District because absences decrease while teacher retention and test scores increase – an overall value to the district and community at large.

Additionally, the new building at Sweetwater High School incorporates state-of-the-art motion sensor lighting to ensure that lights cannot be left on and energy cannot be wasted. Photo Voltaic (PV) panels are being installed on the campus as well. By relying heavily on energy-efficient technologies, SUHi will save 15.3 percent more energy and attain a total cost savings for the campus of 20.8 percent, or \$35,544 per year. These efforts are coupled with SUHi's use of water conservation methods in restrooms throughout the new facility. By providing students and staff with dual flush fixtures and low flow faucets, SUHi will save 46.5 percent or 596,000 gallons of water per year.

The well-being of students, teachers, staff, faculty and administrators — particularly their physical and psychological comfort — is of utmost importance in every scholastic environment. By focusing green building efforts on the ways in which daylight can improve performance, good indoor air quality can improve health, sound acoustics can increase learning potential and comfortable indoor temperatures can increase occupant satisfaction, the Sweetwater Union High School District is creating state-of-the-art environments for students to excel.