

Coronado Unified School District

Superintendent's Recommendation for the Continuing Operation of the BBMAC

April 12, 2010

In a year filled with controversy over finances, it is unfortunate our District must face the issue of funding the Brian Bent Memorial Aquatic Facility or the BBMAC. The very existence of public schools in Coronado may be the issue as we discuss our budget for the next three years in June. Yet we face an equally stubborn foe in the ongoing debate over the worthiness of funding a pool. This current debate over the funding of the pool is sometimes overshadowed by the six year debate over the necessity for the pool to have been built.

But the pool was built at a cost of over \$8 million. Whether one is "in" or "out" no longer makes any difference; it is now a District asset and destroying this facility would be a significant waste of public funds. Now that the facility exists, it must be considered as any other District facility and maintained in like manner. The fact that it costs the District time and money to maintain this facility should not be considered any more important than the cost of maintaining the gymnasium, theatre, or fields.

While that may be true, it is not a reality to some of the community members or to some of the District stakeholders. The expectation of most that remember the contentious Board meetings of 2004-2005 is that the general fund of the District would not be used to supplement the operations of the pool. Even the use of District personnel to clean restrooms was considered to be a breach of this oft quoted pledge. When the Governing Board voted in September 2009 to takeover the operation of the pool and supplemented the operations of the pool with \$100,000 from a deferred maintenance fund, some community members thought it immoral.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Governing Board voted to maintain a public facility and keep it viable for student and community use. The expectation of some, or the promise made by individuals, must not stand in the way of the District's responsibility to develop long-range plans consistent with cultural or academic needs and to create or amend those plans as the Board discerns as the appropriate use of District facilities. The development of those long-range plans must be consistent with Board objectives for educational, social, and recreational activities. The action by the Governing Board to assume operation of the BBMAC, begin funding a portion of the expenses, and form a community Task Force was a sensible and appropriate act to take at that time.

The recommendation of the Aquatic Facility Task Force should be fully adopted by the Governing Board. The Pool Operations Reserve Fund (PORF or formerly the endowment) should be used to fund any additional expenses this adoption may incur no matter how much of that fund is depleted. A Marketing Coordinator, under the direction of our current Aquatic Director, should be hired and a major marketing push should be implemented to attract visitors from around the world. This marketing should be performed in conjunction with the Coronado Chamber of Commerce and the City of Coronado staff. Not only will the financial bottom line benefit from this marketing, but the City of Coronado businesses and eventually the residents will benefit from the additional spending from these tourists.

That being said, I must provide three caveats to the Governing Board. This extra push toward a full business model for the BBMAC will require more of my time, an expense for the District in not only monetary costs, but also academic costs. When I am working on the business of the pool I will not be in classrooms, I will not be talking with the community members, and I will not be directing our staff.

In addition I must be bluntly truthful and say that the pool will always be a cost to the District. Pipes burst, pumps malfunction, people have accidents, chemical costs will rise, and on and on it goes. Just like any other building or field, this pool will always be an expense. As pool use increases, so will the expenses. Any hope of profit will always be discouraged by other unexpected expenses.

Worst of all will be the fact that we are implementing a business model that hopes to increase pool participation at the expense of student time in the pool. Classes on water safety, physical exercise, and interscholastic sports will necessarily need to take a back seat to those who pay for pool time. The Task Force business plan counts on increased participation by outsiders to decrease the negative loss. The pool will be used by visitors to Coronado and not by the students and residents of Coronado. We have built a pool that we cannot afford to use and therefore we must rent the facility to others who can afford it.

Regardless of these three warnings, I still recommend that the Governing Board accept the report from the Aquatic Facility Task Force and approve the implementation of the business plan. I will of course promise to bring monthly reports to the Governing Board on the pool and spend whatever time is necessary to make the plan successful. I also promise to spend the energy and time necessary to fully act upon this plan. It is imperative we all do as much as possible to keep this pool viable as long as possible. It is only by keeping the pool open that we have any hope of returning our children to this facility and finally fulfilling the hopes of those who created the BBMAC.