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April 16, 2008

VIA E-MAIL

Santa Monica-Malibu Board of Education
1651 Sixteenth Street
Santa Monica, CA 90404

Re: Special Education Reform
Hearing Date: April 17, 2008
Agenda Item No. D.03

Dear Board Members:

I am writing to urge the Board to direct prompt implementation of the Barber report's recommendations for reforming District special education practices. Reforming these practices is long overdue.

District special education practices have been the subject of great controversy for quite some time. Last year, a significant number of parents and others expressed opposition to District practices -- including excessive use of settlement agreements, compelling parents to accept confidentiality provisions in such agreements, refusing to include settlement agreement-related services in student IEPs, and the District's abusive treatment of those parents who do not easily acquiesce in District decisions affecting their children.

Frustrated with the District's lack of responsiveness, as a last resort parents turned to the Santa Monica City Council for help. Fortunately, the City Council listened to these parents and conditioned increased City funding for the District on completion of an independent audit of District special education practices. The Barber report is the result of this parent-led effort.

The Barber report confirms the key criticisms which parents and others have leveled at District special education practices and provides a roadmap for District reform. It is imperative that the Board endorse the Barber report by requiring full implementation of its recommendations.

In addition, it is vitally important that the Board retain an independent consultant to oversee this implementation process. Special education parents and others have no confidence that District Staff -- who are responsible for the District special education practices that have been criticized in the Barber report -- will attempt in good faith to fix

