

## Antonio appeals to Valley councils

Mayor seeks help to reform schools

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VAN NUYS - Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa called on neighborhood councils Thursday to help him deliver a campaign promise to take more control of the Los Angeles Unified School District and reform the city's public education system.

Speaking to more than 200 members of the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils in Van Nuys, the mayor said the community groups serve as a forum where "ideas and views percolate."

Villaraigosa also said the councils could help him generate the momentum needed to reform the school district, which educates some 700,000 students.

"I would submit to you that the future is predicated on a great school system," Villaraigosa said. "The neighborhood council should be involved in that. A neighborhood is predicated on how well their neighborhood school does."

Created in 1999 under a charter amendment, almost 100 neighborhood councils gather citywide, while 34 meet across the Valley. They operate as advisory panels and were formed to bring representation to Los Angeles communities after the defeat of the secession movement.

Neighborhood council leaders said they were encouraged by the mayor's effort to form a bipartisan consensus on school reform. And some said they were willing to hear him out on how he plans to reform the school district.

"I think he's a skillful politician by including all people," in the discussion of reform, said Meg Augello, a member of the Northridge West Neighborhood Council. The school system "is an issue that has to be addressed."

Ron Nagai, a member of the Porter Ranch council, agreed.

"I think there is a failure on the part of LAUSD in terms of planning and it affects everyone," he said. "A fourth high school is planned for Granada Hills, but not in Porter Ranch. Those issues don't only affect Porter Ranch. It affects Granada Hills."

In a subtle snub to former Mayor James Hahn, whose administration created the neighborhood council concept, Villaraigosa said he would visit the Valley regularly.

"You're going to see me a lot in the San Fernando Valley," he said. "You're going to see me here more than any other Los Angeles mayor."