

BOARD VISION: *Every LAUSD student will receive a state-of-the-art education in a safe, caring environment, and every graduate will be college-prepared and career-ready.*

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
Los Angeles Unified School District

INFORMATIVE

TO: Members, Board of Education Date: September 28, 2007

FROM: Randy Ross
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SUBJECT: *Board Resolutions and the Superintendent's Focus on Low-Achieving Schools*

At the Board's 9-20-07 Committee of the Whole meeting, Ms. LaMotte asked us, among other things, to assemble information on prior Board resolutions that could help inform the Superintendent's efforts to accelerate academic growth and success in LAUSD's lowest-achieving schools. This Informative provides this background. Moreover, we discuss considerations pertinent to the funding, design, and implementation of the Superintendent's proposed initiative.

LAUSD's Low-API Schools

Recently, Superintendent Brewer set his sight on schools whose APIs fall below 600. He has identified 59 such schools. When we limit our review to regular elementary, middle, and senior high schools, we get a number close to this (57). Our list includes 31 senior high schools, 21 middle schools, 4 four elementary schools, and 1 span school. The approximately 132,000 students enrolled in the 52 schools for which we have complete data are mainly Latino and African American (81 percent and 15 percent, respectively). Over three-fourths of the students are known to be economically disadvantaged (that is, they qualify for participation in the federal lunch program), while only 3 percent are known not to be disadvantaged. About 70 percent of the students are English Learners (37 percent) or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (34 percent).

Board Motions Designed to Improve Student Achievement in LAUSD

As the Superintendent has noted, laudable gains in academic performance for elementary schools have not rubbed off on secondary schools. This pattern prevails throughout California. However, low achievement remains pervasive for some student groups in LAUSD across the K-12 continuum. In response to this need, LAUSD's Board of Education has taken numerous actions during the past decade to address low achievement, especially among Latino, African American, and EL students. Below we focus on those resolutions that relate most to the Superintendent's focus on the lowest-achieving schools.

We begin with the resolutions introduced by Board President Garcia on July 3 and adopted by the Board at its July 10 meeting. These resolutions, in effect, reflect a broad agenda for energizing efforts to ensure that all LAUSD students receive a state-of-the-art education that renders them college-prepared and career-ready.¹

District Accountability: Transformation Metrics

Under this resolution, the Board directed the Superintendent to develop a set of performance indicators on which he would report annually. About half of the listed performance indicators are also contained in a Board resolution passed on April 12, 2005 (i.e., Board's Vision and Goals). Moreover, data for most of these indicators are currently available. As well, the proposed indicators relate to many of the Board's long-range goals.

This resolution (Metrics) bears a close relationship to the Board's Budget Transparency and Accountability (BTA) resolution from February 2007. The Metrics resolution focuses on monitoring student achievement while BTA focuses on the cost-effectiveness of District programs. Both resolutions emphasize using data to drive District policy and actions, a touchstone of any effort to transform low-achieving schools.

“Diplomas for All”: Increasing the Number of High School Graduates

The Board's long-range goals include: (1) Every LAUSD graduate will be college-prepared and career-ready; and (2) All students will graduate from high school. Accordingly, pursuant to this resolution, the Superintendent is slated to develop (within 120 days) an eight-year strategic plan to pursue the goal of all students receiving a quality education and graduating from high school. Moreover, the Superintendent would report to the Board semi-annually on his progress in implementing the plan as well as increasing the proportion of LAUSD students graduating from high school. A plan to magnify attention on LAUSD's lowest-performing secondary schools seems consistent with this resolution.

English Learners: Hope on the Horizon

Under this resolution, the Superintendent will fully implement the Title III Initiative in its entirety and hold schools as well as local and central offices accountable for the academic success of English Learners and Standard English Learners. This relates to the Board's long-range goals concerning effective instruction, Proficiency+, high school graduation, and college and/or work. To these ends, the multiple provisions of the motion emphasize students securing proficiency in English as expeditiously as possible. The vast majority of the students in the lowest-achieving LAUSD schools are EL or SEL. Thus, strategies for expediting these students' proficiency in mainstream English is essential for improved student outcomes.

¹ For a detailed review, see our Board Informative, “Board President Garcia's Co-Sponsored Resolutions (Motions),” July 6, 2007.

Parent Participation

One of the Board's long-range goals stipulates that "parents and communities will be fully engaged in the education of their children." One of the Superintendent's guiding principles embraces this goal. This resolution reinforces the intent of the Board's long-range goal as well as seeks clarity regarding the Superintendent's approach to carrying out this goal. Presumably, the Superintendent's initiatives in this area would also be fully integrated into his efforts to turn around the District's lowest-achieving schools. However, for the lowest-achieving schools, we would recommend that the superintendent focus on the broader concept of educational advocacy. That is, all students should have access to effective educational advocates, preferably in the form of their parents. However, if the parents are not able to do the job, the school should take steps to ensure that effective advocacy is provided by others (e.g., teachers, counselors, mentors).

Leaders of Leaders Program

The recently passed 2007-08 Provisional Budget includes reductions in the resources allocated to principal development. Specifically, the Superintendent decided to put the New Principals, New Administrators, and School Leadership Team academies on hold for a year, pending a thorough study of nationally recognized school administrative development programs. While not tinkering with this decision, this resolution, premised on the importance of school leadership to school success, clarifies a Board view of the need for coherent development and implementation of a Principal Leadership Program that both identifies and develops prospective instructional leaders. Indeed, one of the challenges confronting below-600-API schools is effective, stable administrative and instructional leadership.

Small Schools for Success

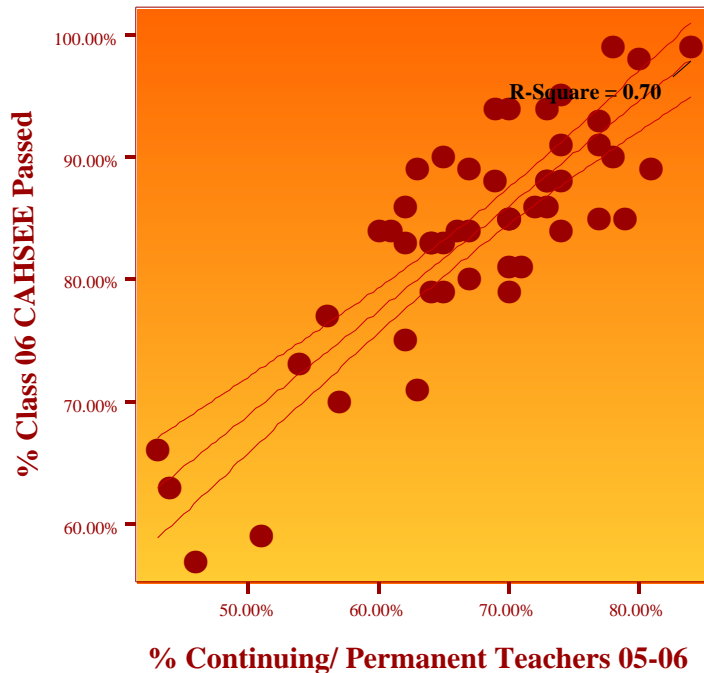
To implement this Board resolution, the Superintendent will, where practical and efficacious, build smaller schools and create primary schools with a K-8 configuration. Most of the below-600-API schools are among the largest in the state of California. Smaller schools could help to improve the personalization of these students' educational experiences.

"Teach LAUSD" Campaign

Under this resolution, the Superintendent will launch a "Teach LAUSD" campaign (by November 1, 2007) designed to "increase the total number of candidates that apply to be teachers, administrators, counselors, police officers, classified employees and volunteers in the District as well as the overall quality and experience level of those candidates." Given the District's commitment to lower class sizes, this is a laudable initiative.

However, while recruitment and hiring are critical processes, equally critical is the need for improved employee retention. In some schools, recruitment is overwhelmed by attrition. We propose that the Superintendent's analysis should: (1) examine the causes and consequences of attrition; (2) include an annual survey of teachers with an annual report on the condition of teaching in LAUSD with recommendations on how to improve those conditions; and (3) evaluate the impact of the Priority Staffing Program on teacher retention.

The most critical bottleneck facing below-API-600 schools is stable, effective teachers. As the chart below shows, the correlation between student achievement (API) and teacher quality/stability (percent of teachers continuing/permanent) is extraordinarily high. On one hand, students learn more when they have continual access to demonstrably successful teachers. On the other hand, many teachers are reluctant to teach in low-achieving schools. Either way, stabilization of the teacher forces in the lowest-achieving schools is a necessary condition for accelerated academic growth at these schools.



Linear Regression with 95.00% Mean Prediction Interval

Board Motions Passed from 1996 to 2006

In anticipation of the Board’s goal of closing the achievement and proficiency gaps, LAUSD Board actions prior to those listed above reflect a growing concern for the underachievement of certain segments of LAUSD’s student population, especially English Learners, African Americans, and Latinos. Below we briefly discuss key motions considered by the Board during the previous decade that bear strong relevance to the Superintendent’s focus on the lowest-achieving schools.

The Board’s Proficiency+ resolution, passed July 11, 2006, directs the Superintendent and Local District Superintendents to assess annually the performance of individual schools and local districts to determine their growth in Proficiency+ for ALL. Furthermore, the resolution stipulates that the Superintendent will report the assessment results to the Board by November 30 of each year along with recommendations for

continued adequate support and improved action, where needed, for schools and local districts in their quest for success with Proficiency+ for all student subgroups.

The Board's A-G resolution, passed June 14, 2005, requires that (by 2008) all LAUSD students enroll in an A-G college-prep curriculum and be given the support they need to successfully pass these courses. In prior years, the Superintendent's staff provided an occasional update on the status of this initiative.

The Board's Comprehensive Plan to Close the Achievement Gap for African-American and Latino Students, effected December 10, 2002, directed the Superintendent to return to the Board within six months with a comprehensive plan, with timelines for implementation and benchmarks, for closing the achievement gap for African-American and Latino students, including English learner, immigrant students, non-standard English speaking students (i.e., SELs) and children from low-income families and/or households. Further, the resolution stipulated that the plan include all proposed new initiatives, professional development plans and instructional programs with specific plans on how each of these components would explicitly use culturally relevant, culturally responsive and culturally contextual strategies for closing the achievement gap and fostering academic success for all students. At the request of Ms. Garcia, last year the Superintendent's staff provided a report on the status of this initiative. Much of this report seemed connected as well to the African American Learners' Initiative Action Plan --a resolution passed by the Board on June 24, 2003, which codified a plan developed by a LAUSD Steering Committee created pursuant to a related resolution passed by the Board on June 26, 2001.

Other important Board resolutions considered during this period are presented in the Educational Policy Unit recent (May 2007) report, *A Decade of Board Action to Accelerate the Education of LAUSD'S African American and Latino Students: Compilation of LAUSD Board Motions to Close the Achievement/Proficiency Gap, 1996 – 2006*.

Funding Reform in the Lowest-Achieving Schools

Discussion at the 9-20-07 COW meeting seemed to imply that the Superintendent would require additional resources to transform low-achieving schools. Our school budget profile data from the 2006-07 school year suggest that the lowest-achieving schools receive considerable supplemental federal and state resources designed to buttress efforts to provide compensatory educational support to these schools' students. For example, our review of 2006-07 budget data for a sample of four of the lowest-performing schools (two middle schools and two high schools) revealed that compensatory education funding ranged from about \$150 to about \$1,000 per student. Moreover, resources for TIIG ranged from \$300 to \$500 per student. Extra resources for curriculum-focused programs (e.g., District Reading Program, District Math Program, and the English Language Acquisition Program) amounted to an average of about \$120 per student.

In addition, about two-thirds of LAUSD's schools scoring below API = 600 are participating in the state's Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) during the next

several years. When fully funded (beginning 2008-09), each of the participating high schools will receive \$1,000 per student, each middle school will receive \$900 per student, and each participating elementary school will receive \$500 per student for grades K-3 and \$900 per student for grades 4 and 5.

Thus a challenge facing the Superintendent and Local District Superintendents is how to ensure that extant resources are effectively deployed to transform these schools. Indeed, chances are that any new resources pumped into these schools will pale in significance to the resources that are already available to these schools.

Accordingly, we recommend that the Board convene a COW to focus on the plans (i.e., single plans for student achievement) that were developed (or revised) pursuant to QEIA, perhaps with a special focus on the District's lowest-achieving schools. Moreover, we recommend that schools' single plans for student achievement be posted on LAUSD.net.

Key Considerations in Transforming the Lowest-Achieving Schools

We close this informative with a bit of reflection on factors that the Superintendent may want to consider in rolling out his plan of action for confronting low achievement in the lowest-achieving schools.

Presumably, the work to transform the District's low-achieving schools will be steered by the Superintendent five guiding principles:

- Decision-making based on data, research and analysis;
- Professional development for all employees;
- Promoting innovation and change within the District;
- Engaging parents and partnering with the community; and
- Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of students on our campuses.

Given this background, we suggest the Superintendent's plan of action reflect sensitivity to the distinctive challenges facing the lowest-achieving schools.

First and foremost, the Superintendent's initiative should include a solid plan for buttressing the retention of fully qualified teachers and other staff in the low-achieving schools. This is a tough job, but one the District must continue to face head-on, for an unstable workforce will vitiate the benefits of the best professional development. Moreover, an unstable workforce will dampen efforts to improve the overall quality of a school's teacher force and teaching environment. To counter this unsavory dynamic, each of the lowest-achieving schools must be run by strong instructional leaders who thrive amidst crisis. Moreover, programs and incentives for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers must be buttressed.

Third, the Superintendent should be mindful that the problems confronting the low-API schools arise long before students reach middle or high school; the need for most of these secondary schools to implement remedial reading programs such as the Developing

Readers and Writers Course reflects this challenge. A close look at the data will reveal that students in the lowest-achieving high schools hail from the lowest-performing middle schools, while students in the lowest-performing middle schools are products of the lowest-achieving elementary schools. In brief, students who exit elementary school lacking the capacity to read at grade level with comprehension are strong prospects for failure in middle and high school. Thus, integrated support for students across the pre-K-12 continuum is essential.

Finally, the guiding principle regarding the making of decisions on the basis of data, research and analysis should be engineered to focus on data-driven accountability of the sort employed by most effective schools. Strategies for individualized student monitoring and support are fading as luxuries and fast becoming practical necessities. The Superintendent has indicated his intent to pursue this course. Indeed, LAUSD is technically equipped to move forward with such an approach, post haste.²

Cc: D. Brewer, D. Davis, B. Collins, R. Ephraim, D. Jacque-Anton, K. Littman, J. Slayton, J. Zeronian, J. Crain, M. Medina, J. Thornton, R. Zobayan

²See R. Ross, "Real Data, Real Answers: Making Accountability Efforts Bear Fruit," *American School Board Journal*, January 2002.