

July 8, 2014

To: Parties

From: Bill Hawley

Re: Basic Concerns about the CMP

Overview

One of the major factors in determining whether the District attains unitary status by the end of the 2016-17 school year is whether it has made reasonable progress in increasing the proportion of its students who attend integrated schools. The major strategy for doing this is increasing the level of integration in its magnet programs and schools. As the District says, a primary goal of its magnet school plan is to integrate *all* of its magnet schools. Even if this goal were not met, the Comprehensive Magnet Plan now under consideration places unitary status at risk. Plain and simple.

The fundamental problem with the CMP is that it virtually ensures that significant progress in developing a collection of magnet school and programs that markedly increases the opportunities for student to engage in an integrated education cannot be effectively achieved before the time the District hopes to be declared unitary. There are two reasons why this is so. First, the process for removing magnet status will allow schools to delay a decision on removal of status for an unacceptably long period of time. (If the district had created a process for closing schools that was similar to that which it proposes for the removal of magnet status no school would yet have been closed). Second, the criteria for evaluating magnet schools, and particularly for removing magnet status, are ambiguous and complicated when the withdrawal of magnet status should focus almost entirely on (1) the potential for racial and ethnic integration and (2) academic achievement and related student outcomes.

The Process for Removal of Magnet Status

Why Removal of Magnet Status is Important

I have not heard a single District employee or Board member say that the current number of magnet school is financially or educationally viable, much less the

addition of magnets proposed in 2014-15. An indication of why this is so is the very small (\$39,000) investment the District is prepared to make in Cragin for its start-up year. In short, unless the District is proposing a significant increase in overall funding of magnet schools. The only money available for new options is going to come from magnet schools that are discontinued. Of course, all current magnet schools could become integrated but that is very unlikely.

What it Will Take to End Magnet Status and Start a New Magnet

If I understand the CMP, no current program or school not already eliminated can be terminated for at least two years, even those that are seen as the most likely to lose magnet status. Consider, for example, Utterback. 2014-15 is the base line year.

After one enrollment cycle (Spring 2015?), Utterback will be given one year to improve. It is not clear whether this means only on integration criteria (as implied in Appendix J(the five pillars measure). And it is not clear what would constitute improvement? Say Utterback gains five points in the improvement year but is still 10 points away. Would status be withdrawn in the face of certain community protest? (The community advisory group recommends a five year turnaround period). But, let's say that Utterback is removed from magnet status in the Spring of 2016. The school using the now available resources would have a year of planning (according to the CMP). Thus, no new magnet school until 2017-18. What if a school is waiting for Utterback (or some other magnet school to fail and is ready to go in 2016-17). Aside from the message that sends to the struggling magnets, would one expect a new magnet to be successful in integrating (or further integrating) its student body in the start-up year?

And, the CMP process would not even eliminate magnet status in a school like Holladay that inexplicably, given its score on the mock evaluation and its backward movement in integration, is identified as an Improvement school not subject to losing magnet status until 2017.

Evaluation Criteria

There are four types of problems with the criteria used for evaluating magnet schools and programs: they are confusing because there are a number of different criteria or standards, they do not provide adequate weight to integration and

academic excellence, they conflate process and product providing more weight to the former, and there are problems with the content of several other criteria.

The Importance of Integration and Academic Achievement

If one imagines that the criteria set forth in Appendix K, which are grouped into five categories called pillars, would be the determining criteria for determining magnet status, a school could (in principle) attain 100 points. However, only 45 of those points deal with integration and academic achievement. While the so-called diversity pillar (which should be called racial and ethnic integration pillar) has 30 points, only 25 the points are actually addressing integration . The Acaademic Excellence pillar has a possible 30 points, only 20 of these deal with student performance (the others are curriculum factors). And, the goals for performance don't deal with "Excellence" but with being better than average. Of course, academic excellence is critical to achieving and sustaining integration. In short, more than half of the points available to determine a school's or program's viability as a magnet, do not relate to the only two outcome measures in the matrix and the only two factors that should determine magnet status.

The Triumph of Process over Product

A primary goal of the USP is to move from a focus on what is being done to what the effects of those processes practices and policies. But the criteria for evaluating magnet schools and programs put a greater emphasis on processes that it does on outcomes. It is easier to improve processes that it is to bring about positive outcomes so the school community that wishes to sustain itself as a magnet could place a considerable amount of emphasis on processes and thus survive without bringing about significant changes in integration and academic performance. This is particularly true because many process criteria do not assess quality of the effort. Process and product criteria serve different purposes; the criteria should be used to determine whether magnet status should be sustained and the level of effort that should be invested in those programs deemed to be worthy improvement. Process criteria should be used to identify problems and to focus investment of time, money and expertise on those aspects of the school or program that are most in need of additional improvement. The CMP criteria do not make this distinction.

Numerous studies show that the improvement of process does not necessarily lead to improvements in outcomes for number of reasons.

The Problem of Multiple Criteria

Throughout the CMP there are numerous of criteria or standards that should be applied in making various decisions. The most important of these seem to be those in the Magnet Evaluation Matrix. I will discuss these further below. But, On p.39, the CMP requires each school to develop “specific and measurable goals” for eight “components” these standards/criteria overlap but are different from those in the Evaluation Matrix. Which are schools to work on and how is progress on the eight to be scored? Will local goals trump District goals? Appendix I identifies “percentage at entry level moving toward integration”. Are these goals and, if not, what are the goals schools should meet regarding integration? Can they set these themselves?

The Content of Key (?) Criteria/Standards

Consider the criteria identified as the Magnet Evaluation Matrix (Appendix J), which are presumably of central importance to this plan. These are elaborated on in Appendix H (but the wording varies for some of the criteria and needs to be aligned). The criteria need to make sense, reflect high goals, and meaningfully differentiate among programs/schools.

1. Three of the four “diversity” criteria measure the same thing in the sense that it would be hard to score high on one without scoring high on the others.
2. Progress toward integration should be part of 1.1.
3. Academic goals are modest. Being above average is not a characteristic likely to draw families to magnets.
4. Some criteria will be scored high because they have no qualitative dimension (e.g., 1.3, 3.10, 4.12, 4.13).
5. A program could have a unique theme OR pedagogy (2.6). How could a theme not have a commensurate pedagogy? But, that is not what 2.6 is about anyway. In Appendix H, 2.6 is defined as theme fidelity. But the measure deals not with fidelity (which is more 2.5, than 2.6) but with student immersion (engagement?).

6. There is no mention of ELLs in the criteria except in the family engagement standard.
7. Does the District mean to commit to extended day programs in all magnets? See 3.10. And, an extended day is an intervention. How can you have an intervention in an intervention?
8. What does it mean to have multiple modes of instruction and why is this a good idea? This sound like the largely discredited idea that we should be identifying students' "learning styles" and differentiating instruction accordingly.
9. Can a magnet not have key personnel? 4.11
10. The requirement of 25 hours of PD annually on a theme is minimal, less than an hour a week (4.3). Since all programs need to work on themes and on related pedagogy, among other needs for expertise, 25 hours is not nearly enough. Giving key personnel five more hours is also woefully inadequate. The focus of these two criteria on theme (and not pedagogy or other aspects of professional expertise are emblematic of the assumption throughout the CMP that themes are what makes the difference). Themes are important but one can have a strong theme and a weak school. The budgets for magnets do not generally have funds for PD so all of the PD will presumably take place on Wednesday afternoons. If so, what PD will this magnet-related PD replace?
11. The FCE wisely reflects current thinking about the importance of learning from families. Standard 5.16 does not include this and, in general, reflects older thinking about family engagement. The authors of the FCE should be asked to review Standards 5.15 and 5.16.
12. The community engagement criterion focuses on "local" community. This is not appropriate to magnets that are not local. The measure don't make this mistake so "local" can be deleted.