

June 2, 2015

To: Parties

From: Bill Hawley

Re: Comments on Plaintiffs Objections to the District's Proposed CMP: Part 2 of 3

On May 31, I shared comments on some of the objections to the District's proposed CMP. In that memo, I dealt with the identification of Ochoa as a lighthouse school, clarification of how funding would be handled after withdrawal of magnet status and the role of paraprofessionals in improving student performance. I also urged the District to develop greater capacity for supporting magnet schools and programs and asked that it abandon the categorization of magnet schools into three types. This is the second installment of comments and suggestions relating to objections by both Fisher and Mendoza plaintiffs..

Measuring the Achievement Gap

The wording of the plan suggests that achievement gaps will be measured against the highest achieving racial/ethnic group in the school. The data provided implies that this group will always be white students. However, Asian Pacific islanders might be higher achieving in some schools. The District should clarify whether it means to compare African-American and Latino student performance only to whites or to the highest achieving group, whatever its race/ethnicity.

Aligning Improvement Strategies with the Magnet Theme

The Mendoza plaintiffs make an excellent point that the strategies proposed for school site improvement do not appear to be related to the site's magnet theme. Ideally, the reform strategies being proposed would represent a coherent school-wide approach to instruction and curriculum. However, it is not clear that all of the magnet themes are very coherent or comprehensive start with. To ask schools that are having trouble ensuring that all students in their schools achieve that reasonably high levels to adopt innovative approaches to intervention may be overtaxing capacity. I do not believe that individual school plans should be required to reflect the theme of school but I do believe that the overall magnet

plan should assert the importance of coherence and the infusion of same throughout instruction and curricula. In future years, the extent to which school level plans reflect this coherence should be considered in funding and need for technical support.

Feeder Patterns

It is desirable to identify feeder patterns for schools with common themes at different grade levels. But to insist on the identification of such patterns in this version of the CMP seems problematic. A year from now it is likely that a number of current magnets will no longer have status magnet status. Given the array of themes (and the weakness of some of the themes), it is not clear what the patterns would be. And, having studied magnet schools to some extent, I am less convinced than those who did the magnet school study for TUSD that pipelines have a significant effect on family choice. Indeed, as I have noted in other commentary about magnet schools, location, racial and socioeconomic composition, and perceptions of school quality often trump themes (some themes are seen as proxies for school quality—such as STEM).

The Budget for Robison

When I first read the proposals coming from Robison, I wrote in the margins, “this school has given up”. I urged the District to bite the bullet on Robison and to devote resources to school improvement. So here is the dilemma that the District confronts. Sensible analysis leads to the conclusion that Robison is likely to lose magnet status. Whatever current investment is made should be focused on school improvement and that the resources should be sufficient to implement the core strategies for school improvement that the District is advocating. But to take such steps overtly is to communicate to the school and the community that its loss of magnet status is certain--a position not required by the Court and resisted by the governing Board.

Goals for Academic Improvement

In my previous comments on the CMP, I indicated that most schools had set minimal goals for improvement and in some cases had actually set lower goals

than they had achieved in the recent past. Presumably this will be resolved in the final plan (it must be). The Mendoza plaintiffs would require that each school set a one grade per year goal until A status is secured. Moving a school up 20 points in one year is difficult and if required would certainly reduce the number of magnet schools and programs in the short run. In any event, this is not required by the Court order relating to the CMP.

Immediate Withdrawal of Magnet Status

The Fisher plaintiffs argue that continuing to support schools the District has identified as “problematic” is wasteful and unproductive. I do believe that the loss of magnet status by these schools, as well as others, is very likely. The District, and particularly the Governing Board, has been unwilling to take relevant action. The Court order relating to the CMP sets the process for withdrawal of magnet status. An objection to the District’s revised CMP because, in effect, it proposes processes outlined by the Court, is not likely to be sustained by the Court.

On June 3, I will submit my third set of comments on some of the plaintiffs objections including the Mendoza’s concerns about the focus on what they describe as deficit models of school improvement, the implementation of PLCs, the use of Tully as a GATE program, and additional dual language programs.