

May 24, 2016

To: Parties

From: Bill Hawley

Re: Initial Thoughts on Magnet Plans

### Caveat

The following comments are based on initial reading of the magnet plans sent by the District. Two the plans are missing. I raise these concerns now to draw attention to issues that may have be of concern to others and to put in context more detailed analyses of plans of individual schools. These comments might also encourage the District to provide answers to questions that may be raised about specific plans. It may be that a more careful reading will alter these preliminary assessments.

### Overview

May we assume that the actual plans being pursued by the magnet schools provide better targeting, more specific goals, and more detailed strategies for achieving these goals? It appears that schools were given a template that they used rather unevenly to justify expenditures rather than to articulate plans of action. For example, how would the appointment of a single individual achieve goals ranging from meeting the needs of all students to addressing the needs of the lowest achieving 25% of students to developing approaches for differentiating tier 1 and tier 2 interventions? The plans differ significantly in the extent to which they link expenditures with specific strategies and goals. For example, the Drachman and Borton plans seem significantly more strategic than many others.

### Specific Budget Issues that Apply to More than One and Sometimes Several Magnet Schools

Several schools seek funding for teaching assistants and other noncertified personnel who would be meeting with students who are struggling. The use of funds for this purpose specifically prohibited in the previous budget.

In some cases, substitutes are to be hired to free up teachers for professional learning community work or its equivalent, another practice specifically prohibited. In this case, however, more specific descriptions of how this will be accomplished without losing time for student learning could justify the approach if there was reason to believe that this would result in overall school improvement.

It appears that the planning template provided to schools identified professional development for culturally relevant curriculum as one of the categories. None of the plans provide for professional development for culturally relevant pedagogy as though curriculum was more important than actual instructional strategies. It is not.

Some schools invest much of their funds in the hiring of certified faculty without being clear why such teachers are needed above and beyond those that would be provided to the school by formula (see Tucson High, Safford, Bonillas , Pueblo and Utterback).

There are big differences in the amount of money being spent on supplies from school to school even when schools share similar themes.

Several schools appear to be using consultants for purpose of professional development in core subjects while other schools with similar professional development needs and intentions do not use consultants. There is a considerable amount of money being used for this purpose. Presumably, other schools in the District also require professional learning opportunities for Math and English-Language Arts teachers. Might it be more cost-effective for the District to strengthen its own capabilities to support such professional development not just once a year or for short-term sessions but to provide on- going support?

In the 2016 magnet plans, virtually all of the schools referred to learner-centered professional development. In these plans, only two or three schools commit to such a strategy. This is understandable because it appears from our monitoring that most schools did not use learner

centered professional development. In general, these plans appear to revert to or at least sustain approaches to professional development strategies likely to be relatively ineffective.

My impression is that these plans were developed before significant funding was allocated for technology several schools appear to be asking for the equipment and software that they will now receive as a result of the millions of dollars recently allocated for such purposes. If this impression is correct, how much money will be freed up and for what purposes will it be used.

Similarly, some schools are asking for staff to perform the functions that will be performed by the MTSS facilitators. Will the plans be adjusted accordingly?

Schools differ substantially in the level of expenditure they proposed to implement professional learning communities. After a year of implementation, has the District learned what approaches are more cost-effective than others? Our monitoring suggests that, as might be expected, the effectiveness of PLCs appears to vary significantly from school to school. This also raises the question about where the funds for implementing PLCs throughout the District are coming from since it is a requirement of the USP.

Several schools are proposing investments in family engagement but these investments appear to be used to tell parents what to do (in rather traditional ways) or to recruit students to magnet schools rather than to learn from parents about how best to meet the needs of their children. This two-way bridge approach to family engagement is an essential element of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Investment in promoting integration in magnet schools is modest. All schools have a magnet school coordinator whose job includes the promotion of integration but in virtually all cases the magnet school coordinator has other important roles.

### Final Thoughts

In making these comments, I hope to encourage additional review of the plans by the District. I do not presume that these concerns necessarily warrant objections to the proposed expenditures. And, as I note at the

outset of this memo, the way the plans are presented may not convey what is being proposed.