March 22, 2017

To: Parties

From: Bill Hawley

Sections of the Special Master's Annual Report(SMAR)

Introduction

This is parts of the SMAR that deal with the elements of the USP for which the District seeks partial unitary status. This is not meant to be my comments on the district's proposals though where I think it might be helpful I have shared some thoughts related to these proposals and used italics to set them apart. I do not anticipate making changes in the text below except with respect to extracurricular activities for reasons noted and perhaps to the section on family engagement where additional information is needed. When the district returns from spring break next week I will finish these two sections.

As I have done in the past, I do not comment on every aspect of the district's annual report. Rather, I comment on those aspects of the district's progress towards unitary status that appear problematic or in need of clarification. In some cases, I draw attention to exceptional actions by the district that deserve recognition though this is not meant to suggest that these are the only efforts by the district that warrant positive comments.

Transportation

The District is implementing the transportation provisions of the USP satisfactorily. *Should the district be granted partial unitary status for this portion of the USP it should be stipulated that it remains obligated to implement those elements of the action plans dealing with the full range of commitments the district has made.*

Meaningful Family Engagement

The district has increased opportunities for families by opening four family centers throughout the district. These centers provide a number of services to families that are described in detail in the DAR. The Centers are located

throughout the District with attention to the importance of making them accessible to low income families.

The District has increased visits to family homes. Almost all of these visits are meant to help families address difficulties their students may be having in school. This is important work. However, some districts have found it productive to facilitate teacher visits to families to learn from these families how they can best facilitate the learning of their children. Further information is needed in order to know how family liaison staff communicate with teachers about teachers' students. Learning from families during parent teacher conferences about what might motivate or impede student learning can improve teaching and student outcomes. Home visits also (1) break down concerns some families may have based their own unhappy school experiences about whether their child will receive the support they need and (2) counter the reticence some families, especially immigrant families may have about candid interactions with teachers. Much of the district's approach to family engagement is what is called a one-way bridge and current thinking calls for a two-way approach, a genuine partnership between the school and the home to facilitate learning both in the home and in school.

One strategy to utilize might be selecting and utilizing family mentors at both the school and classroom level to both encourage engagement and involve families in decision making and instructional activities. [1]

Family engagement through parent-teacher organizations, school advisory councils or other formal arrangements appears to be uneven across the district and the DAR provides little information about the status of this form of family engagement. While differences in the vitality of family engagement do vary by school, it does not appear that the racial composition of the schools where family engagement is more robust is significantly different than the racial composition of schools with less assertive family involvement. But, as noted, better evidence in this regard is needed.

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[1] Family mentors are parents who volunteered to meet with other parents who may find it difficult or awkward to go to the school or seek opportunities to share their concerns and suggestions with teachers and principals.

The district employs numerous community liaison persons whose role includes bridging the gap between schools, families and communities. Many of these positions have gone unfilled. The District should ensure that full time community liaisons are in place in at least all racially concentrated as well as schools in which achievement levels fall below the district average.

The District appears to have developed a significant number of partnerships with organizations of different types throughout Tucson. More information on the functions and the results of these partnerships would be useful.

The Director of Family Engagement for the district is an enthusiastic supporter of family engagement and the four district family centers. A district wide impact will require real changes in family engagement practices at the school and classroom level. This will require both senior administration and principal involvement to ensure practices occur at the teacher level.

Extra-curricular Activities

It appears that the District is implementing the provisions of the USP with respect extracurricular activities in a satisfactory way. This does not mean that extracurricular activities in the district are necessarily robust or that a valid argument for greater investments couldn't be made. That said, the district has taken some steps in training the supervisors of extracurricular activities (which, for purposes of the USP, include athletic activities) and student leaders that exceed what is done in many districts.

The District provides students with after-school tutoring in academic subjects. The district has moved gradually toward providing such tutoring support by certified instructional personnel. In 2016-17, all students in afterschool tutoring programs will be tutored by a certified instructor or by tutors who are closely supervised by certified instructors.

The District provides free transportation to students who participate in extracurricular activities, including tutoring, in schools that are integrated and magnet schools. The logic of this policy is that one of the ways integration the district is promoted by the district is to encourage families

to attend a school other than the one closest to their "neighborhood school". Many students in such schools therefore live more distant from their school than those who attend a school within their home school boundary.

As I was finishing this part of the SMAR, I learned that the data related to participation in extracurricular activities may be incomplete and/or not accurate. When the district returns I will be able to finish the section of the report.

Equitable Facilities and Technology Facilitated Learning Resources

Facilities

The quality of the district's facilities differs significantly from school to school throughout the district and the learning environment in some schools is substandard. Given the substantial decreases in state funding in recent years, upgrading facilities to even minimally satisfactory levels will require a bond issue.

While many schools require improvements that would address the needs of schools with low ratings on the FCI and the ESS, it does not appear that the quality of school facilities varies significantly by the proportion of students of different races in a school. In the last year, the district has significantly increased student access to learning technologies throughout the district, especially in magnet schools and those that are racially concentrated. Access to computers, whiteboards and other hardware in schools appears equitable (see discussion of technology below).

The formula for the Facilities Condition Index (FCI) was unilaterally altered during the 15-16 school year without plaintiff input. In order to compare year to year changes, the District should return to the originally agreed-upon FCI formula delineations. If the district believes that changes in the weights assigned within the FCI index are needed, such proposals should be submitted to the plaintiffs and the special master for review and comment.

In order to ensure the FCI and ESS are utilized and updated regularly, the District could post an updated list on the website with notation that includes projects that are planned and budgeted for the current school year.

Technology

In the 2015-16 school year, the district invested in the acquisition of hardware and software to be used for the first time in 2016-17 thus making exponential progress in addressing the provisions of the USP dealing with technology.

Increasing the access students have to learning technology and software is important and this effort focused on schools serving the largest numbers of African American and Latino students. These initiatives have largely eliminated differences among schools with respect to access students have to technology.

Access is essential but how the technology facilitated learning resources are used is also important. Studies of ways that technology can facilitate learning show that access is more often equitable than utilization. For example, how many hours in a day or week a student has access to computers in the classroom or school does not, in itself, indicate what the learning experiences of students are. Often, students who are achieving at relatively low levels are more likely to be using computers to develop so-called basic skills rather than to engage in more complex problem-solving and the development of what are called "higher order" knowledge and skills. Whether this is the case in TUSD we do not know, but the level of investment in teacher training on the use of computers and other learning technologies is, at best, modest.

How students use technology, especially with respect to the development of higher order skills, depends significantly on their teachers' proficiency to make the most of the learning opportunities that technology- facilitated learning provides. For most teachers, their proficiency in using technology to facilitate student learning depends on the professional development and

hands-on support that they receive as they teach.

The district acknowledges that it has much more to do with respect to training teachers to use technology in the most productive ways. The District provides such training in three ways. First, during sessions in which teachers are brought together in classroom-type settings. Second, the district has provided online courses that are voluntary but these appear to not be used extensively. Third, the district has identified teachers who are considerably more proficient than their peers to serve as Teacher Technology Liaisons (TTL). TTL serve teachers in their own schools but teach a regular course load. TTL are paid a modest stipend for taking on this responsibility.

During the 2015-16 school year, the district created a position called teacher technology liaison. TTL positions are held by teachers who are paid a small stipend to take on this responsibility in addition to their full-time teaching assignments. This approach to support for teachers in the utilization of technology has the virtue of being school-based and responsive to particular needs of individual teachers or small groups of teachers. However, the amount of time that TTL have to work with their colleagues is quite limited because it must take place during the school day when the TTL have their own classes to teach or after school when teachers who need support may not be able or willing to stay at the school.

As evidence of the success of this initiative, the district indicates that a total of 2800 hours of support during the first months of the 2016-17 school year by TTL were provided--an average of a little more than one hour for each of the district's teachers. Of course, some teachers may feel reasonably confident about their proficiency but it is hard to imagine that an average of one hour per teacher will serve the needs of teachers to develop proficiency in the use of technology, especially with respect to more complex courseware.

Learning new skills often requires hands-on support. When the learner becomes aware that the skills they believed they had learned are more limited than they believed, they need someone to show them how to do the task involved. This means that teachers would benefit substantially if the TTL(s) in their school were able to work with them in the classroom while

they were teaching. But, because TTL are also teaching, such support may be limited.

As suggested above, the real payoff for student learning from the utilization of technology comes from students engaging in simulations, and complex problem-solving and other types of higher order learning. But most of the teacher training thus far appears to be focused on simple tasks in the management of data rather than how to facilitate learning of more advanced knowledge and skills.

The district uses teacher surveys (self-assessment) to determine whether teachers' professional learning needs are being met. These surveys indicate that teachers, in general, are increasing their proficiency in the use of technology to support student learning. However, the assessment strategy is problematic. Numerous studies indicate that people--not just teachers-- overestimate their capabilities and are not very good at assessing how much they have just learned when asked in the kind of surveys of the teaching that the district uses. The reasons for this are understandable. First, teachers--especially new teachers--are often unwilling to draw attention to the fact that they have limited understanding of what they are supposed to have learned. Second, teachers (this finding is not limited to teachers) may actually think they've learned what they were taught but when they apply what they've just learned they find that the knowledge they thought they had is more limited than they believed. Paradoxically, this over-estimate of proficiency is more likely for novices than for experts or people with greater levels of proficiency.

The district says it is working towards "skill-based assessment". If this means that teachers will be observed on how they use technology to facilitate student learning, this would be an important step. It should be noted that few districts undertake such intensive evaluations of teacher capabilities.

Information Systems and Budgetary Processes

Information Systems

While it has been a long time coming, it appears that the Evidenced Based Accountability System (EBAS) is well along in the implementation phase. The test will now be to use the extraordinary capabilities of this system in decision-making from the classroom to the Governing Board throughout the year. The hardware and software the district now has available gives it capabilities that most school districts lack. The EBAS provides the district with detailed information that integrates an array of data sources. Embedded in the software are programs to facilitate data analysis as well as suggestions about effective practices for addressing challenges identified in the analysis. For example, algorithms can identify individual students who are high risk as well of those who are of a high probability of becoming high risk both with respect to behavior and academic performance. Having identified such students, the program can provide information on research-based interventions.

For the first time, the district is able to integrate teacher data and all other types of information about student experiences and outcomes. This makes it relatively easy to create analytical models that might explain why for example student achievement is trending down in an individual school or if the reasons that specific student is not achieving might be linked to that student being taught in two consecutive years by beginning teachers.

Any information system is only as useful as the capabilities of those using the system permit. The district has increased its in-house professional staff giving it significant capacity for research and evaluation.

Steps have been taken to train teachers and administrators. There is more to be done here and the District seems to be moving forward in an appropriate way. A key to the effective data-based decision-making at the school level is the enhancement of the MTSS system with the addition of MTSS facilitators. *Before the district is granted unitary status for the part of Section X of the USP that deals with EBAS, clarity is needed about the adequacy of the number and placement of MTSS facilitators, how EBAS and the MTSS system are integrated, and how the MTSS system will work in the absence of facilitators whose primary role is to facilitate the effective use of information on student behavior and academic performance beyond the designation of MTSS "Leads".*

Budget Process

The 910G Budget Process for 2017-18 is in place. The process itself will be monitored throughout the year to ensure requests for information are responded to in a timely manner.

The continuing concern on the part of the plaintiffs is the criteria that can be used to determine whether a proposed use of 910 G funds represents supplanting (i.e., whether it would be more appropriate to use O and M funds for a particular purpose).

Expenditure reviews have been completed in a timely way. However, since all dollars are listed as encumbered, one might question how one would know of unexpended funds.   Yearly reallocation requests continue to be substantial, i.e. greater than several million dollars.

The yearly expenditure "audit" has been completed in a timely way and now reflects spending per the accounting system that delineates expenditures by activity.