

Addendum A

Examining the Achievement Gap in TUSD

Introduction

One of the issues that has shaped the discussion on the overall effectiveness of the District's efforts to implement the USP is whether these combined efforts have resulted not only in increased student achievement, but in narrowing the achievement gap between white students on the one hand and African American and Latino students on the other. The Fisher plaintiffs, for example, have argued not only that the achievement gap has not narrowed but that it has widened over the last few years and that, in itself, should cause the Court to deny unitary status to the District.

Put in national context, virtually every study of student achievement finds a gap in the performance of white students as compared to African American and Latino students on standardized tests. These gaps have persisted over the last 20 years, during which time there have been significant increases in funding aimed at reducing the gaps. The most recent international study confirms this reality.

As ubiquitous as the achievement gap finding is in research is the finding in every study of student achievement that socioeconomic factors – such as family income, mother's education community characteristics, and other variables over which schools have little direct control account for 60% or more of the variation in student achievement. These two realities are seldom part of the same narrative, which in turn leads to the view that schools are ineffective, at best.

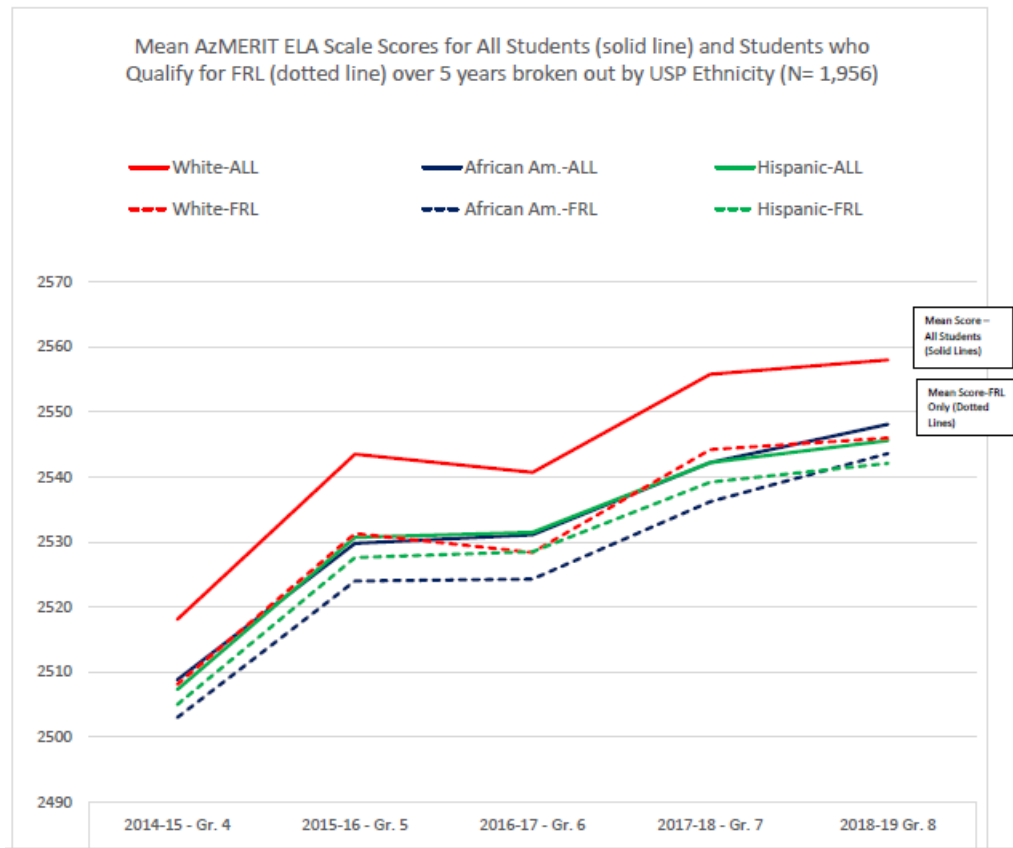
Analysis

If schools account for less than half of student standardized test scores, then the assessment of school effectiveness should take that into account. The Special Master, in collaboration with his statistical consultant, David Krueger, undertook a school level analysis of differences in student performance by race controlling for the proportion of students in the school who receive free and reduced lunch¹ (FRL). They found that the effects of FRL on student achievement was substantial for both English language arts and mathematics using recent AZ merit test outcomes.

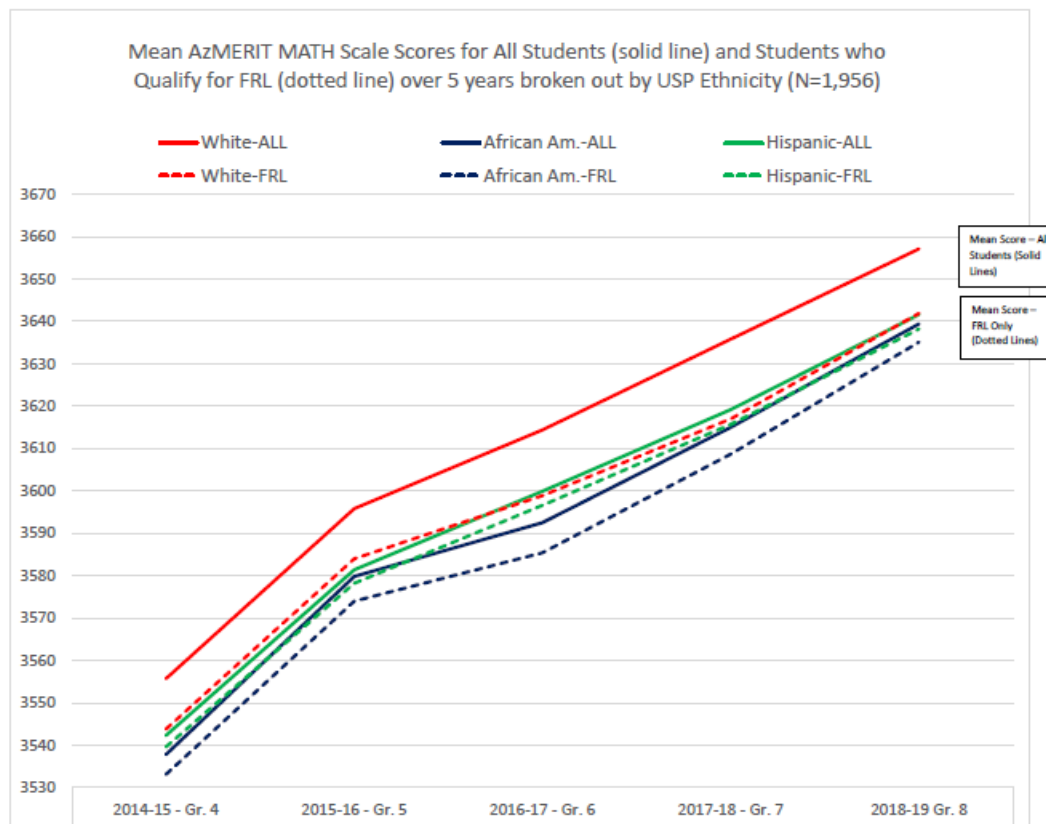
The Special Master asked the District to undertake a longitudinal analysis of achievement gaps, taking into account the effects of free and reduced lunch, broken down by race. Because of the relatively high mobility rate among students in TUSD it is important to be looking at the same students each year in any study over time. Dr. Halley Freitas, Senior Director for Assessment & Evaluation, examined the test scores of a cohort of almost 2000 students, grade 4 to 8. These students were enrolled in 4th grade in TUSD in 2014–15 and were continuously enrolled in the

¹ Free and reduced lunch is an admittedly blunt instrument for measuring social phenomenon that might affect student learning. But is all we have in TUSD. There is reason to believe that more nuanced measures would account for even more of the variation in student achievement.

District to 2018-19². As graphs a A-1 and A-2 show, students of different races start school with significant differences in performance and these differences remain relatively constant over time. This, in itself is important because most studies of student achievement over time identify what is called the Summer slide – in summer months, during which students are not in school the achievement levels diverge further because of the inherent out-of-school educational opportunities middle and upper income students have, opposed to working and lower income families. All students tend to lose ground, but the extent of summer loss varies by family income. (This TUSD study is not the only one to find that the achievement gap varies among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds).



² I don't think we can state that external effects increase over time because we have little or no control to be able to measure it. I suggest removing this statement altogether.



While these graphs are busy with many lines, they show that the 70% plus students who qualify for free and reduced lunch have a smaller achievement gap than all students. While not shown on the graphs, the achievement gap is greater among students who are not eligible for FRL as compared to students who are.³ These graphs also show that the size of the achievement gap varies from year to year, but that it appears smallest in the most recent year measured.

The question then becomes, what is it that the District did that resulted in this comparatively positive outcome? It is not possible to determine the relative effect of each of the several efforts made by the District to enhance student achievement because many of these efforts were underway in the same schools at the same time. Moreover, in most cases, efforts to improve schools enhance the learning opportunities for all students. So, the question then becomes, which of the initiatives that the District has done are particularly useful for African American Latino children, or are these initiatives targeted at schools where there are large numbers of African American and or Latino students?

³ One reason for the difference between free and reduced lunch students and others is that those who do not receive free and reduced lunch represent a much broader range of income with white students on average being notably more likely to be from higher income families than African-American and Latino students. This reality suggests that even within the relatively narrow band of income among students with eligibility for free and reduced lunch, white students may be more likely to be distributed towards the high end of the distribution. If we had access to the actual income, it is assumed that the gap in these graphs would be even narrower.

The Special Master asked the District to compile a list of the actions it has taken that it believes accounts for the relatively positive findings about the achievement gap. That list is attached and should be thought of, the Special Master believes, as reasonable hypotheses.

Final Comments

Nothing in what has been said here should be taken as a conclusion that the District need not do more to enhance the achievement levels of all its students, especially African American and Latino students who are the focus of this case. The purpose of this analysis is to put in perspective what has happened to the achievement gap in the District and to suggest that the District's efforts have been more successful than not. The District has been able to provide equitable education to all students that has resulted in an achievement gap that does not widen by ethnicity over time.

District Efforts to Improve the Academic Performance of African American Students

This description of initiatives was provided by the district and edited by the Special Master. It focuses on African-American students because the gap between white and African American students as usually been greater than the gap between white and Latinx students. A listing of initiatives focused on the Latinx students could, of course, be provided.

A. Direct Services to African American Students.

The District provides a broad range of direct, targeted services to support African American academic achievement, including:

Elementary and Middle School Students: Targeted culturally relevant academic intervention programs in ELA and math; innovative behavioral interventions to prevent or reduce disciplinary incidents to help keep African American students in their regular learning environments; and work with families to establish and benefit from individual student plans. [ECF 2265-1, pp. 4-5.]

High School Students: Direct Services to African American students and families in college and career readiness, post-graduation planning for 12th grade students, high school readiness and graduation planning for incoming 9th grade students, progress check-in for 10th and 11th grade students. College students serve as student mentors.

Mentoring: The District provides numerous opportunities for African American students, including African ELL students, to engage in mentoring beyond what schools traditionally offer. It partners with numerous community organizations to provide this support including The State of Black Arizona, the UA African American Student Affairs, and the UA MathCats [ECF 2298-1, p. 103.]

Tutoring: The District provides certified math teachers as tutors for African American students for additional help and at alternate times. The math tutors have access to the students' math assessments and coordinate tutoring with the students' regular teachers at targeted schools.

AA Student Leadership Development: To support students' self-awareness, self-empowerment, and social emotional learning, the District provides opportunities for students to participate in small-group mentoring, youth empowerment workshops, and events like the annual African American Youth Heritage Day connecting high schools students to community leaders and college advisors.

Summer Experiences: The District implements summer opportunities including University of Arizona Summer Leaders In Training for rising seniors and a STEM

enrichment program [ECF 2298-1, p. 104.] The STEM enrichments embeds Math and ELA concepts to reduce summer learning loss. The District works with the Pima County Youth Employment program to assist students with job placement and supports high school students with summer credit recovery options and enrollment.

Collaboration with Local Colleges and Universities: The District collaborates with the University of Arizona, Pima Community College, multiple Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and local organizations to strengthen African American students' college and career readiness exposure and preparation. [ECF 2298-1, pp. 98-100.] The department collaborates with the Advanced Learning Experiences (ALE) office to connect middle school students to high school AVID, CTE programs, and exposure to IB and AP courses.

Parent Information Events: The District offers regular parent informational and recognition events and other parent information and school events in order to empower and inform parents about District policies, connect parents with needed community resources, and provide strategies to help parents with home education. [ECF 2298-1, pp. 100-101.] These events include IMPACT Tucson, Parent University, Annual African American Parent Conference, Black College Tour Parent Meetings, and African American College Day with the University of Arizona. [ECF 2303-9, pp. 15-16.]

B. Culturally Relevant Courses (CRC)

The District's Culturally Relevant Courses (CRCs) are a unique educational opportunity for TUSD students and have had a significant positive impact on the learning of the District's African American students. Culturally relevant education helps create an inclusive school environment and fosters a sense of belonging, increasing student engagement as a result of connecting the curriculum and instruction to African American culture in a comprehensive, integrated fashion. [See 2259-1, p. 2.] The District has dramatically increased the number of these courses over the past five years, which has contributed to an increase in student participation from 1,243 in 2015-16 to 6,184 in 2018-19. Perhaps most impressively, the District worked with the College Board to develop an AP CRC course (AP English Language and Composition: Culturally Relevant.

Mexican American and African American Perspectives). More details regarding the District's CRCs can be found at ECF 2259. This course is the first of its kind in the United States.

C. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Instruction (CRPI)

Because the District's African American students' engagement and interest are linked to their academic performance, the District works to increase awareness of the correlation between curriculum, pedagogy, and academic success. The District has worked with a national panel of

experts to develop and implement innovative methods of addressing the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of its African American students, including by incorporating students' cultural assets into the learning environment, which increases student engagement through a reflective curriculum. [See ECF 2384-1, p. 26.] The CRPI Department also works directly with schools to provide professional development on asset vs. deficit thinking, bias identification and reduction, and microaggressions in the learning environment, directly addressing issues that affect African American students' learning and achievement across the country.

D. Multicultural curriculum

In addition to CRC and CRPI, the District also offers a comprehensive multicultural curriculum in all its core content areas. The District's efforts have benefitted African American students by integrating and implementing an aligned and articulated, multicultural curriculum for all district courses, across all grade levels, that integrates racially, ethnically and globally diverse perspectives and experiences. Its resources help teachers and students work toward structural equity and inclusion by engaging in critical thinking and discussions around issues of race, sexism, disability, classism, linguisticism and religious intolerance, and the effects of each of these issues within all other subjects in the District's curriculum.

E. AVID

AVID is a highly successful, nationally renowned college-prep program that focuses on supporting students of color, low SES, and first generation to attend college. The number of African American students who have participated in AVID from SY14-15 to SY19-20 grew from 69 to 393 students. Multi-racial student participation grew from 19 to 98 over those same years. The number of Tucson Unified schools that had an AVID program grew from six in SY14-15 to fifteen in SY19-20, giving more students access to this award-winning program.

F. MTSS program to identify, track and intervene in instruction.

The District has designed and executed a comprehensive system of identifying, intervening, and monitoring African American students who are identified as being “at-risk” for dropping out of school.

The District utilizes the special at-risk identification and tracking function in the District's student information system to notify teachers and other staff of at risk African American students and allows teachers and site administrators to assign and track the support services needed. Central and school staff provide a series of interventions, primarily through the MTSS model, and through the Dropout Prevention Department and the African American Student Services Department (AASSD). These interventions can be academic, behavioral, or both. And, MTSS interventions are designed to address indicators that are highly correlated to dropout rates: poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, in grade retention, disengagement, and out of school suspensions.

All schools are required by TUSD to use the MTSS model, and to develop support plans for at-risk African American students through an MTSS team. Teams meet bimonthly, with many holding weekly meetings. MTSS Facilitators and leads provide site trainings as needed and document meeting notes and student support via the online documentation platform.

G. Dropout Prevention and Graduation (DPG).

The District has institutionalized several key actions to prevent African American students from dropping out of school and to support graduation, including annual goals and progress monitoring, identification of at-risk African American students (discussed above), and over a dozen grade-level-based graduation support strategies for African American ELL and non-ELL students.

The District convenes a multi-departmental DPG committee that meets quarterly to evaluate and adjust annual goals based upon data. To achieve its goals, the District implements district-wide support strategies that impact all African American students (e.g. MTSS (discussed above), individual student support plans, standardized curriculum, and a strategies to support African American high school students (e.g. Freshman Academies, dropout prevention specialists, training on credit recovery, and alternative schools and programs); efforts to help African American students in grades K-8 (e.g. CORE Plus, 6th grade bridge programs, and middle school teams); and practices designed to support African American ELL students (e.g. online credit recovery, sheltered content classes, and transportation support). TUSD also conducts family engagement outreach targeted specifically to African American families through the AASSD.

H. Reading Recovery (RR) and other programs.

Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention of one-on-one tutoring for the lowest achieving first graders. Nationally, approximately 75% of students who complete the full 12 to 20-week intervention can meet grade-level expectations in reading and writing. The goal is to serve the literacy needs of the lowest-achieving and most struggling literacy learners who are African American and Latino/Hispanic students in the first grade at selected schools. For the past few years, the District has implemented RR in a manner that is targeted specifically African American and Latinx students. Of 13 schools in SY2019-20, the District intentionally placed RR in three schools with African American student populations near, at, or above the District average (Borton; Cavett, and Marshall ES), and three schools with African American populations that are more than twice the District average (Erickson, Myers-Ganoung, and Wright). Erickson, Myers-Ganoung, and Wright have the highest numbers of African American students in elementary schools.

I. Seven-Period Days

Seven-period days support Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and intervention time during school for at-risk students, both USP priorities. There is ample evidence that successful PLCs result in improved student performance, better teaching and diagnosis of student learning, and stronger interventions that lead to improved achievement for struggling students. Additionally, research shows PLCs result in greater teacher job satisfaction, fulfilling another USP priority: teacher recruitment and retention. Peer-to-peer learning through PLCs improve classroom instruction to improve academic achievement for African American students. Also, seven period days will also afford schools the ability to provide ELA and math intervention classes during the school day. African American students who struggle with learning at the Tier 1 classroom level are scheduled an additional smaller class setting with targeted academic support in ELA and math. These classes provide opportunities for African American students who are behind in academic performance with the interventions needed.

J. ALE recruiting and participation

The District has improved access to, participation in, and completion of ALEs for African American students over the life of the USP. Overall ALE participation by African American students has grown continuously and significantly over the last five years. Key in driving these increases has been the District's efforts to offer additional ALE services to students who otherwise would not have known of, qualified for, enrolled in, and/or successfully completed such services and courses. For example, the District has utilized whole-grade testing and open-access and cluster classes to significantly expand the number of African American students participating in GATE services.

In addition to the overall increase in ALE participation by African American students, the District has shown significant improvements in the number and/or percentages of African American students in nearly every ALE offered. [ECF 2267-2, pp. 5-6.] For example, the number of African American students participating in cluster GATE classes increased from 20 in SY 13-14 to 213 in SY 18-19. [ECF 2267-2, p. 9.] The number of African American students tested for GATE services increased from 435 in SY 14-15 to 1,050 in SY 18-19. [*Id.* at 10.] The numbers of African American students qualifying for self-contained and pullout GATE likewise increased from SY 1617 to SY 18-19 from 39 to 45 and from 17 to 26, respectively. [*Id.*] Combined, the total number of African American students receiving GATE services increased from 200 in SY 14-15 to 523 in SY 18-19. [*Id.* at 18.]

In SY 18-19, the District's African American students increased participation in IB courses and dual credit courses, including a 155% increase in dual credit courses. [ECF 2267-2, pp. 58, 61.]

Discipline

The District implements a comprehensive strategy to promote positive student behaviors, to reduce exclusionary discipline, and to create inclusive learning environments. A primary goal of this strategy is to reduce the number of days African American students are out of class and/or school when there is a behavior violation to reduce the academic impact that may result from exclusionary discipline. The District also seeks to address the root causes of student misbehavior by replacing punitive actions with restorative and positive interventions: the punitive use of serious disciplinary sanctions for low-level offenses creates the potential for negative educational and long-term outcomes for affected African American students.

To create positive learning environments for African American students, and to reduce the number of days students are out of class/school through exclusionary discipline, the District's strategy features, but is not limited to, the following: the Student Relations department, dedicated solely to behavior, climate, and discipline issues; restorative and positive practices; an updated Student Code of Conduct; manuals and handbooks for several programs to ensure consistency and fidelity across sites; and regular and frequent meetings and data monitoring that occurs daily, weekly, monthly.