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RAMON C. CORTINES
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

March 18, 2010

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Dear Sirs/Madam:

I cannot comprehend the selection process, the list for selecting persistently low-achieving schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), or the consultative process by the State of California to use data from our District to effectively create a list of persistently low-achieving schools in THE District. I am requesting that the State Superintendent of Schools and State Education Department review the methodology and request that the California State Board of Education develop a more realistic list that accurately reflects low-performing schools in the LAUSD.

On March 11, 2010, the California State Board of Education approved the methodology for selecting the persistently low-performing 5% of schools in the State. Using the established methodology a list was derived of the proposed schools. Even though the Board cited the inadequacies of the selection process, the Board voted to apply the criteria to the School Improvement Grants (SIG) funds.

The California Department of Education (CDE) followed a multi-criteria process to identify the eligible schools. After reviewing the process the following has been found to be problematic:

- Lengthen of time in PI Status: Schools can be included on the persistently low list regardless of the number of years in Title I improvement. There is no consideration given to the length of time schools are in corrective action. Persistently low performing schools should have been in corrective action for 5+ years or more. We have schools on the Tier I list that have only been in PI for two years.
- Inadequate weighting of students in lowest achievement bands: The proposed methodology gives insufficient weight to the performance levels of students. Using school wide proficiency rates to rank schools, fails to provide a complete picture of schools that are really struggling. For example, one school has a 40% proficiency rate with 50% of the students at Below Basic or Far Below Basic, and another school that has 30% proficiency rate with 70% at Basic. The later school is identified as lower performing yet the first school has far more students failing. To meet AYP criteria, subgroups also have to be considered.

Failure to weigh over-all performance levels. The fifty points of growth over 5 years does not distinguish between a school that starts at 450 API and grows versus a school at 700. We have over 20 schools that met the 50 point growth and are still under 600 API, 200 points below the State's target of 800.

The following chart illustrates three schools that were identified as Tier I that did not have the opportunity to show five year API growth (50 points) given the schools opened in 2006:

Name of School	Year School Opened	Number of years API scores	Number of Years in PI
Contreras LC	2006-07	3	2
Clinton MS	2006-07	3	2
East Valley SH	2006-07	3	2

I understand that the methodology for development of the persistently low achieving schools list comes from legislative action (SB X5 1) and federal rules, but neither of these guidelines precluded the State from overlaying finite strategies to truly address ‘persistently’ low-performing schools. Our list has 4 schools that have only been open for three years, 9 schools that have been in PI for 2 - 4 years, and has left off 9 schools that have been in PI for 12 years (many of these schools API scores are under 600).

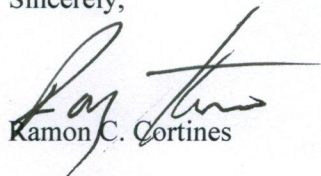
The definition of “persistently” leads one to believe schools have been low achieving for a long duration of time that would exceed five years. Attachment A lists the schools that more closely fit the definition of “persistent” due to the following factors:

- Program Improvement status range from 5 to 12 years;
- Academic Performance Index remains at 600 or under (with the exception of Bethune MS at 607);
- Students at Proficient or Advanced are under 30%; and,
- Overall graduation rate is under 80%.

This list is an embarrassment to the District and the State. I am requesting a review of the process and an analysis of the data that determines PI status. Your consideration to ensure the identification criteria are reasonable will allow for a selection of schools that supports student needs. Attached is a list of the schools we have identified as being persistently low-performing in Los Angeles Unified School District. Please review this list and the rationale and move forward to ensure California and LAUSD are targeting the schools that are most in need of reform.

I would like for you to work with Dr. Sharon Robinson, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, to secure any information or support that you need to ensure this happens.

Sincerely,



Ramon C. Cortines

Attachments

- c: John A. Perez, Speaker of the Assembly
 Senator Darrell Steinberg, Senate President Pro Tem
 LAUSD Board Members
 Local District Superintendants
 James Morris
 Judy Elliott
 Sharon Robinson
 Matt Hill