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William Gronseth - Assistant Superintendent*

MEMORANDUM

TO: School Board Members

FROM: Bill Gronseth, Assistant Superintendent

DATE: July 13, 2010

RE: District Response to Indian Education Concurrence/Non-concurrence Report

On Tuesday, June 15, 2010 the Cabinet reviewed the Report of Concurrence/Non-Concurrence, which is an annual submission to the Minnesota Department of Education and was presented at the June 8, 2010 Education Committee Meeting. Below is a response by District administration to address issues of concern from the Indian Parent Committee.

DISTRICTWIDE

Duluth Independent School District 709 is committed to quality education for all students. Upon receiving the Notice of Non-concurrence from the Director of Indian Education -- ISD 709 in June of 2009 the administration of the District enlisted the assistance of the Office of Education Equity, the Education Equity Advisory Committee, and the educational leadership of the District to overhaul the District's approach in addressing the needs of American Indian students and other students of color. The project included input from the community and with the coordination efforts of the Office of Education Equity, community input was incorporated into the District's invigorated achievement strategies referred to as Operation Graduation.

Initially, on receipt of the Notice of Non-concurrence, ISD 709 contracted with the former Director of American Indian Education for the Minnesota Department of Education. This consultant offered an initial plan for remediation of many of the issues identified by the Director of Indian Education for ISD 709. Members of the local school board felt that the needs identified were, in many cases, clearly applicable to other students of color. Recommending a general approach, while addressing specific needs of American Indian students, the School Board supported administration's efforts to improve academic achievement for all students. The combined efforts resulted in a reevaluation of the District's magnet school strategy, a redirection of fifty percent of the Desegregation/Integration funds to close the achievement gap, the research and selection of new strategic interventions to assist with academic achievement, the expansion of existing integration strategies to include a greater number of students, and the hiring of twelve additional Specialists to address the needs of American Indian students and other students of color.

In many ways the impetus for this overhauling initiative is the direct result of input from the Department of Indian Education of ISD 709. School year 2010 has been the year of research and redesign. School year 2011 is the

beginning of implementation of many programmatic approaches. Many challenges throughout the District have been identified and we believe addressed in a healthy and collaborative approach. We intend to continue this process with commitment and support of all who are involved.

1) CURRICULUM

a. Gap in Achievement Test Scores

Progress

The Duluth Public School District acknowledges that an achievement gap exists between American Indian students and White students and concur with the Duluth Public Schools Indian Education Parent Committee that this disparity is unacceptable. The District has been working diligently to develop a sustainable system to close this gap. This system is designed to identify struggling learners early, intervene with evidence-based interventions, and provide best-practice instruction throughout the core curriculum. The Learning Services Lead Team met weekly and developed this system with stakeholder input, including but not limited to: District Administrators, teachers, parents, and community members; each representing various ethnic groups (See Section 2, School Community Relations portion of this response for more specific information regarding the work of the Community Achievement Gap Group). The Director of Indian Education is an important part of the Learning Services Lead Team.

Recommendations/Timeline

By September 2010, the Duluth Public Schools will:

- Implement an assessment system that measures students' achievement in reading and math three times per year. This information will be used to identify each individual student's needs and match them with appropriate interventions (Core, Strategic, and Intensive). The intent of these interventions is to increase skill and concept levels so that students may participate in the core curriculum without the need of interventions in a short period of time.
- Implement a longitudinal data collection system that records students' results on the reading in math assessments given three times per year. Staff that work with the students will be provided access to these results.
- Employ staff to work at each building to assist teachers with the interpretation of these assessment results so that they may be used to individualize instruction to meet students' needs (Instructional Data Coaches). Additionally, Instructional Data Coaches will help teachers utilize the assessment results to monitor intervention effectiveness.
- Identify a specific training plan for Instructional Data Coaches. Categories of development will include the following strands: Interpretation and Use of Data, Knowledge of District-Wide Interventions, Coaching and Leadership, Content Knowledge (Reading and Math), and Cultural Competency. The expertise in staff and community members will be relied upon in the development and delivery of training in cultural competency. Specifically, the District requests that the Director of Indian Education and the Supervisor of Education Equity play an integral role in coordinating this training component.
- Develop a system that supports district-wide interventions to all students based on their individual needs (See attached District-Wide Interventions). Need will be determined based on the results of the assessments given three times per year, as well as in class assessments, teacher observations, grades, etc.

- Employ staff to work to specifically support children of color who are not meeting or partially meeting the standards in reading and/or math (Integration Specialists). Integration Specialists will work with the children and families to encourage attendance and high academic achievement, connect them with school and community resources, etc.

It is also recommended that the Director of Indian Education continue to attend and participate in the work of the Learning Services Lead Team. The Learning Services Lead Team is charged with developing the district's strategic plan in addressing the achievement gap. It is also recommended that the weekly Learning Services Lead Team meetings serve as the venue to share information between departments and committees. The Director of Indian Education will serve as the liaison between the American Indian Parent Committee and the Learning Services Lead Team by providing input and suggestions from the American Indian Education Committee as well as provide updates of the activities of the Learning Services Lead Team to the American Indian Education Committee. Representatives of the Learning Services Lead Team will attend the American Indian Education Committee meetings as the Director of Indian Education deems appropriate.

b. Textbooks. Supplemental Materials, Computer Programs

Progress

The Duluth Public School District acknowledges the importance that textbooks and supplemental materials are reflective of American Indian heritage with an emphasis on Minnesota-based tribes. The district adopted an elementary reading series that included a diverse representation of authors and text including American Indian. Supplemental materials include *Lit Pics* that specifically address American Indian heritage. This adoption was the result of a year-long review conducted by a committee that was comprised of teachers, principals, and parents. Representation from the American Indian population was present. Duluth Public School policies and regulations (6035) were followed.

Recommendations/Timeline

By September 2010, the Duluth Public Schools will:

- Include representation from the Department of Indian Education in the District-Wide Curriculum Committee. This group meets monthly to focus on the District's written curriculum in each of the content areas. The Director of Indian Education will designate who from the department would be most appropriate to participate in this committee by August 2010. The purpose of this is to ensure that the American Indian Learner Outcomes (AILOS) are woven into the existing curriculum in each of the content areas, as appropriate.

2) CHEMICAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Progress

Duluth Public Schools Counselors and Social Workers have received Teen Intervene training – a response to students who receive a consumption ticket. This training consists of three sessions, one of which the parent(s) attends.

Recommendations/Timelines

The Duluth Public Schools is currently looking at ways to implement such a program in all schools

SPECIAL EDUCATION

1) REFERRALS AND PLACEMENTS INTO LD, EBD, AND MMI

Disproportionality continues to be a district concern despite training provided to staff through two grants the district received to address this issue, as well as other district supported training. The district is in compliance with state and federal special education laws.

Progress

Data has been provided and reviewed with the Director of Indian Education on a regular basis since April, 2007. The three full-time American Indian Youth Advocates, funded by special education, are co-supervised by the Director of Indian Education and the Director of Special Education.

Recommendations/Timeline

Indian students receive evaluations and special education services as determined by Student Support Teams (SST's) and IEP teams, with parent consent. Funding is based on the amount and type of services recommended by the IEP team for each child without consideration to race. Federal funds are received based on the December 1st child count for the previous year. State and local funds pay for costs of certified and paraprofessional staff.

The district is audited yearly by the external auditor and at least every five years by the Minnesota Department of Education. No discrepancies have been identified with regard to appropriate use of special education funds.

There have been no proposals to decrease services to Indian students with disabilities. Every program is reviewed annually as a component of the budget process.

BG/td