

Office of the Independent Monitor

Modified Consent Decree
333 S. Beaudry Avenue, 18th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90017
Tel: (213) 241-1797
Fax: (213) 241-7551

DAVID ROSTETTER
Independent Monitor

JAY R. ALLEMAN
Chief Analyst

JAIME E. HERNANDEZ
Research Director

April 22, 2015

Mr. Ramon Cortines
Superintendent of Schools
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 S. Beaudry Avenue, 24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Re: Graduation and Completion Data for Students with Disabilities

Dear Superintendent Cortines:

As noted in the letter dated April 22, 2015, the Independent Monitor (IM) will be issuing a series of disengagement alerts intended to provide the District notice and guidance on resolving issues that have been outstanding and remain impediments for achieving a successful conclusion to the Modified Consent Decree (MCD).

This is the first alert and focuses on the shortcomings of the process for entering and maintaining graduation and completion data for students with disabilities. As stated in the Disengagement Alert letter, the problems associated with the graduation data fit the following criteria:

1. Achievement requires system wide leadership and management across many components;
2. The Office of the Independent Monitor (OIM) has provided recommendations that could resolve the problems that preclude achievement of each of these tasks;
3. These tasks are characterized as long-standing, and repeated, failures and/or persistent lack of attentiveness; and,
4. These tasks are absolutely essential to the IM's determination that the District does not exhibit systemic problems that preclude substantial compliance.

Background

The problems observed with the graduation and completion data are related to Outcomes 3 and 4 of the MCD. These problems have persisted over 10 years with minimal progress made to remedy the shortcomings. The following is a summary of the problems identified and recommendations made by the OIM.

Since the beginning of the MCD, the quality and accuracy of this data has been a factor in both the negotiations of the targets for each outcome, as well as with the validation of such data. This was noted by the overestimation of graduates and completers by the District when negotiating targets. In the 2004-2005 school year, the District reported 49.4% of SWD having received a diploma and 76.3% of SWD completing high school with either a diploma, certificate of completion or aged out. The following year, the first year of data validation, the OIM found 42.2% of SWD received a diploma while 67.1% were determined to be completers, demonstrating the impact of the inaccuracies of completion data.

In the 2005-2006, the IM's annual report noted that the student information data system was inconsistent in reporting graduation and completion data. Some of the problems identified were the overestimation of graduates due to a default mechanism which applied a leave code to all students that indicated they received a diploma or completed school with a certificate of completion (L7). The system also applied a default code for students who did not pass CAHSEE with a code that indicated a student's school completion status was unknown or considered a drop out (L8) despite the possibility that students may have received a diploma with the Chapman exemption. These defaults resulted in inaccurate data since it relied heavily on school personnel changing the leave codes to reflect the correct status for each student. The system also allowed students to have conflicting leave codes in different fields of the data system, meaning students could be coded both a graduate or completer (L7) and or drop out (L8).

During the 2009-2010 school year, the validation study was broadened to examine processes for gathering, maintaining and reporting completion data. In addition to the persistent problems with the student information system, these inquiries found problems with the district policy and procedures regarding the cumulative folder as the official transcripts of students. The report noted many shortcomings, including that schools failed to update paper records which was further limited by the procedures that requires schools to box and store cumulative files for five years prior to being provided to the Student Records Center for scanning. The Student Record Center reported lacking access to the SIS to cross reference cumulative transcripts with the electronic version. It also was reported that on average, one to two students a week who visited the Center had incomplete records and were directed back to their schools report, the IM noted that the limitations and shortcomings of the processes for gathering, maintaining and to reconcile their records.

In the 2009-2010 annual reporting completion data was "unacceptable." Further, the IM stated that "The lack of accountability for the accurate maintenance and reporting of completion data is evidence that the District is negligent in carrying out its basic responsibility to ensure that students graduate and complete schools. These behaviors and practices must cease."

Over the past ten years, these findings have demonstrated the persistent issues with the data system, and pervasiveness of these problems across schools. While some improvements have been noted, many of the recommendations have been ignored and/or haphazardly addressed.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Rostetter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Rostetter" clearly distinguishable.

David Rostetter, Ed.D.

C: Robert Myers, Catherine Blakemore, Sharyn Howell, Deneen Evans Cox,
Brigitte Ammons, Veronica Smith, Diane Pappas, Shahryar Khazei, Robert Pelayo, Elizabeth
Louros, Marissa Tamayo, Richard Alvarez