

Targeting Low Performing Schools

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Reform efforts to turn around low performing schools under the Consent Decree have stalled. There has been no organized effort and minimal progress in this area since 1997. The district's April 2001 version of *Excellence for All* recognizes this, but does not set forth a concrete educational plan that would enable it to move forward in a precise fashion.

2. Successful strategies exist from the Phase One and CSIP/Reconstitution efforts that can and should be replicated. Even today, in the most recent API statewide rankings, 22 out of the 32 schools specifically targeted under past Consent Decree reforms did not appear on the lowest performing schools lists.

3. II/USP has helped in certain respects, and has the potential to help in other ways. Yet not only is II/USP not a satisfactory vehicle – by itself – for turning around low performing schools, but the draconian sanctions that come with the program may cause havoc at numerous schools by the end of the coming academic year.

4. As we reported in our response to the district's first draft of *Excellence for All*, filed with this Court in March 2001, II/USP must be integrated into a larger and more

comprehensive plan. The April 2001 version of *Excellence for All* is still very deficient in this regard.

5. Before a complete comprehensive plan for turning around low performing schools under the decree can be finalized, crisis teams must be organized to visit and thoroughly assess all the lowest performing schools (which have scored 3 or less in both the basic API statewide rankings and the similar schools rankings) and all those with reading scores in the bottom quartile. These visits and assessments should be based on the range of 48 objective and subjective factors set forth above in this report.

6. In addition, all the district's language acquisition programs must be assessed for effectiveness through a combination of factors as discussed earlier in this section. Our findings over the past four years lead inexorably to the conclusion that the district's monitoring of its language acquisition programs – particularly with regard to consistency in programmatic approaches and redesignation procedures – has been woefully inadequate. There has been significant movement in this area since January, however, and the convening of a blue ribbon taskforce to focus on these issues is a laudable first step.

7. Everyone in the community must recognize that the campuses at several of the lowest performing secondary schools are dramatically underutilized, and that a combination of factors -- including dwindling enrollment, demographic shifts, and economic developments -- lead to the conclusion that there is no likelihood of change in these trends for the foreseeable future. In any plan targeting the lowest performing schools under the Consent Decree, the district should consider closing schools, shifting campuses, and combining existing facilities in creative and thoughtful ways.

8. It is now appropriate to ask whether SFUSD has an overabundance of programs in place at certain school sites that are in dire need of modification and consolidation. This issue has been highlighted by the structural requirements of II/USP, which have led each school to identify a series of programs it wishes to adopt, on top of the federal programs,

state programs, district programs, Consent Decree programs, language acquisition programs, grant-funded programs, and other “homegrown” programs that are already in place. A final plan for targeting low performing schools under the decree must address the coordination and consolidation of programs, and programs within programs, ending the funding of repetitive and ineffective initiatives.

9. The targeting of low performing schools under the decree must be accompanied by the complete integration of the Language Academy and Consent Decree operations under a larger framework for reform. We also urge that the BELA offices be moved to the main district headquarters at 555 Franklin as soon as possible. The district must move toward a complete integration of all interrelated operations targeting low performing schools in every respect.

10. The district now has the opportunity – if this Court grants final approval to the July 2001 settlement agreement – to benefit from an extension of Consent Decree funding through June 2006. Consistent with our findings in the first 120 pages of this report and the mandate set forth in that agreement, we urge the district to consider a dramatic reallocation of Consent Decree funds. Indeed -- apart from the required spending on the organizational and structural components of the decree – we recommend that the district consider spending Consent Decree money on only three areas at the present time: (a) reading specialists and highly structured reading & literacy programs with built-in accountability, (b) school social workers or their “specially trained” equivalent, and (c) targeted professional development for teachers and principals.