

Attachment A

Obama Plan Aims to Reward Performance

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We have good news and bad news about the list of schools that the California Department of Education just deemed to be among the poorest performers in the state. The good news is that thanks to the hard work of our teachers and others, no schools in the Long Beach Unified School District appeared on this “lowest 5 percent” list. The bad news is that because we have no schools on the list, our schools and students will miss out on tens of millions of dollars in federal education funding that will instead go to the poorest performing schools.

Last Saturday, President Barack Obama attempted to remedy such funding flaws as he unveiled his blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind. Building upon his administration’s Race to the Top education initiative, President Obama’s plan would reward academic growth and innovation instead of simply sending more money to troubled school districts. We applaud the president’s plan, which presents an important opportunity to revamp many of NCLB’s deficiencies.

Instead of unfairly labeling schools as failures, including some of the top-ranked schools in the nation, President Obama’s plan would abolish NCLB’s draconian Adequate Yearly Progress system, replacing its single snapshot approach with a system that rewards academic gains. Here in our school district, which has attracted national attention for its successful school reforms, we say it’s about time.

We welcome the president’s emphasis on competitive grants. Competition drives reform by recognizing and rewarding success. We saw this theory in action when, even before any Race to the Top money was spent, many states moved forward on a number of reform issues as they competed for federal funds.

The president’s blueprint contains a number of other features that we favor:

- Competitive grants will focus on big-picture goals (student success, teacher excellence, etc.) and give recipients the freedom to decide how to meet those goals.
- Competitive funding will drive reform not only at the state level but also at the school district level. We relish the opportunity to apply directly for federal funds, bypassing Sacramento.
- Designated funds will support local projects to incubate and expand promising reforms. This approach not only complements our practice of launching pilot projects and then carefully evaluating and refining them before implementing them more broadly. It also inherently

encourages collaboration with teachers and community partners, which has been key to our success in Long Beach.

- Fewer, but larger and more flexible funding streams will be created for areas integral to student success, giving states and districts flexibility to focus on local needs. These new, competitive funding streams will still ensure that federal funds are used wisely. At the same time, school districts will have fewer restrictions on blending funds from different categories, meaning less red tape. We have consistently advocated for such increased flexibility at the state and federal levels.
- College and career readiness standards will be implemented, as will improved assessments aligned with those standards. This effort will enhance our own Academic and Career Success Initiative, which aims to prepare more students for high-paying, high-demand jobs.

Critics of the president's plan should consider this. Few people dispute that the current system doesn't work. Secondly, our students in Long Beach face the same and often greater challenges than those in other school districts, yet they regularly miss out on large sums of federal help. Two-thirds of our students live below the poverty line. More than 30 languages are spoken in our schools. Yet somehow we continue to make significant progress. Federal policies should not punish our teachers and students for their successes. We're just as deserving of those federal funds – if not more so – than other school systems.