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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
GOVERNOR

May 15, 2018

Superintendent Raquel Reedy
PO Box 25704
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Dear Superintendent Reedy:

Over the past year, and in years prior, throughout the process of working to turnaround some of our state's most struggling schools, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) has made every effort to provide Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) with multiple opportunities to improve policies, practices, and outcomes for students throughout your district. In developing a State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is now federally-approved, we engaged in a yearlong listening tour and outlined a bipartisan, students-first approach for our state's perennially struggling schools that builds upon the progress made statewide.

After our State Plan was approved in August 2017 by the United States Department of Education (USED), APS was made aware of the new policies and new opportunities required by the State Plan. NMPED met with APS leadership in October 2017, prior to a formal school turnaround announcement, to discuss your struggling schools given that the number of schools earning "Fs" in APS has tripled in recent years. The full criteria for school identification, district options for support, and the additional funding to be made available were formally announced by NMPED in early December 2017. Throughout the last year, NMPED also shared examples of schools and districts with high percentages of students from low-income communities that were demonstrating strong student growth—from Mission Achievement and Success (MAS) Charter School in your own backyard, to the schools of Gadsden, Farmington, Belen, Gallup, Hobbs, and Alamogordo. We raised the bar on behalf of your students throughout the More Rigorous Interventions (MRI) process because we deeply believe in each and every child—and because we believe APS can do better in serving our children. As a state, we have learned how to turnaround our most struggling schools and have been doing so for the past five years. It starts with an unyielding belief in every student's unlimited potential.

Out of approximately 850 schools across New Mexico, several of which have been closed in recent years due to low academic performance, APS oversees the only two schools in the state

that have earned six straight “F” grades—one of which is Whittier Elementary School (“Whittier”). It is the responsibility of NMPED to intervene in APS so that this does not continue for our students and families.

APS has made considerable progress in developing a school plan for Whittier that extends learning time for students, outlines teacher recruitment and retention activities, demonstrates how important it is to have a high-performing teacher in every classroom (which can translate to 18 to 24 months of learning for our students in a single year), partners with community organizations, and outlines how progress will be measured, analyzed and shared through meaningful assessment and accountability. These are positive steps forward, and have been acknowledged as such by many across New Mexico, including me. APS district leadership must continue to forge ahead in this manner for Whittier, and should not delay in the logical next step of committing to full implementation, which requires a state-approved plan.

The conditional approval provided on April 27, 2018 for the district plan for Whittier is now pending full acceptance by APS. Your most recent letter dated May 4, 2018 requested particular modifications to that conditional approval. While the requests for modifications are unwarranted given your performance history to-date, NMPED nonetheless reviewed them in earnest with a focus on what is in the best interest of your students. The modifications you requested for items numbered 2-7 are acceptable and shall be considered integrated into your plan—however APS is ultimately responsible for the full implementation of each item. The modification you requested for item number 1 is partially acceptable—as such the terms of the NMPED letter provided on April 27, 2018 remain in-effect with the allowance of every teacher at Whittier to have earned Effective or better by the first day of school, which is more consistent with your final plan submission. NMPED would like to reiterate, however, that it is in the best interest of your students to be placed with Highly-Effective and Exemplary teachers, which creates the potential of 18-24 months of learning in a single academic year. There are 1,340 Highly Effective and 184 Exemplary teachers within APS—certainly the students of Whittier deserve them.

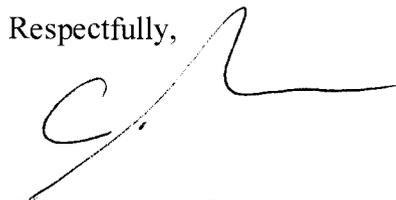
Given that conditional approval of the Whittier plan is now pending district acceptance in-full, without reservation, it should be reiterated from the April 27, 2018 letter that the district is ultimately responsible for improving the school’s performance, and that NMPED must continue to play an oversight role. Thus, as stated in the NMPED’s letter dated April 27, 2018, if Whittier earns two more consecutive “F” grades in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, then the federal grant allocation(s) for 2019-20 and 2020-21 will be withheld and repurposed for School Closure during the 2019-20 school year. If the school earns a combination of “D” and “F” ratings over the next three years, the school shall close at the end the 2021-22 school year. Whittier must earn at least three “C” grades or better during the next four school grading periods, which could include 2017-2018 if the district so chooses, in order to exit MRI status.

Districts that underserve students for more than five years straight require further conditions, oversight, and consequences. This is common sense. Any reasonable person would conclude that more than a half-decade of failure of our children is unacceptable, that the district responsible for that failure should have conditions imposed upon it, that it should be closely monitored in its delivery of a state-approved plan, that it should have clear performance-based criteria to meet, and that there must ultimately be a final determination made on whether the school be allowed to continue to operate.

We urge APS to accept the terms of conditional approval provided April 27, 2018, inclusive of any and all modifications included in this letter, which would allow for an additional \$2 million investment at Whittier over the next three years. NMPED has acknowledged the progress that APS has made with Whittier to-date and has accepted several of the modifications that APS has proposed, even though it was under no obligation to do so.

APS must respond formally in-writing by Friday, May 18, 2018 on behalf of Whittier, accepting the terms in full in order for NMPED to review and approve the district's plan under the district-selected option of Significantly Restructure & Redesign.

Respectfully,



Christopher N. Ruszkowski
Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Public Education Department

cc: APS Board of Education
Kim Finke, Principal, Whittier Elementary School
Dr. Gabriella Blakey, Associate Superintendent for Leadership and Learning - Zone 1
Debbie Rael, Deputy Secretary of School Transformation, NMPED
Matt Montano, Deputy Secretary of Teaching & Learning, NMPED
Marian Rael, Deputy Secretary of Finance & Operations, NMPED
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