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January 15, 2019

Dear Colleagues and Community,

Upon the completion of this administration's first six months of leadership and service to Stockton and Stockton Unified School District, and after completing a period of listening and learning, it is time to propose our way forward – a way to begin the process of dramatically improving the outcomes for all youth in academics, community participation, responsibility and career preparation.

The most sobering theme I heard across all constituents was: “Is this as good as it gets?”

If there was a single theme heard from parents, guardians, caregivers and the youth themselves, it was “we want a successful future – we want much better than we have now – we want the lives of our children to be much better than the outcomes of the past.”

If there was a single theme heard from business, advocacy, non-profit, and faith-based communities, it was “SUSD and Stockton can and must do much better – current results and current conditions are unacceptable – previous efforts at improvement were too little and not sustained, so we now need dramatic efforts for dramatic improvement.”

If I heard a single theme from the amazing employees in SUSD, it was “treat us fairly and with respect, give us the tools to do better, and stop the constant churn of leadership.”

I heard from many community members that “there is nothing about Stockton that is so unique, that explains or supports the current results – do people care about people who look like me?” I also heard “the conditions we live in and our youth experience explains the results we are seeing – this might be the best we can hope for – it will hurt kids to expect things that are so tough and out of their reach.” I reject this last theme and I wholeheartedly embrace all the rest of the learnings from my community meetings.

This proposed ‘way forward’ is intended to be a roadmap for the next 3-5 years. It is designed to be specifically thematic and not dogmatic. Such a roadmap provides the best way to a proposed destination. I believe now more than ever that we must continue to be clear about our destination, which is that all youth can and will graduate college-, career-, and community- ready. In doing so, we will lift youth out of poverty.

Therefore, we will set to work on several fronts:

- 1. Culture and Community in our Schools**
- 2. Supporting Elements**
- 3. Theories of Action, Instruction and Change**

## **Culture and Community in our Schools**

We will establish a high-performing and caring culture in our schools, the school district and in our community by:

- Establishing high and unambiguous expectations for adults and youth.
- Implementing the support necessary for trauma-informed care and instruction.
- Providing rigorous and engaging instruction at all levels.
- Deeply investing in the development of all employees.
- Ensuring high-quality choices for all youth in their education as well as their educational setting.

This will be helped by the guiding principle that we will build a system of great schools and not simply a great school system. Uneven performance averaged to an acceptable level is not being true to all youth. I believe this is supported by a strong, explicit, and transparent method of providing extensive autonomy in exchange for high accountability.

We will also establish benchmarks and goals that are growth-based over time for all groups of students, schools, and the district. We will hold ourselves accountable for reaching these high but achievable goals, celebrate our successes and remediate our failures. We will not be afraid to try bold and new ways of doing our work and we will grow accustomed to being uncomfortable in our pursuit to continually improve as adults working in service of our youth and families. And we *will* be afraid of failing our youth and families.

## **Supporting Elements**

Our declared goals for the dramatic improvement of our culture and community will be possible with a set of supporting elements that are for all youth and adults in SUSD. We will:

- Develop standards for leadership in Stockton Unified at every organizational level, provide the training necessary to be an effective leader and grow as an effective leader. We will be held accountable to these standards of practice as a leader.
- Commit to authentic parent and community engagement in service to developing a ‘parent demand-side’ approach to running our schools and system.
- Implement a set of wrap-around services of support for families and youth who struggle outside of our schools, and we will call for an engagement in partnerships to establish these supports.
- Be a system who is not confused about our mission and acts with integrity within the mission.

## **Theories of Action, Instruction and Change**

We will establish and understand *Theory of Action*, which supports a *Theory of Instruction*, based upon a *Theory of Change*; all three sit upon the equity agenda.

### **Theory of Action**

Our Theory of Action is how we believe the district’s work will best be done. The theory of action I propose, and will revise as we move forward, is called Managed Performance Empowerment. In short, we will:

- Set clear, high standards and measurable goals.

- Establish a set of non-negotiable guiding parameters, such as curriculum, a system to measure the progress and attainment of these standards, and a variety of supports for the development of the skills to teach and learn these standards.
- Be clear that leaders and school sites must have the autonomy to implement strategies as they best see fit for their own community.

This coupling of the school district holding tight to the ‘*what*’ and giving schools the autonomy on the ‘*how*’ remains the case if progress and improvement occur. This is managed performance empowerment.

Schools and leaders must be empowered to implement and customize using the wisdom of the collective. This agreement is critical and can be complicated. The District must hold a far lesser role in the management of schools and a greater role in the establishment of what must be learned and what constitutes successful achievement. We then manage the performance of schools and the district through this agreement. The district steps away from the running of successful schools and intervenes in the management of unsuccessful schools. This requires the District to establish norms and guidelines that allow for far greater autonomy for principals and school sites in terms of budget, instructional methodologies, personnel choices, and customized interventions that are ‘just-in-time.’

This shift into acting in a managed performance empowerment style will require the district to understand its fundamental role which is to establish the ‘*what*’. We must set the bar and metrics of success and hold all accountable for improvement and achievement, then move out of the way for successful schools. It will also require leadership and site work that is highly collaborative, publicly obsessed with improving the performance of all youth and adults, while consistently and persistently focusing on the core business of teaching and learning.

A successful enactment of a theory of action that believes in managed performance empowerment understands that dramatic improvement will not come from regulation, legislation, litigation, negotiation, or even by fear, but rather from *innovation*. As such, our theory of action will set the conditions for innovation and make sure there are safety nets for all youth.

### **Theory of Instruction**

Our Theory of Instruction is how we believe the art of teaching and learning develops our students. In short, we will act upon a belief that high-quality, rigorous, FIRST instruction is key to our success; Instruction that is all the following:

- Based in strong and public standards.
- Infuses the skills and techniques for language learners for all as first instruction and not remediation.
- Culturally relevant and engaging.
- Invites all learners into the act of learning through grade level text and computation as a baseline and not a guideline.
- Starts with rigorous grade level text and computation and scaffolds to success when necessary.

This theory of instruction is based on the premise that all educators are constantly improving their craft and expertise in frequent and collaborative professional development, and that this professional development is a critical part of the daily job, not an option or add on. We will become the lighthouse district for teaching and teacher quality and results. This theory of action also requires all leaders to be experts in instruction, the coaching of instructional capacities, and the deep knowledge of successful teaching and learning techniques. Our school and district leaders will be teachers first, as a model for all learning.

### **Theory of Change**

Our Theory of Change is the system we believe will best guide the improvements we seek and support our theories of instruction and action. In SUSD, I believe the best approach is one that is centered in the following:

- Choose the best and most talented individuals to work and remain working in Stockton.
- Provide high-quality, real choice to parents and students for learning environments and learning opportunities.
- Develop all this work in partnership with our community.

We will invest deeply in the support and conditions for our employees, be clear about expectations for performance, monitor this performance routinely and celebrate and learn from high performing employees. We must become the model and the center in California for attracting and retaining high-quality talent in every job!

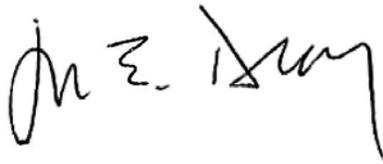
We will provide high-quality, real choice to parents and students for learning environments and learning opportunities. One type of learning environment does not fit all, so we must embrace customization and seek to innovate whenever possible. If we want to solve the current problems we have with achievement, we will need to employ methods and skills not currently being used. This is both an exciting and daunting opportunity– I look forward to leading by example and leading with support. High-quality choice must be expanded but grounded in proof of: quality of performance, quality of engagement, exemplars of instruction, leadership, parent engagement, and employee satisfaction. Such choice must also be a lighthouse in terms of successful diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examples could include: business and career pathway partnerships, lab schools, linked learning models, etc. We should see the district as a manager of a portfolio of learning options for all youth.

We will use the “community-based, community-engaged” model to develop all of this work. Deep, authentic engagement that seeks to move from advocacy to agency in our youth and parents. In short, actions that move away from being done ‘to’ our community and rather actions that are done ‘with’ our community at all levels of the organization. We will welcome problems and the emotions that come with the frustration in parents and families wanting better and see these as invitations for partnership.

All this will take collective time to be implemented carefully and successfully, just as we are about to do with our new K-12 ELA and MATH curriculum. Milestones for each will be established, made public, and monitored. However, while this will take time, it cannot take years.

We will take heed of the warning made so clear by Dr. Martin Luther King when he noted the dangers of “the tranquilizing drug of gradualism”. We will move through this important work living the values of integrity, dignity for all, gratitude, courage, and compassion. All require courage and determination. I have already seen these in action and hold a firm belief that we will be very successful and proud.

If the dirt of Stockton can produce the highest-Grade A cherries, walnuts, and grapes; I have no doubt that the schools constructed on the very same dirt can produce the most successful youth in the County and the State.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John E. Deasy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

John E. Deasy, Ph. D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Stockton Unified School District