

INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
Los Angeles Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent

TO: Members, Board of Education

DATE: September 2, 2014

FROM: Dr. John E. Deasy, Superintendent

SUBJECT: COMMON CORE TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

In light of all of the questions being raised with the Common Core Technology Project (CCTP) and the rollout of the tablets and laptops, I think it is very important for me to set the record straight and let you know my view on what is happening.

The purpose of the Common Core Technology Project is to provide all the youth in the Los Angeles Unified School District with the opportunity to be college and career ready in the 21st century. That means to have world-class curriculum married with world-class technology lead by world-class teachers. The CCTP was conceived as a vehicle to align LAUSD's instructional delivery and curriculum with the Common Core State Standards adopted by California in August 2010. Today, even though we have taken advantage of a number of opportunities to constantly improve processes associated with this work, this extremely important initiative for the youth of LAUSD has been sidetracked by insinuations, innuendos, and misleading statements.

In view of the many false and misleading statements of fact that have been made public for what seems to be primarily political reasons, I believe it is incumbent on me to set the record straight so that an extremely important initiative does not continue to be undermined or compromised. It is time to put the learning of students first.

First, it is important to understand my role as superintendent.

It is extremely important for any superintendent and staff to meet with people all over the country at conferences, in symposiums and individual discussions in order to keep current about what the best research is saying and learn about the most effective emerging practices. This has become even more important given the adoption of the world class Common Core State Standards that call for significant changes in content and pedagogical practices. I have been fortunate to be invited to participate in discussions around the country by leading educators, researchers and vendors so that I could bring the very best to the youth of LAUSD. When I accepted the position as superintendent, I believed that was what you expected me to do. It now appears that some believe that it is inappropriate for officials of a school district to have any contact with vendors or leading educators regarding developments in the field--for fear that at some future date there might be a more formal partnership. Under those circumstances we could not give Advanced Placement, GRE, or SAT because I have had meetings with the president of College Board.

I could offer many other examples. I see this as no different from when a vendor or researcher attends a political event or fundraiser for a Board Member or potential candidate for the Board, and then at some date in the future, the Board Member votes to award a contract to that vendor. Furthermore, I meet with current vendors of the district all the time, as they are doing various types of business with LAUSD. I seek to understand the quality of their work and how it always can be better. This is no different for Apple or Pearson or Dell or HP or any food vendor from our nearly one billion dollar annual cafeteria operation. As a matter of fact, I am often times

asked to meet with current or potential vendors by Board Members--all appropriate in my responsibility to become aware of what are the best products and services for LAUSD. There has to be good faith efforts from all to improve education and not believe there has to be ulterior motives. My motive is and always has been to do the very best for all the youth in LAUSD.

Second, it is important to understand the nature of the bidding for the first phase of the CCTP. The regular bidding process of LAUSD is very regulated and controlled. There are a host of regulations and procedures that govern all bidding, particularly, bidding for major contracts. These are part of processes we have been using for years. Part of the regular process is the imposition of a “cone of silence” once the bid process begins, **but not before it begins**. The “cone of silence” letter sent to all involved is public and clear. It is publicly available and you as board members have been sent this communication on several occasions. It is clear that in the case of the bidding for the first phase of the CCTP, the “cone of silence” was imposed and adhered to. I know of no violations and no one has accused any vendor or District employee of violating the “cone of silence” period, or the regulations. The Inspector General affirmed this fact. Rather, detractors have shifted to alleging that there was too “cozy” of a relationship between District staff and some vendors such that the bidding process may have been skewed to favor those vendors. Such an allegation is baseless. The Office of General Council has not found any misconduct, nor am I aware of any, nor has anyone brought any misconduct to my attention.

Because it is indisputably the case that the “cone of silence” associated with the issuance of the RFP was scrupulously observed (thus providing not even a tentative hook upon which to hang allegations of wrongful conduct), the current efforts to impugn the bidding process have shifted to the period leading up to the issuance of the RFP and prior to the “cone of silence.” Over the course of the past year, attempts have been made to sully the integrity of certain district officers and of the bidding process pursuant to which the contract to develop and implement the CCTP was awarded. With respect to myself, those attempts ignored the fact that early in the process, before the RFP had even been prepared and issued, I recused myself completely from participating in the process because I then owned, in my retirement account, 15 shares of Apple stock valued at \$7,793.70. The same situation was also true for a Board Member and other district leadership staff, although the amount of shares varied for each person. (As a footnote, I sold my shares of Apple that were in my retirement account on November 7, 2013, and notified the General Counsel.) Because I owned Apple shares at the time, I was completely prohibited from participating in the construction of the bid process, the bid specifications, the selection process or the recommendation and awarding of the CCTP contract. As a matter of fact, I was prohibited from even overseeing the process. Any specific questions or concerns about the bid process, the contract selection and award are appropriately addressed to Mr. Mark Hovatter, who along with his team, undertook this process with thousands of hours of hard and dedicated work. No one on my staff discussed the RFP process with me. I did not know what the RFP said. I did not know who was on the selection panel. I did not know how the RFP applicants would be judged, nor did I know who applied. In other words I did fully recuse myself from the process. Since that is the case, and although some have alluded otherwise, there was no way I would or could influence who the contract was awarded to since I had no role in any part of the process. As determined by the LAUSD Inspector General and the LA District Attorney, no violations of any legal requirements took place.

Third, it is important to understand the role of the distinguished educator, Dr. Jaime Aquino. Dr. Aquino worked for America’s Choice for approximately two years before Pearson PLC acquired America’s Choice in September 2010. After that time Dr. Aquino worked for Pearson PLC for approximately eight months before becoming the Deputy Superintendent for Instruction for LAUSD. When I became the LAUSD Superintendent, I wanted to bring to Los Angeles the very best academic officer in the country. I found that in Dr. Aquino, and I was able to convince

him to join the new LAUSD executive leadership team, as he became convinced that Los Angeles had a vision to do the very best for all children. As Deputy Superintendent for Instruction, it was his job to know what the current research was saying about serving all students, to meet with educators, researchers and vendors to stay current in the work, and to bring to Los Angeles the very best thinking and partnerships that would move forward the agenda for serving all students, in particular, those youth who are English Learners, and those who live in circumstances of poverty. In that capacity, Dr. Aquino and his staff met with numerous researchers, educators, and vendors. He and his staff oversaw many field tests and pilots in all areas of instruction and curriculum. Among his many duties, he was also responsible for developing a plan for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards for all teachers and students in Los Angeles.

Dr. Aquino was approached by Dr. Judy Coddling, a leading educator and co-author of three books on standards-based reform, to see if it would be possible for the Pearson Foundation to pilot/field test a new system of digital instructional materials that were being developed to align to the CCSS. The materials were to be field tested in different settings in the country. Because of his prior employment with Pearson PLC, Dr. Aquino asked the Office of the General Council (OGC) whether he could meet with the Pearson Foundation to discuss a non-paid pilot/field test for May/June 2012. The OGC told Dr. Aquino that it would be permissible. The IG affirmed this. The pilot/field test occurred in two schools in Los Angeles (Mulholland Middle School, and Plummer Elementary School). Researchers were in the classrooms to capture the teacher and student reactions and recommendations. Following the field test/pilot, there was a Summer Institute hosted by Pearson where approximately 500 teachers from across the nation attended the institute in Palm Springs, 49 of whom were from Los Angeles. The Summer Institute had 23 Teachers of the Year from various states in attendance. Palm Springs was chosen because it was one of the least expensive places due to the summer 110-degree weather. The purpose of the Summer Institute was for teachers to learn more about implementation of the CCSS and to examine the Pearson Common Core System of Courses, and to provide their input. All teachers received an iPad loaded with the CCSS and the curriculum. The iPads were not gifts to the teachers; every teacher signed a statement agreeing that ownership of the device belonged to the district, not the individual teacher. Dr. Aquino had a scheduling conflict and did not attend the Summer Institute. There were many discussions with Dr. Aquino and his staff about doing a more extensive and paid pilot in the fall of 2012 but it never occurred. In addition Dr. Aquino and his staff held discussions with other technology and curriculum vendors. Specifically, Amplify was offered an opportunity to also pilot a no-cost trial of their curriculum materials and devices, however, it was determined that their prototype was not ready at that time. Instead I believed that because we were less than one year away from full implementation of the new state standards and facing a totally new and different state assessment system--one that would require all state assessments to be taken electronically--we should not do any more pilots where some youths would have an advantage over others and instead we should provide content and technology for all of the LAUSD youth. Although Dr. Aquino was one of four sponsors of the CCTP procurement, I have since learned that Dr. Aquino was not on the selection panel and he endorsed the final selection by the panel. In fact, when Dr. Aquino communicated to a vendor that they would need to have the lowest bid to be considered by LAUSD for selection, he was communicating industry standard guidelines and expectations. We want the best product for the lowest price. Dr. Aquino left the district in December 2013, very discouraged.

Fourth, it is important to understand the role of Apple.

I have already addressed the fact that I did not participate in any way with the CCTP procurement process because of the 15 shares in Apple stock I held in my retirement account at the time.

I enjoyed a meeting with Tim Cooke, the CEO of Apple and his team in early 2011 to discuss Apple's relationship with LAUSD, as I also did with the leaders of Oracle. Before the CCTP, we had thousands of Apple devices and Apple products in our district, purchased by individual schools, Board offices, departments and regions. For years, we have had Apple devices, thousands of them, in our schools. We also had the Schools For The Future program that was constructed by then Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Judy Elliot. This program was approved well before I even came to LAUSD as Deputy Superintendent. We also have thousands of HP, Dell and a myriad of other technology devices, software and technology infrastructure in our district. As with all discussions with vendors, I wanted to understand what the very best materials I could get for the students of LAUSD. That is why I met with Tim Cooke, and why I meet with many other vendors. We discussed a range of possibilities about us working together as I do with many vendors. Remember, at that time, there was no RFP out, or coming out.

In addition, I was approached by Apple to participate in an informational video. I was asked to be videotaped while previewing new materials that Apple had in construction. I was told that this would allow my considered opinion and expertise to be registered on the quality of newly constructed educational material. I was glad to oblige. Of course, I received no compensation in any form for being willing to critique and react to instructional material. I recall this being asked of me in December of 2011. I also mentioned proudly our work in our Schools of The Future in this piece of videotape. I remain appreciative that a company like Apple would want my comments about their educational products.

As you know we have had a particularly long-standing partnership with HP and still do. As a matter of fact, HP has much of our technology business. At the time of the CCTP, some people speculated that the bidding process was skewed for HP, and not Apple. I now know that Apple submitted two bids; one with the Pearson Common Core System of Courses, and another with a different curriculum provider. I also now know that Pearson was a partner with several other technology providers of devices. As was reported in the Chair's Report on the Common Core Technology Project Ad Hoc Committee, Apple submitted the lowest bid and had the highest scores. Much public discussion has occurred about the per pupil price. Apple provided a significant discount to LAUSD with a price of \$768 per student for a device that included service, curriculum, and a variety of applications that gave it a market value of \$1000-\$1200.

Fifth, it is important to understand the role of Pearson.

LAUSD has had a long standing relationship with Pearson as it has with Scholastic, McGraw Hill, Houghton Mifflin and many other publishers of student and teacher materials and textbooks. I frequently meet with vendors and as such, expect my staff to meet with them on a regular basis. We need to know what they are developing and what might be available in the future for the youth of LAUSD. In light of that, I met with Marjorie Scardino, CEO of Pearson, in May 2012 to learn about the new digital curriculum aligned to the CCSS that was being developed by a leading group of educators and researchers. The product was not being developed in ways most products are developed by publishers. Because there are such new expectations of students and teachers around the CCSS, Pearson incubated a team of leading educators and researchers to develop what has become known as the Pearson Common Core System of Courses (PCCSoC). The managing director of this initiative is Dr. Judy Coddling along with Phil Daro, one of three writers of the math CCSS, leading the math design and development work, and Dr. Sally Hampton, one of the major writers of the ELA CCSS, leading the ELA work. Let me remind the Board that LAUSD

had an extensive relationship with Pearson long before the CCTP was conceived. As a matter of fact, our entire elementary math curriculum materials, is Envision Math, a Pearson product.

Mrs. Scardino shared with me the names of the leading experts from all over the world who were advising the PCCSoC core team on the math design and development work, and the names of the leading experts from the US who were advising the PCCSoC core team on the ELA design and development work.

I was very excited to hear from Mrs. Scardino that the PCCSoC was comprehensive, coherent, spanned all grades and aligned to the CCSS. I also was pleased to hear that technology would be used to support student learning and engagement and that the role of the teacher would be critical to the success of raising student achievement. Of course, technology would not be used to replace the teacher. What I knew was happening in my discussions with other vendors, including other products at Pearson, was that they were taking their textbooks and just putting them online. They were repurposing materials and saying they were aligned with the CCSS when in fact they were not. Simple repurposed materials would be unacceptable for our teachers and students because they would not be aligned to the new CCSS. This issue has been widely reported in the education press. Mrs. Scardino assured me that was not the case with the PCCSoC. Because there has never been an educational digital product that was designed and developed from scratch, nor has there been a product that spanned all grade levels for K-12, I became very interested about the possibilities. The PCCSoC team was field-testing the product in a few schools around the country, and that included two LAUSD schools. As we have done in many other circumstances, we were thrilled to participate in the field test. We were pleased that our teachers were having the opportunity to meet with researchers to discuss the experiences they were having. Likewise, we were pleased to be included in the Summer Institute in Palm Springs where our teachers could hear from experts from all over the country about the new CCSS and see some lessons developed against the CCSS.

We had many discussions with the PCCSoC team about participating in a larger 2012 fall pilot but decided against it, because of the reasons I stated above.

One of the requirements LAUSD made in the RFP is that all respondents had to apply for state adoption. The process for the CA Math State Adoption called for all products to be submitted in July 2013 at about the same time the CCTP contract was awarded to Apple. The PCCSoC math product was submitted. As with every product, there were editorial corrections that had to be made. Dr Aquino was pleased that the PCCSoC received a positive citation in every category and that it was on the California State math adoption list. It is important to remember that the state of California only adopts materials for K-8. It is hard to understand why the Chair's report consistently refers to the courses not being finished. It would not be possible to submit partial courses for adoption. The California ELA adoption begins in 2015. Pearson also is required to submit the ELA K-8 PCCSoC for adoption.

To the best of my knowledge, Pearson has followed the contractual agreements between LAUSD and Apple--as Apple's subcontractor in all aspects with regard to content construction. And to the best of my knowledge, Pearson has submitted all of their lessons and units required by the phase roll out.

Finally, here is my current Reflection:

I became the Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2011, believing that with the strong support of the parents, community, educators and elected officials that we could dramatically make a difference in the lives of all the youth in Los Angeles and LAUSD, and I have devoted my career to that cause. I have personally witnessed what it is like for some

children to not have opportunities that other children have; therefore, I vowed that I would do all in my power to make sure that all youth in our care would have the opportunity for a high quality education. I saw the children of the surrounding wealthier communities in LA, and youth in charter schools, and youth in private schools in LA going home with high quality devices and I wanted to make sure that the youth of LAUSD would have the same opportunities. I did not want to see technology widening the achievement gap where the more privileged had opportunities that our students did not. As the new school year begins, we are all reading about how millions of children across our country are coming home with technology loaded with exciting apps. Yet in LAUSD we continue to focus on maligning our work and not on what is best for our children. Of course there is always room to improve, and we will do so. We have already taken lessons learned from the first phase of bidding and rollout, and made improvements in the laptop phase. We plan to take the lessons from this phase and make improvements as we set the next bid and phase rollout.

This is what responsible people do; we make improvements and continuously improve our work. This has been a massive undertaking for a district of our size and one that we should have undertaken. But I feel that we have lost the discussion about what is best for our children. We only see the adults bickering, and I must say this bothers me. Right now, we need to stop this rancor and recommit to doing what is best for the youth of LAUSD. We can and must do this together.

c: Sr. Leadership Team
Inspector General