



TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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Robert Scott
Commissioner



IMPORTANT
INTERVENTION
INFORMATION

CERTIFIED MAIL

227-901
2008-2009

July 2, 2009

Dr. Meria Carstarphen, Superintendent
Austin Independent School District
1111 West Sixth Street
Austin, Texas 78703-5399

Dear Dr. Carstarphen:

This letter is to notify you of the conclusions I have reached based on the academic performance of Pearce Middle School (227-901-048) and Reagan High School (227-901-006) for the 2008-2009 school year. As you know, state law establishes standards and sanctions for multiple years of failure to meet performance standards, including closure or alternative management of a campus that fails to meet those standards for multiple consecutive years. When ratings were issued on August 1, 2008, Pearce Middle School was rated *Academically Unacceptable* for the fourth consecutive year and Reagan High School was rated *Academically Unacceptable* (AU) for the third consecutive year. Agency staff has determined that both Pearce Middle School and Reagan High School will again be rated AU when accountability ratings are issued on July 31, 2009. With that rating, Pearce will have earned a fifth consecutive AU rating and an AU or low-performing rating for eight out of the past ten years for which campus performance ratings have been issued. This pattern of continuing low performance is not acceptable and currently is unmatched by any other campus in the state. I am therefore ordering the closure of the Pearce Middle School effective with the 2009-2010 school year. The level of state intervention in the Reagan High School is also being increased. These were not easy decisions. The closure of the Pearce Middle School will be a challenge for the community that it serves, but, as I have stated to the district previously, my greatest concern is for the education of students served by the campus. State law establishes an expectation that the students assigned to Pearce be provided a more effective learning environment.

On November 13, 2007, the Austin Independent School District (ISD) was sent a letter describing the actions to be taken by the Texas Education Agency (TEA or agency) to oversee the implementation of school improvement and/or reconstitution plans for multi-year AU campuses within the district. These TEA actions included the assignment of a management team to the district to work with district personnel assigned to serve in a central office coordination role for under-performing campuses. Those campuses included Pearce Middle School, which was placed under the charge of the management team as a result of having at that time been rated AU for three consecutive rating cycles. Reagan High School was also subject to the charge based on two consecutive years of AU performance.

Pearce Middle School

A June 4, 2008, TEA letter to the district reviewed previous agency correspondence and interventions regarding the performance of the Pearce Middle School and notified Austin ISD that the agency would increase the level of interventions at the school but would not order closure of the campus for the 2008-2009 school year. However, that letter also acknowledged ongoing performance concerns and referenced the intervention structure in place under state law to address ongoing AU performance. The status of the campus has been the subject of ongoing discussions with district personnel and the management team assigned to the district.

I have continued to request routine benchmark information from the district over the past months to allow the earliest possible decision for the Pearce community. Along with that information provided by the district, TEA has gathered information from the management team assigned to the district and the campus intervention team (CIT) assigned to the campus. In addition, as referenced above, I have reviewed preliminary performance results for the campus, which the district also has received directly from the testing contractor.

Based on the five consecutive years of AU performance and the long history of performance deficiencies at this campus, I am ordering Pearce Middle School closed effective with the 2009-2010 school year. Austin ISD may apply for approval to repurpose the campus. While the district recently has submitted an updated contingency plan for this campus, additional details are needed before a repurposing plan can be formally considered by the agency. Any plan to repurpose the campus must be approved by the agency before any instructional use may be made of the facility during the 2009-2010 school year.

In accordance with 19 TAC §97.1037(a)(1)(C), a district may request a record review related to the closure of a school district campus. A request for record review related to the closure of Pearce Middle School within Austin ISD must be received by TEA **no later than July 21, 2009**, and may be addressed as follows.

Laura Taylor
Associate Commissioner for Accreditation
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701
Fax: (512) 936-6474

Additional information regarding the record review process can be referenced at 19 TAC §97.1037 at the *Texas Administrative Code—Currently in Effect* link available at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/index.html>.

Reagan High School

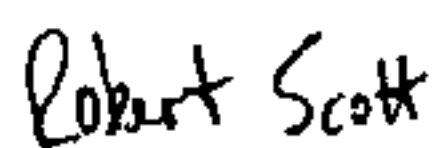
In regard to Reagan High School, I appreciate the information shared by the board president, superintendent, campus principal, external CIT representative, TEA-assigned management team, and other members of the Austin ISD staff with my designee and other TEA staff at a hearing conducted on January 14, 2009. The purpose of the hearing was to provide district and campus leaders an opportunity to explain the unacceptable

academic performance, lack of improvement, and plans for academic improvement given that this campus had been identified as academically unacceptable for three consecutive rating years. During the hearing, the statutory intervention structure addressing ongoing academically unacceptable performance was reviewed. Subsequent to the hearing, the TEA has continued to gather benchmark information and information from members of the management team assigned to the district and CIT assigned to the campus. I also have reviewed the recently-available preliminary performance results for the Reagan High School campus. Although there is evidence of improvement at this campus in certain areas, agency staff has determined that Reagan High School will again be rated AU when accountability ratings are issued on July 31, 2009.

Therefore, in regard to the Reagan High School campus, I am ordering that the district take additional actions during the 2009-2010 school year to address the patterns of continued performance concerns for the students served by the campus. Specifically, I am ordering that the district contract for professional services to support student-level remediation efforts in the campus's areas of academically unacceptable performance, as well as additional professional development. A plan to secure appropriate private tutorial or instructional services in addition to the regular school program should be developed in consultation with the CIT and management team and submitted to TEA no later than July 31, 2009, for approval. These professional services must be acquired at the expense of the district and/or campus. The management team and the CIT will keep TEA apprised of the campus's efforts to develop and implement these required interventions. Additionally, the campus will be required to comply with any other actions ordered by the management team and/or included in the campus's school improvement plan.

My concern for the long-term interests of the students served by the Austin ISD compels me to take these actions. The management team will work with the district to support an effective transition for Pearce Middle School and will continue to keep me apprised of the conditions in the district and the district's multi-year AU campuses. Additionally, I will make agency staff available to support the district as questions or issues may arise. It is my sincere desire that all parties work together in a cooperative and productive manner to address the requirements reflected in this letter. Any questions you may have regarding this correspondence may be addressed to Laura Taylor, Associate Commissioner for Accreditation, at (512) 463-5899.

Sincerely,



Robert Scott
Commissioner of Education

RS/aw

cc: Mark Williams, President, Austin ISD Board of Trustees
Pat Pringle, Executive Director, Region XIII Education Service Center
Ray Glynn, Deputy Commissioner for School District Leadership and Educator Quality, TEA
Laura Taylor, Associate Commissioner for Accreditation, TEA
David Anderson, General Counsel, TEA
Henry Boening, Management Team Member
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