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STATEMENT BY MARK WILLIAMS, PRESIDENT  
AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SUPERINTENDENTS EVALUATION  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2012

The Trustees of the Austin Independent School District have completed our third annual performance evaluation of our Superintendent, Dr. Meria Carstarphen for the 2011-12 school year, and we wish to share our findings with the community.

The Board of Trustees has the responsibility to evaluate the performance of only one district employee - the Superintendent. Her evaluation this year is largely based on reviewing the District's progress in the area of student performance, the status of certain key Board priorities and the Superintendent's overall effectiveness in her ongoing responsibilities in the areas of educational leadership, district management and Board and community relations. I hope that the public recognizes, as the Board does, the incredible challenges of managing an urban school system, with almost 12,000 employees, 123 campuses, a large food service function, bus operation depots and transportation department, athletic and other complexes. The district has over 86,000 students, including 64% that are classified as economically disadvantaged. 23% of our students are considered English Language Learners and 10% are identified as needing special education services. Suffice it to so, AISD is a complex and large organization, with a diverse student population.

On an overall basis, the Board is pleased with the progress made by the district under Dr. Carstarphen's leadership during the past year, and continues to believe that she is the right person to lead Austin ISD, especially in light of the many challenges facing our district going forward.

AISD, along with districts from across Texas, is engaged in litigation against the state to address, among many items, the inadequacy and inequity of the existing school finance system. From a funding standpoint, after the state budget cuts last session, AISD has less money to spend per pupil, yet has a growing and increasingly diverse student population. The district isn't

significantly benefitting from the increased tax base in Austin. Instead, the primary impact on our local taxpayers of the increased tax base comes in the form of increased recapture, or Robin Hood, payments to the state. Another legislative session in Texas begins in January, with new leadership and chairs in several key legislative committees. Even beyond school finance, there will be a variety of hot public education topics, including standardized tests and end of course exams, student, campus and district accountability, and the push for more school choice, including vouchers and expansion of the cap for state authorized/out of district charters. The federal elections in November, including the Presidential race and the control of Congress, will almost certainly have a major impact on No Child Left Behind and the role of the federal government in public education. Potential sequestration of the federal budget at year-end could have a significant adverse impact on Title I and other federal funding received this school year by AISD to support economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

The uncertainty at the state and national level is immense. The Board as a whole believes that maintaining continuity in the Superintendent and AISD's strong leadership team in the face of all this uncertainty is critical.

Further, Dr. Carstarphen has shown courage and a willingness to take on the difficult task of actually trying to adapt, evolve and innovate our district to respond to the current environment, which includes:

- Significantly reduced funding which adversely impacts both our students and our educators through larger class sizes, reduced social service supports and an inability to provide competitive compensation to our staff.
- An increasingly diverse student population
- Competition from neighboring school districts for our students and our staff
- Further competition for our students from rapidly growing state authorized/out of district charters that do not serve every child
- Enormous pressure to improve education in areas like East Austin where students have historically underachieved academically and have left their campuses for other schools in the district or for neighboring districts and charter schools
- The need to incorporate technology and other modern best practices into the classroom to better engage and meet the needs and interests of

- today's student
- The desire to go beyond basic academics and provide an educational experience that emphasizes the whole child in areas such as Social and
  - Emotional Learning, Fine Arts, Athletics, dual language and other electives and extracurriculars
  - The importance of preparing AISD's graduates for college, career and life in the 21st century, including being good citizens and for meaningful participation in the Central Texas economy.

The breadth and depth of these challenges dictate the Board continues to be interested in the Superintendent creating, leading and maintaining a supportive and productive work environment, tone and climate for all our people, be they on a campus, in central office or elsewhere in the district, as they are being asked to do more each year. The Board truly appreciates the effort of all the district's educators and staff who are committed to doing their best, every day, for every child.

In addition, we know that the Board, the Superintendent and the district have to improve the effectiveness of our community engagement efforts as we move forward to deal with all the challenges and uncertainty facing AISD and public education.

The Board also recognizes that given the size of AISD and the complexity and challenges of operating a major urban school district in a community as diverse and engaged as Austin, it is essential for the success of the district and to build public confidence in AISD and its leadership team that the Board/Superintendent team often is operating as effectively as possible. Therefore, the Board as a whole is also committed to coming together with the Superintendent to focus on the future opportunities and challenges facing AISD.

Now let's turn to performance of our students.

Whether people like standardized testing or not, or regardless of the accountability weight placed by the state and the federal government on the performance of AISD students on those tests on a single day, the perception of Dr. Carstarphen's effectiveness by many in the public and on this Board is measured by the performance of AISD students on the state's standardized tests. To complicate matters, school year 2011-12 saw the transition from

TAKS to STAAR, a new accountability and standardized testing system in Texas. So preparing for this transition and performance on such tests, is a key part of the district's strategic plan and thus the Superintendent's evaluation.

AISSD is an urban district, and its performance results on the state's standardized tests are best evaluated relative to the performance of other large districts in Texas. For the 2011-12 school year, AISSD has done well, as evidenced by the district having:

- The highest overall pass rate on the initial end of course Reading,
- Writing and Algebra I exams compared to the other "Big 8" districts in Texas
- Its elementary and middle school students making gains on the initial
- STAAR tests in every subject compared to the prior year's TAKS equivalency performance
- The highest campus passing rate for Adequate Yearly Progress under the federal accountability system when compared to all the other "Big 8" districts.

As evidenced by the results, the Superintendent and her academic team did an excellent job preparing our district for the new STAAR standardized tests. As a reminder, the state's accountability ratings for AISSD's campuses from last year will be held constant for this year under the state's transition plan from TAKS to STAAR.

The Board does remain concerned that Austin ISD again did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as a district, and that 40% of our campuses also failed to meet AYP under federal guidelines. To put that into a bit of context though, none of the Big 8 met AYP as a district. In addition, at the state level, 72% of Texas school districts, and 56% of Texas campuses, also failed to meet AYP standards. The increasing federal No Child Left Behind standards are creating accountability challenges for districts and campus across Texas, and the nation. Nevertheless, the Board has indicated to the Superintendent that they would like to better understand what it would take to improve the district's performance under NCLB, especially as it relates to special education students. The district has struggled with this particular student group for years in achieving performance at a high enough level to meet the federal standards.

But I do want to note that there are indeed other measures that the Board looks at beyond the standardized tests to evaluate student engagement and performance. A few of the key achievements this past year include:

- AISD's student attendance continues to improve, with an overall district rate of more than 95% and for the second consecutive year, a high school attendance rate of over 90% (increased attendance translates to additional local funding under the state's school finance formulas which are based on WADA - weighted average daily attendance)
- The district's graduation rates increased nearly two points to 80%
- Post-secondary enrollment rates for AISD graduates increased a substantial 5 percentage points to 67%
- AISD continues to perform well on NAEP (the National Assessment for Educational Progress, known as the gold standard for comparing performance across the country). In comparison to the other 20 urban districts included in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) districts,
- AISD ranked first in 8th grade math, second in 4th grade math and fourth in both 4th grade and 8th grade reading. AISD also ranks above the national public and large city averages on all four tests
- AISD students exceeded the state averages by 62 points on the SAT (and were only two points below the national average), and exceeded the national and state average composite scores on the ACT

Austin ISD is getting better, both on an absolute basis and relative to the other large urban districts in the state. However, while AISD's academic performance is improving, a significant achievement gap continues to persist, and the rate of closing this gap is below the level targeted by the strategic plan. The Board has indicated to Dr. Carstarphen that they would like to work with her over the next year to better understand the barriers to closing this gap, and the approach and resources that are needed to accelerate improvement of the district's lower-performing student groups.

From an organizational perspective, the district continues to improve its systems and operational infrastructure, processes and capacity. In spite of reduced funding, AISD remains fiscally sound with a strong bond rating. There continues to be a strong focus on the impact of educator quality, recognizing the critical nature of developing a forward-thinking and

effective human capital strategy. In addition, the Board supports the ongoing effort to improve the district's information technology and performance management reporting capability. In addition, AISD earned the Top Performing District award for its management of business operations services in 2011 from the Council of Great City Schools. The recognition was based on demonstrated efficient and effective use of resources in critical areas like food services, maintenance and operations, safety and security and student transportation.

The establishment of a facility master-planning framework has laid the groundwork for a more sound planning process and cycle for both academic and facility initiatives. While the framework was approved mid-year during school year 2011-12, and thus only partially implemented last year, it set the stage for better planning and engagement in the future. The past year's Annual Academic and Facility Recommendation (AAFR) process also generated several positive enhancements for the district to begin in the 2012-13 school year, including continued expansion of the district's dual language initiative, the implementation of two in-district charter programs at Travis and Lanier High Schools to help recover dropouts and support over-age and under-credit students, and the establishment of two new pre-K centers at Dobie and Webb to relieve severe overcrowding of the north-central elementary schools.

Nevertheless, the district's experience as it related to the IDEA in-district charter proposal highlighted the need for AISD to improve its community engagement efforts, especially on major changes or in areas where a possible change can be reasonably expected to generate significant attention or controversy, so that parents, staff and other community members have a more meaningful opportunity on the front-end to provide input into the identification of the issues and challenges that need to be addressed and the development of a range of possible options and decision-making criteria. As indicated above, Dr. Carstarphen and the Board are committed to making the district's community engagement efforts more effective.

While all is not perfect, and never will be, the Board as a whole continues to believe that AISD is moving on an overall basis in the right direction, and improving the capability of our district to meet the needs of all our students. Being a superintendent in a large urban district is a complex, demanding and difficult task, and you will not make everyone happy. There are no easy answers. A best practice for successful districts is continuity in the position

of the superintendent. Looking at the state and national landscape for large urban district indicates that superintendent transitions, which occur frequently, can slow down progress.

Thus, the current Board as a whole believes that AISD would be best served to continue its positive trajectory by keeping Dr. Carstarphen as our superintendent. We believe that she is capable of not only addressing the issues raised in our evaluation but also continuing to raise the performance of our students and our district. We also feel strongly that she is a high quality superintendent who we believe can and will build the relationships necessary with the Board, district staff and our community to enable her to continue to lead the Austin Independent School District in that capacity for the foreseeable future.

As evidence of that commitment, the Board will take up an agenda item later this evening to extend the contract of Dr. Carstarphen for one year. If the Board approves this extension, Dr. Carstarphen's contract would be extended to June 30, 2015.

Tonight's action is being proposed to demonstrate that there is mutual commitment on the part of the Board and the only employee that reports directly to the Board, Dr. Carstarphen, to see through the innovations and reforms already underway, to more fully implement the district's strategic plan and to ensure that Dr. Carstarphen is here to help navigate Austin ISD through the school finance litigation and the next legislative biennium, and its associated financial and other impacts on our district.

Dr. Carstarphen, thank you, and thanks to your team, for all the efforts and good work we have seen over the past year. The Board looks forward to continuing to work with you and your team in the future to meet the needs of our students, our staff, our taxpayers and our community.