



RIVERSIDE COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
EDWIN GOMEZ, Ed.D.  
County Superintendent of Schools

Riverside County  
Board of Education

Jamie Azpeitia-Sachs

Kim J. Cousins

Ray "Coach" Curtis

Bruce N. Dennis

Ben Johnson II

Jennifer Mejares Pham

Elizabeth F. Romero

**DATE:** August 30, 2024  
**TO:** Dr. Kelly May-Vollmar, District Superintendent  
Dr. Kailee Watson, Board President  
Mr. Jordan Aquino, Assistant Superintendent, Business Services  
Dr. Marcus Wood, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services  
Desert Sands Unified School District  
**FROM:** Edwin Gomez, Ed.D., Riverside County Superintendent of Schools  
**BY:** Scott Price, Ph.D.  Amanda Corridan   
Chief Business Official Chief Academic Officer  
(951) 826-6790 (951) 826-6648

**SUBJECT: 2024-25 LCAP and ADOPTED BUDGET – APPROVAL**

The County Superintendent of Schools is required to review and approve the district's Local Control and Accountability Plan or the annual update to an existing Local Control and Accountability Plan prior to the approval of the district's Adopted Budget [Education Code Section 42127(d)(2)].

**Adopted Local Control and Accountability Plan**

In accordance with California Education Code (EC) Section 52070, our office has completed its review of the district's 2024-25 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) to determine whether it adheres to the guidelines adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).

The district's adopted LCAP has been analyzed to determine whether:

- The plan adheres to the template adopted by the State Board of Education.
- The budget includes sufficient expenditures to implement the actions and strategies included in the plan, based on the projected costs included in the plan.
- The plan adheres to the expenditure requirements for funds apportioned on the basis of the number and concentration of unduplicated pupils.
- The plan includes the calculations to determine whether there is required carryover. If applicable, the plan includes a description of the planned uses of the specified funds and a description of how the planned uses of those funds satisfy the requirements for specific actions to be considered as contributing toward meeting the increased or improved services requirement.

Our office received a board approved LCAP on June 24, 2024. After a comprehensive review, our office determined the LCAP required further clarification to ensure compliance with state guidelines. On August 1, 2024, our office provided a clarification letter highlighting specific areas requiring additional detail and adjustment. On August 13, 2024, the district took to board an updated plan. The district's adopted LCAP has been analyzed in the context of the guidance provided by the California County Superintendents and the California Department of Education

(CDE). Based on our analysis, the district's Local Control and Accountability Plan for the 2024-25 fiscal year has been **approved** by the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools. Our goal is to further enhance the performance of students by providing feedback and inquiry questions that will support the refinement of future Local Control and Accountability Plans and any additional plans designed to close the achievement gap in metrics that impact student preparedness for college and career.

### **Student Achievement**

The purpose of the LCAP is to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills necessary to be successful in both college and career. The Riverside County Office of Education conducted a review of research on TK-12 college readiness indicators to identify those that would align with the LCAP purpose and have the greatest impact. As a result of this research, we recommend that local education agencies (LEAs) closely monitor the metrics listed in the data table below for all student groups.

Desert Sands Unified School District Student Groups – Program Participation Status						
Indicator	LEA	English Learner	Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	Students with Disabilities	Foster Youth	Homeless Youth
Enrollment Count 2023 <sup>1</sup>	24,277	5,319	18,633	2,934	188	265
Enrollment Percent 2023 <sup>1</sup>	N/A	21.9	76.8	12.1	0.8	1.1
English Language Arts (ELA) Distance from Standard 2023 <sup>2</sup>	-35.8	-73.4	-49.1	-123.0	-94.8	-109.2
Mathematics Distance from Standard 2023 <sup>2</sup>	-78.8	-110.6	-92.7	-152.7	-130.5	-142.9
English Learner Progress Indicator 2023 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	48.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Graduation Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	93.8	87.9	93.3	81.0	83.3	84.5
A-G Completion Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	51.1	26.1	47.3	14.7	23.3	31.7
Career Technical Education (CTE) Completion Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	17.5	7.8	17.4	8.4	3.3	15.5
Chronic Absenteeism Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	34.8	36.0	38.1	43.8	44.3	51.3
Suspension Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	4.5	5.0	5.0	7.7	11.5	7.0

<sup>1</sup>2023 California School Dashboard Downloadable Enrollment File  
<sup>2</sup>2023 California School Dashboard/Dashboard Additional Report Downloadable Data Files  
\* Data Suppressed for Student Privacy Reasons

Desert Sands Unified School District Student Groups – Race/Ethnicity										
Indicator	LEA	American Indian	Asian	Black/African American	Filipino	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	
Enrollment Count 2023 <sup>1</sup>	24,277	62	440	337	157	19,005	20	3,256	432	
Enrollment Percent 2023 <sup>1</sup>	N/A	0.3	1.8	1.4	0.6	78.3	0.1	13.4	1.8	
English Language Arts (ELA) Distance from Standard 2023 <sup>2</sup>	-35.8	17.7	34.9	-79.3	49.0	-45.9	*	12.3	16.6	
Mathematics Distance from Standard 2023 <sup>2</sup>	-78.8	-27.0	7.0	-100.9	-13.7	-90.6	*	-26.1	-17.6	
English Learner Progress Indicator 2023 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Graduation Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	93.8	*	95.1	94.1	89.5	93.1	*	96.5	98.0	
A-G Completion Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	51.1	*	73.2	58.8	78.9	46.8	*	67.6	51.0	
Career Technical Education (CTE) Completion Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	17.5	*	24.4	14.7	31.6	17.9	*	15.0	13.7	
Chronic Absenteeism Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	34.8	30.2	17.7	30.3	20.8	36.7	35.3	25.8	35.1	
Suspension Rate 2023 <sup>2</sup>	4.5	2.9	1.5	9.7	1.2	4.7	0.0	3.5	3.7	

<sup>1</sup> California School Dashboard/Dashboard Additional Report Files

<sup>2</sup> CDE Dataquest and Files

\* Data Suppressed for Student Privacy Reasons

We offer the following commendations and inquiry questions to consider for the implementation of the 2024-25 Local Control and Accountability Plan and the refinement of the plan in future years:

### **Student Success in Academics**

The district is to be commended for an increase in English learner reclassification by 11.7 percent (totaling 707 students) and 12.2 percent of Long-Term English Learners (totaling 206 students). Notably, the district recognizes that 56 percent of all preschool students are English learners, leveraging the importance of early Language Acquisition opportunities. In addition, it is commended that for the 2024-25 academic year, the focus on Early Literacy will be incorporating third grade students into foundational skills work. Efforts will include systematically embedding reading foundational supports for K-3 students and addressing

reading achievement gaps for fourth and fifth graders. Lastly, the district is to be commended for training secondary teachers in math discourse strategies and elementary teachers in mathematical processes.

Additional dialogue related to the questions below may support achievement of the goals and desired outcomes aligned to student academic achievement:

- How might the district use the Integration of Standards for Mathematical Practice in its Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports for those who may need support in concept mastery?
- How might the district analyze its assessment tool systems and protocols to ensure the use is consistent and effectively impacting teaching and learning at a rigorous level districtwide?

### **Student Access, Enrollment, and Success in Rigorous Coursework**

The district is to be commended for its collaborative partnerships with the Ophelia Project and Gents Alliance, which have significantly increased the College and Career readiness rates for first-generation students. Additionally, the district has expanded Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways and improved program progress monitoring by increasing the staffing of CTE assistant principals at all high school sites, resulting in a 10 percent rise in CTE pathway completion. Lastly, the district should be commended for its efforts in transcript analysis to assess students' readiness for high school, college, and beyond further demonstrating its strong commitment to enhancing college and career access and readiness for all students across the district.

Additional dialogue related to the questions below may support achievement of the goals and desired outcomes aligned to student access, enrollment, and success in rigorous coursework:

- What strategies are being utilized to recruit, sustain, and ensure CTE Pathway Completers, specifically for underserved student populations (i.e., Reasons for 14 percent of students' disengagement after third year compared to their commitment in middle school grade levels)?
- What current supports can the secondary sites utilize to increase the percentage of CTE program students completing all pathway-required coursework, with an emphasis on English Learner, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, Foster Youth, Homeless Youth, and African American student groups?

### **Student Engagement and School Climate**

The district is to be commended for hiring a second Foster Youth/Homeless Liaison, which has significantly enhanced student support by providing supplies, enrollment assistance, counseling, and transition planning. As a result, all high school seniors identified as Foster Youth completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Secondly, the district is to be commended for fostering continued collaboration between Site Attendance Leads (SALs) with the Child Welfare and Attendance Office to develop and implement attendance interventions at each school. The district's attendance goal is 95 percent, and they are close to their goal with 91.95 percent. Lastly, the district is to be commended for the decrease of Chronic Absenteeism for Foster Youth by 10.6 percent, which shows the district's focus on attendance is yielding positive outcomes.

Additional dialogue related to the questions below may support achievement of the goals and desired outcomes aligned to student engagement and school climate:

- What mechanisms might the district create to enhance collaboration among its existing attendance initiatives, including full-time attendance clerks, data reporting, Site Attendance Leads (SALs), Family Engagement Specialists (FESs), the Foster Youth and McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program Liaison, and other key district and community partners to enable real-time progress monitoring, respective program evaluation, and adjustment of program design as necessary to improve student attendance rates?
- How can the district utilize the collaboration with the Child Welfare and Attendance Office to implement attendance interventions for the identified subgroups needing support with chronic absenteeism (qualitative/quantitative data, partner feedback, meeting minutes, etc.)?
- How can the district use the Panorama "sense of belonging" data to inform its next actions in creating a culture of belonging for secondary schools?

To access resources and tools that will support future LCAP development, please go to <https://www.rcoe.us/lcap-support>.

#### ***Fiscal Recommendations***

During our review we identified opportunities to improve data accuracy between the district's LCAP and fiscal documents. After board adoption, the district revised certain items, which had no material impact on the implementation of the district's plan.

#### **Adopted Budget**

In accordance with California Education Code (EC) Section 42127, our office has completed its review of the district's 2024-25 Adopted Budget to determine whether it complies with the criteria and standards adopted by the SBE and whether it allows the district to meet its financial obligations for the 2024-25 fiscal year, as well as satisfy its multi-year financial commitments.

Based on our analysis of the information submitted, we approve the district's budget, but would like to highlight the following:

*Enrollment and Average Daily Attendance (ADA)* – The district estimates 21,484 ADA for the current fiscal year, or a 1.0 percent decrease from the certified 2023-24 P-2 ADA. For 2025-26, the district projects a 1.1 percent decrease in ADA. For 2026-27, the district projects a 2.1 percent decrease in ADA. It will be important for the district to monitor enrollment in the current and subsequent years to ensure accurate LCFF revenue and plan accordingly.

*Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)* – The district's Adopted Budget included Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) for LCFF funding of 1.07 percent, 2.93 percent, and 3.08 percent for the 2024-25, 2025-26, and 2026-27 fiscal years, respectively. Our office recommends a contingency plan should LCFF funding not materialize as projected in the 2024-25 State Budget.

*Unrestricted Deficit Spending* – The district's Adopted Budget indicates a positive ending balance for all funds in the 2024-25 fiscal year. However, for the unrestricted General Fund, the

district anticipates expenditures and uses will exceed revenues and sources by \$9.1 million in 2024-25, \$9.7 million in 2025-26, and \$5.2 million in 2026-27. Our office strongly discourages districts from committing to additional ongoing expenditures without offsetting reductions and stresses the need to continue identifying solutions to reduce any potential structural deficit.

*Employee Negotiations* – As of the board date, June 18, 2024, the district reports salary and benefit negotiations continue with both the certificated and classified bargaining units for the 2024-25 fiscal year. Prior to entering into a written agreement, California Government Code (GC) Section 3547.5 requires a public school employer to publicly disclose the major provisions of a collective bargaining agreement, including but not limited to, the costs incurred in the current and subsequent fiscal years. The disclosure must include a written certification signed by the district superintendent and chief business official that the district can meet the costs incurred by the district during the term of the agreement. Therefore, please make available to the public and submit a disclosure to our office at least ten (10) working days prior to the date on which the governing board is to take action on a proposed agreement.

*Reserve for Economic Uncertainties* – The minimum state-required reserve for a district of Desert Sands Unified School District's size is 3.0 percent. The district projects to meet the minimum-reserve requirement in the current and two subsequent fiscal years.

*Cash Management* – Attention to cash solvency remains a critical fiscal practice and should continue to be prioritized in the coming year. The district projects sufficient cash balances to cover projected expenditures during the 2024-25 fiscal year. Should the district identify the need for temporary borrowing options, our office strongly advises districts to consult with legal counsel and independent auditors prior to using Cafeteria Special Revenue Fund (Fund 13) and Building Fund (Fund 21) for temporary interfund borrowing purposes to remedy cash shortfalls.

*AB 2756* – Current law, as enacted through AB 2756 (Chapter 52, Statutes of 2004), requires the County Superintendent to review and consider any studies, reports, evaluations, or audits that may contain evidence a district is showing fiscal distress. Our office did not receive any such reports for the district.

### **Conclusion**

Our office commends the district for its efforts thus far to preserve its fiscal solvency and maintain a quality education program for its students. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our office.