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## TUSD has ambitious plan to bolster all schools

**By George B. Sánchez**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Tucson's largest school district has unveiled an ambitious improvement plan to offset its poor standing under federal accountability standards.

The plan seeks to raise standards districtwide, not just at schools that are facing some form of state or federally mandated improvement.

Steve Holmes, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, presented the plan last week to the Tucson Unified School District Governing Board.

TUSD's Corrective Action Plan generally calls for further school improvement accountability and a districtwide literacy plan, and specifically calls for more rigorous English as a second language programs at middle schools and teaching strategies that culturally resonate with American Indian students.

In the past, TUSD offered aid to schools and students after they fared poorly on benchmark tests. Now, Holmes explained, the district needs to push all its students to do better, not just those who need extra help.

"We haven't had a system in place to be preventative," he said. "We've been more reactive."

In May, Holmes represented TUSD at an education summit in Phoenix for all school districts that missed federal standards, known as Adequate Yearly Progress, for two years in a row.

A total of 23 Arizona school districts, including the Sunnyside Unified School District and the Indian Oasis Baboquivari Unified School District, were summoned because they were facing corrective action under the No Child Left Behind Act. The Arizona

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**Did you know ...**

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One is Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards, or AIMS, which students must pass to graduate from high school.

AIMS scores will be released publicly on Wednesday.

### School improvement

TUSD has 16 schools in some form of school improvement, either federal, state or both. They are (in alphabetical order):

- Cavett Elementary School
- C.E. Rose Elementary School
- Corbett Elementary School

Department of Education called the meeting to collectively strategize what districts needed to do to improve.

State officials say a districtwide approach is needed.

"We're beginning to see that more," said Steve Henneberg, a Title 1 program specialist for the state Department of Education. "It's one of those things we've emphasized, whether (schools are) in improvement or not."

Title 1 funding is determined by federal Census poverty statistics. Title 1 funds are distributed to schools based on the number of students who receive free or reduced-cost meals.

Federal guidelines under No Child Left Behind require school districts, schools and student groups to improve every year, aiming for a goal of 100 percent proficiency in math and reading by 2014.

Adequate Yearly Progress is judged by the percentage of students tested and the percent of students who meet or exceed reading and math standards set by the government. If a single student group doesn't meet those standards, there can be consequences for the entire school and its district.

The federal government has divided students into eight such groups: Anglo, black, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, "economically disadvantaged," English-language learners and special-education students.

During Holmes' presentation Tuesday, the board learned special-education students in sixth, seventh, eighth and 10th grades and American Indian students in 10th grade were not meeting the percentage of students required to be tested. Ninety-five percent of each student group needs to be tested per federal standards.

Special-education students, English-language learners and American Indian students also were not meeting federal math and reading proficiency goals.

"Our Native American students in general are not doing well, and that's a big concern," Holmes said.

The corrective-action plan calls for parent forums to discuss the issue and teacher education of Pascua Yaqui culture.

Though Pascua Yaqui Tribe officials had not been notified of the corrective-action plan, they said they welcome the opportunity work with TUSD to improve student achievement.

"We believe in our children. We know they can learn, and we'll work with TUSD as much as we can, but we'd like to see TUSD

- Cragin Elementary School
- Hohokam Middle School
- Lawrence Intermediate School
- Lynn/Urquides Elementary School
- Maxwell Middle School
- Maldonado Elementary School
- Naylor Middle School
- Roberts Elementary School
- Robison Elementary School
- Safford Magnet Middle School
- Teenage Parent Program
- Valencia Middle School
- Wakefield Middle School

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reach out more," said Alena Hernandez, education division director for the tribe.

She noted successful partnerships between the tribe and TUSD are occurring at Johnson Primary School and Lawrence Intermediate School.

Pilar Thomas, chief of staff for Pascua Yaqui Chairwoman Herminia Frias, said the Tribal Council voted on June 27 to give TUSD \$50,000 from its gaming revenue. The money, she explained, will go toward improving American Indian student performance, attendance and parent participation.

TUSD also has acknowledged its problems at schools that largely serve the Yaqui community, such as Hohokam Middle School, 7400 S. Settler Road, which had three principals in the last school year and was labeled "underperforming" under Arizona Learns, the state equivalent of Adequate Yearly Progress.

Middle-school English-language learners, as a student subgroup, also will receive more attention under the new plan, Holmes said, including integrating their needs into the new districtwide literacy plan.

Across the district, each school also will receive a school accountability plan, Holmes said, which will be devised and implemented by principals and teachers. To make sure those plans go into effect, principal supervisors, along with subject experts, will perform academic audits at each school.

The audits, Holmes said, are part of what separates the corrective action plan from previous improvement attempts. But TUSD has to be clear with its staff that the audits aren't punitive, he noted.

"This is that fine line between pressure and support," Holmes said. "For every unit of accountability, we need to give them a unit of support."

Along with school-to-school accountability plans, Holmes proposed that schools on the verge of failing or restructuring be labeled "superintendent schools" and receive more oversight and resources. Those schools are Naylor Middle School, Hohokam, Lawrence Intermediate School and Roberts Elementary School.

Naylor, 1701 S. Columbus Blvd., already is receiving extra funding after being labeled failing by the state. The school will get new staff and administrative support to the tune of about half a million dollars, Holmes said.

Though state law calls for Title 1 funds to be redirected for improvement, there is no additional reserve of money for schools or districts in corrective action, said Jill Andrews, the state's improvement director for school districts and charter schools.

State officials have not set a timeline for TUSD's corrective plan, nor is there a date by which they expect to see results.

"Overall, increased student achievement for all districts will be the greatest indicator," said Kimberly Allen, director of state intervention for Arizona Learns.

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Download a PDF version of TUSD's corrective action plan at [azstarnet.com/education](http://www.azstarnet.com/education)

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