

Prepared Statement

of

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tester, Vice Chairman Barrasso, and distinguished members of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me today to discuss the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). DoDEA, as one of only two Federally-operated school systems, is responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and managing prekindergarten through 12th grade educational programs on behalf of the Department of Defense (DoD). DoDEA is globally positioned, operating 191 accredited schools in 14 districts located in 12 foreign countries, 7 states, Guam, and Puerto Rico. DoDEA employs approximately 8,000 educators who serve more than 82,000 children of active duty military and DoD civilian families. DoDEA is committed to ensuring that all school-aged children of military families are provided a world-class education that prepares them for postsecondary education and/or career success and to be leading contributors in their communities as well as in our 21st century globalized society.

DODEA — A UNIFIED SCHOOL SYSTEM

The DoDEA Headquarters (HQ) serves in several capacities that facilitate DoDEA's ability to operate as a unified school system. In addition to serving as a DoD Field Activity, DoDEA HQ fulfills responsibilities commonly performed by State Education Agencies (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEA). Similar to an SEA, DoDEA HQ establishes system-wide policies, academic standards, assessments, and accountability. Similar to an LEA, DoDEA HQ establishes system-wide curriculum, instructional frameworks, professional development programs, and performs system-wide resource management, facility recapitalization, and strategic planning. By virtue of the HQ performing the functions of both an SEA and LEA,

DoDEA is able to operate as a unified school system, achieving system-wide coherence and unity of effort in spite of its global geographic dispersion.

Over the course of the next five years, DoDEA will implement its new strategic plan for achieving new levels of school system excellence, most importantly in the areas of school performance and student achievement. I would like to share with the committee the strategic reforms DoDEA is preparing to undertake that are essential to achieving excellence in these two areas.

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

DoDEA's path to achieving new levels of excellence in school performance and student achievement will largely be determined by our ability to successfully achieve three conditions in every DoDEA school: we must establish and communicate high expectations for all students; we must ensure all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities; and, most importantly, we must ensure all of our students achieve high academic standards. To achieve such aspirations, we have determined that we must focus our strategic efforts on mastering research-based fundamentals essential to improving what we teach and how we teach. A key facet of our strategic approach is the implementation of a school improvement model that establishes the capacity in each school to be an effective catalyst for higher-level student learning. The fundamental components of our school improvement model are summarized below.

Standards-Based System: To fulfill our obligation to prepare all students to meet the higher demands of today's colleges, careers, and citizenship responsibilities, we are taking necessary

actions to establish a coherent standards-based educational system. Our standards-based system will enable our students to progressively master knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for success at the next grade level and postsecondary success upon graduating. A complex yet critical condition of success for our standards-based system is to ensure system components — rigorous academic standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, professional development, and technology — are properly aligned.

Rigorous Academic Standards: Over the course of the next five years, DoDEA will join the majority of states in implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. Compared to DoDEA’s current academic standards, the CCSS are more rigorous and better define the essential content knowledge and higher-order thinking skills students should possess at the end of a course and/or grade level in order to remain on path for college and/or career readiness upon graduating from high school. As such, the CCSS will form the foundation from which all other components of DoDEA’s standards-based system are aligned.

Curriculum: To ensure our curriculum (course/subject area content) remains aligned to the new standards, we will further develop and implement a comprehensive, vertically- and horizontally-aligned prekindergarten through grade 12 curricular framework. The framework, by providing high-quality course content in sequenced units of instruction that establish a teaching and learning focus on targeted standards, will achieve quality and consistency in what is taught and learned in each course, grade level, and in each of our schools.

Instruction: We recognize that the success of our curriculum ultimately depends on the ability of our teachers to deliver rigorous and relevant standards-based instruction that progressively develops student knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In order for our students to master rigorous standards, instruction must be equally rigorous in actively engaging and challenging students so that they develop a deep understanding of content knowledge and improve higher-order thinking and communication skills. Likewise, we will emphasize the importance of students understanding the relevance of what they are learning. To the greatest extent possible, lessons will require students to apply and demonstrate targeted knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Assessment: We will also establish a more comprehensive assessment system that provides the means to effectively and efficiently measure the level at which our students are learning to the more rigorous standards. We will consider a full range of assessments to accommodate the need for classroom assessments used by teachers to frequently check for student learning and the need for common assessments that objectively measure the level of student mastery of course and/or grade-level academic standards against established performance benchmarks. In short, our assessment system will be considered fully developed when it serves to effectively: 1) measure student-level proficiency in applying/demonstrating targeted knowledge, higher-order thinking and communication skills, and dispositions; and 2) improve the quality, consistency, and rigor of curriculum and classroom instruction.

Teacher and Principal Professional Development: Research clearly demonstrates that teachers and principals have the most influence on student achievement within a school. For this

reason, we will make the professional development of our teachers and principals a top priority. Our professional development effort will focus on ensuring our teachers and our principals, as instructional leaders, have the requisite skills, knowledge, strategies, and beliefs necessary to provide rigorous and relevant instruction. In addition to a robust professional development program, we will also establish a common instructional framework. The framework will promote and model research-based teacher and instructional leader practices and skills crucial to planning and preparing coherent lesson plans; delivering instruction in a student-focused, individualized manner that actively engages and challenges each student to apply and demonstrate targeted knowledge and skills; and creating a classroom environment that enables student higher-level learning.

Student Capacity and Motivation to Learn: Our students' ability to successfully adapt to the increased rigor within our system will depend, in part, on our ability to build each student's capacity and motivation to meet higher academic expectations. We recognize that there are many external factors that influence student dispositions and contribute to inequities in achievement levels. However, we also recognize there is much we can do in the school environment to better prepare our students for the learning process and once in-process, better meet the unique learning needs of each student. To do so, we will ensure our educators are more cognizant of the need to individualize instruction to account for differences in student learning styles and abilities, to check for student understanding and provide feedback on a more frequent basis, and create respectful classroom environments where students feel valued, safe, and at ease taking intellectual risks.

Technology: We will increase our emphasis on integrating technology throughout our curriculum to improve the ability of our students to learn and create in a digital environment. We will do so by continuing our efforts to improve and standardize the technology infrastructure within our school facilities and by integrating the digital learning resources available to students at every grade level. Our transition from a teacher-centered, rote-learning model to a blended digital environment geared toward student creation hinges on three initiatives. First, we will provide high-quality digital materials that comply with federal accessibility standards and are accessible to all students and teachers, including persons with disabilities and English language learners. Secondly, we are implementing a learning management system where teachers can leverage their creativity in their lesson planning and delivery, providing a consistent student experience. Finally, we will provide teachers training on the use of collaborative digital tools that allow students to show not just what they know, but what they can construct with that knowledge.

Partnerships: We strongly believe that the success of our school system and schools depends on our ability to cultivate the shared commitment of community stakeholders. We strongly emphasize the need to proactively establish partnerships with parents that empower them to be effective advocates and partners in their children's education. As all DoDEA schools are located on military installations and central to our military communities, we place similar emphasis on the value and need for our schools to establish close military-community connections. Through community partnerships, our schools are able to leverage community resources that serve to improve student educational opportunities and help address student social-emotional issues related to the military's transient lifestyle and parental deployments. We also

work closely with the Military Services to remain responsive to their constituents' educational concerns and force restructuring and infrastructure consolidation efforts. Lastly, we will continue to pursue high-value partnerships with public, non-profit, and other DoD components that are an integral part of our strategy for providing relevant instruction that actively engages students, especially in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Academic Support Systems: In addition to our educational system components, we will also ensure the alignment of two priority academic support systems — the DoDEA Accountability and Data Management Systems. The two systems work together to convert student performance data into meaningful information that clarifies what is impacting student achievement and why, so that appropriate action(s) can be taken by the appropriate organizational level(s).

Accountability System: Over the course of the next several years, we will strengthen our accountability system to focus the organization on achieving standards of excellence in the areas most important to becoming a high-performing school system. The accountability system framework will articulate ambitious (but achievable) performance expectations for our students, schools, and school system. The system will consist of a comprehensive set of school system performance indicators that: 1) provide evidence of student learning and whether students are on track to meet predictive benchmarks along the educational trajectory (e.g., reading proficiency at the end of the third grade); 2) identify students and schools in need of support; 3) establish a laser-like focus on the initiatives, programs, and systems most essential to improving student postsecondary readiness for all students, including students with disabilities and English

language learners; 4) provide evidence of improved workforce and system capacity; and 5) facilitate acknowledgment of exceptional individual and organizational achievement.

Data Management System: At the core of our school system's continuous improvement efforts is the need for valid, reliable, and timely student performance data that reflects each student's academic performance and progress by content area, grade, and standardized assessment. To ensure essential performance data is consistently available to the right system stakeholders in a meaningful way, especially teachers to facilitate timely instructional decisions, we plan to develop and implement a more comprehensive and responsive system-wide data management system. This system will serve as the "integrity linchpin" that reliably provides critical student performance data from our assessment system to our accountability system.

Culture of Accountability and Raised Expectations: An imperative for achieving excellence throughout our school system is an organizational culture of accountability and raised expectations for all students and their families. We recognize that to grow from good to great, every part of our school system must become more accountable for improving student and school performance. We must also establish a common belief that all students with appropriate services and supports are capable of achieving higher academic standards and that our higher expectations will positively influence student outcomes. Furthermore, for students to achieve their full academic potential, we understand that our school system must also meet higher expectations in not only ensuring equal access to a rigorous curriculum, but in achieving universal student accomplishment and academic success as well. An important first step in

“reculturing” our organization will be to develop the cultural competence of our workforce and to provide training that will enable the workforce to educate all children successfully.

Educational Facility Capital Investment Program: DoDEA’s Educational Facility Capital Investment Program coherently identifies and prioritizes the sustainment, restoration, modernization, and replacement of our school facilities worldwide. By 2021, DoD and DoDEA are committed to ensuring all DoDEA school facilities meet DoD’s acceptable condition standards and are accessible to persons with disabilities. The program includes centrally managed inspection, requirements determination, and prioritization processes that facilitate the inclusion of DoDEA’s facility capital investment requirements in the DoD Future Years Defense Program, which details DoD’s five-year (current year and following four years) program requirements. The DoD’s investment demonstrates its shared commitment with DoDEA to achieve and sustain quality DoD school facilities that provide safe and secure 21st century learning environments that are accessible to all of our students, staff, and their families.

In summary, the strategic reforms DoDEA plans to implement over the next five years are ambitious and complex. While we understand the challenges in implementing the reforms are real and should not be underestimated, we clearly understand our moral obligation to be resolute in their successful execution. The stakes are too high for our students and our Nation not to be successful in this endeavor.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I want to thank you and the members of this committee for the opportunity to provide an overview of DoDEA and our most important strategic reform

initiatives. It is our honor and privilege to contribute to the education of the children of our military families. The education of all of the children of our Nation's heroes must not be among the sacrifices our country asks of them. I look forward to your questions.