

## Meet LAUSD's New Superintendent

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On April 15, Los Angeles Unified School District Chief Deputy Superintendent John Deasy will officially take over the reigns of the school district from Supt. Ramon Cortines in the midst a period great transition and budgetary pain. Some of the challenges he will face in running this \$6 billion behemoth is a \$400 million shortfall in the next school year which has forced district to issue thousands of layoff notice, prompted by declining enrollment. Deasy is expected to hit the ground running. He recently requested that his approved salary of \$330,000 be reduced by 17 percent in nod to the tough economic times the district is facing.

Deasy joined the district in August 2010. His responsibilities included Deasy advising Cortines on educational and administrative issues, developing operational procedures for the district, and recommending review procedures for staff and special studies authorized by the Los Angeles Board of Education, as well as directing the assignments of school administrators.

Prior to prior to his employment with LAUSD, Deasy served as deputy director of education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; he served as superintendent of the Prince George's County in Maryland, Public Schools; and served as superintendent of the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District and of the Coventry Public Schools in Rhode Island.

Deasy spoke to Random Lengths News recently about his view and plans for the district. Here is what he had to say:

Random Lengths News: What policies or things would you like to do different than Ramon Cortines?

John Deasy: I'm building my team. I need to build a team that will take the work that we are planning on doing to continue the reforms in the district; to rapidly accelerate those reforms, have a very laser shot focus on several core pieces of work. We've got a set of core beliefs that will guide our work. We are going to start with students and families who are going to be our partners. Success is in the classroom, diversity is our strength and effective teaching and administration

are the keys to success. So, if you think about the kind of buckets that need the kind of deep attention, it is the continuing improvement of teaching and learning, so that we can assure every student that they are in front of a highly effective teacher in a school led by a highly effective principals.

There is great deal of focus on building the capacity of teaching, particularly in math and particularly in youth who have been chronically under-achieving in our language learner work. There will be a great deal of emphasis on the principalship as the center of this work. Principals not only coach the improvement of instruction and support that they also determine who is in schools. And there is a great deal of emphasis in terms of our theory of improvement on the principalship. I will be working hard to make the central administration a much leaner, much more agile organization that is service oriented, not so much compliance driven, one that proposes to provide as many resources as possible to sites so that we can have a system of great schools.

RLN: What would you like to continue that Cortines has already been doing?

JD: One is really continuing to build strong current engagement. Ray has done a very fine job of that and has laid very fertile and successful ground for me to be able to continue that.

Another has been Ray's skill – and this is probably going to be the most consuming issue in front of me at the beginning – of managing the state's chronic failure to fund its schools and our budget deficit.

Another is to build on Ray's strength at building good cohesive teamwork with the board of education.

I can't think of something I would reverse course on. You are asking me what I would like to build on. I mean, certainly the reforms of public school of choice, strengthening our charter relationships around not just having charters but having high quality charters, so that we are handle schools that are no performing and celebrate schools that are.

RLN: With regard to your support of pay-for-performance, are you taking into consideration socio-economic and family as factors that contribute to the dysfunction of education?

JD: I'm a believer that there should be differentiated compensation for differentiated results. And, I also believe that that has to be a collaborate process with labor. You don't shove things down people's throat and expect it to work. You build the relationship side by side and hope that both sides can make that work well. People hold strong opinions about that and for me, what I infer from your question is, "So, would that be fair when some teachers and schools and principals are working with populations that are highly impacted and others that are less impacted?"

RLN: Well, I am asking about considering socio-economic factors dealing with communities where poverty, hunger and lack of parental guidance are prevalent.

JD: Two things about that. One is that poverty is indeterminate. We know that very clearly inside of LA, where we have schools where the overwhelming majority of youth are used to living in circumstances of poverty, are ones who are achieving at extraordinary levels. I can give you 99th Street, I can give you Maywood, there are number of examples of that. But it's much more important that these be looked at as improvement over time, not just the test score snapshot. So, if we could where schools are rapidly improving. Even though they maybe currently low performing, they are improving on factor rates on other schools. That, merits an important conversation about what is happening at those schools and how do we compensate people for that.

RLN: How do you plan to work with unions?

JD: By having the conversations with all of the individuals, building a relationship with labor and the membership, by agreeing that there is no surprises, by being honest with each other, by finding places where we can have conversations

about any topic, realizing what we will make our best case and at the end of the day, the art of compromise is far more powerful than the art of war. What I am trying to say is that there is far more power in compromise on both sides on an issue, than there is on just holding out on a position. So, I think that will go well.

RLN: Tell me about your plans with regards to the committee on African American education?

JD: I'm looking at my white board in my office and it's one of the most important data point that I'll be held accountable for and that is I'm looking forward to actively engaging with the committee for very crisp, honest, deliverables that we will be held accountable for putting into place. I am trusting that this is not a committee to have a conversation about what the obvious is, that is, students who are African American are not doing as well as other students. I think it is what are we going to do about it and how are we going to do it.

The committee has just started and they are getting going, so I'm really looking forward to joining them.

It's been a pernicious problem in the system that it is high time that we bring the best minds in the community and the school system around to really change the trajectory for our youth.

RLN: Tell me about the parent engagement committee Cortines formed.

JD: I'm going home this weekend with the first set of drafts of recommendations. One of the things that I'll obviously be responsible is how do we consistently and persistently implement the ones they choose to be able to work on them as a team? There is a lot of work to be done. At this point, this is really about administration being held accountable for implementation and I welcome that.

RLN: What is your take on bilingual education?

JD: We are just launching our team to re-write our ELL master plan. We've made progress, not nearly the amount we need to make and I believe we will write a spectacular master plan. And the thing that will matter is not how great it is but how well we implement it. And there will be a great deal of attention to the implementation of that master plan.

RLN: What aspects can you tell me about that master plan?

JD: It's just being started to be re-written. Lot of it deals with not only our approach to instruction, our approach to supplemental support for students, our approach for identification, how quickly we are able to reclassify students, the materials we will use and the training to teachers and parents. That is all part of the master plan. While I think we've written good plans in past, I think we have a lot of room to grow in how well we've implemented those plans. The only data that matters at the end of the day is to the achievement and we've got a lot of room to grow there. So, it's critically important.

RLN: What is your take on value-added evaluations?

JD: We've worked very hard at creating a formula that is very responsive and responsible, and we in April will be producing an academic growth over time score for each school. It's a different formula than the L.A. Times used. It's going to be produced having a school wide form for every school on the system. We will blow that out and produce it and we will begin to on a school report card starting in April and help people understand it's uses, limitations and to make sure that people aren't going to misuse it. But like any data point that looks how student do over time, it shouldn't be the only thing, but should also not be ignored. And, it's finding a balance and appropriate approach to doing this.

RLN: There is a growing chorus that is saying teachers and teachers unions are the biggest part of the problem facing today's schools. Do you agree or is there a clarification of that answer?

JD: I do not agree that teachers and teacher unions are the biggest part of the problem facing today's schools. I feel that our biggest challenge is that we are not all aligned to focus on meeting the needs of each child. We all have room for improvement from the boardroom to the classroom. However, I do agree with the research that states a teacher has the most significant impact on a child's education. In LA we are using multiple measures to identify our most effective teachers so that we can celebrate and learn from them in addition our most effective teachers so that we can celebrate and learn from them. In addition we are going to provide additional support for teachers who are struggling.

RLN: In the documentary films "Who is Accountable?" now Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education Russlynn Ali, said that the federal government's Title I program sends billions of dollars a year to districts to ensure that students from low-income families get extra services and support.

Title I presumes that there are equal educational opportunities for all students before federal funds are applied and that the federal money provides "extras" for students growing up in poverty. However, schools that have the most low-income children get the most federal Title I money, but Education Trust-West 2006 research, of which Ali was then executive director, found that they also get the least in teacher talent.

They noted that high-poverty schools are more likely to have inexperienced teachers and under-qualified teachers; and that these teachers are paid less than veteran and fully credentialed teachers, who are concentrated in more affluent schools. Consequently, school districts spend less money in Title I schools and other high-poverty schools than in other schools, even after the addition of Title I funds.

The Education Trust study suggests that this occurrence is no accident but matter of benign intent where school districts, LAUSD included, have been taking advantage of a massive loophole allowing them to ignore disparities in teacher qualifications across different schools, and the resulting disparities in teacher salaries.

The law demands "comparability" in the educational opportunities provided in Title I schools and non-Title I schools. But this loophole lets states and districts off the hook for ensuring genuine comparability. The result is a phenomenon that directs millions of dollars away from high-poverty schools to subsidize higher teacher salaries in schools with fewer children in poverty. Do you agree or disagree with the conclusions of that study? Please elaborate.

JD: I do feel that the Title I comparability loophole needs to be corrected, but it should not be a "gotcha." I do not agree that most school districts have intentionally used the loophole. Step one should be for all districts to budget on actual expenditures so that we can clearly see any inequities. The federal government should then thoughtfully phase in any adjustments to the allocation formula in order to resolve the inequities without causing chaos in our schools.

I feel that the bigger challenge we must address is the complexity of our nation's current budgeting system. We need to fix this system if we are going to achieve true transparency, equity and accountability. Dollars should follow the child based on each student's need. Finally, we need to hold schools/districts accountable for the result on the inputs. We must move from a culture of compliance to a culture of performance.

Currently, we are working with American Institutes of Research (AIR) and Pivot Learning Partners to pilot a per student budgeting model in Los Angeles. We believe that this model can address the concerns I have highlighted above.

RLN: Tell me about your foundation.

JD: We are looking forward to launching what we are going to call the L.A. Fund for Public Education and we want to create an endowed fund where donors gift, high wealth individuals or corporate philanthropy, can provide gifts in an interest-based environment. So, if I'm really interested in accelerating reform, or charter schools or I want to support the

arts, we create funds to be able to do that and obviously your gifts give for perpetuity. We want to do it on an endowed basis.

I am looking forward to choosing and bring together a group of folks and a leader who will launch this work for us and rapidly bring the community together around investment. It won't be based in the LAUSD. We need it to be a separate entity, which makes the investment and holds us accountable for the results of those investments.

It would be designed to impact only students of LAUSD.

A number of people I've spoken to are not so keen on just providing dollars to LAUSD. They want to be able to provide them to a separate entity, governed independently, monitored independently, whose goal is to invest in LAUSD. And I happen to think that is the right way to do it. In other words, I'm not fundraising for people just to give us money.

I'm hoping to launch in the next two months, maybe sooner.