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Brewer's report card is in

Problems plagued LAUSD chief during his first year

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Article Last Updated: 11/11/2007 12:38:29 AM PST

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At the one-year mark as superintendent of Los Angeles Unified, David Brewer III has had a rocky initiation into city and union politics as well as the massive bureaucracy at the nation's second-largest school district.

He has grappled with glitches in a \$95 million electronic payroll system that created a teachers union uproar as thousands of employees'

pay was affected for more than nine months.

He was hit with pay raises for teachers and administrators, and new health care benefits for some workers that forced him to cut \$300 million from his budget over three years.

While he announced early on that he would push to get rid of ineffective teachers and institute a merit-pay system, he has backed off that approach and now is focused on professional development.

And he was only able to roll out his own reform proposals after 11 months, including a plan to create a separate district of 44 of the lowest-performing schools and personalized learning environments at all of LAUSD's 92 middle schools.

But now, even some of those reform plans look to be in jeopardy amid fierce opposition from teachers union leadership that has said it will block his attempts to move forward with the proposals.

Education observers give Brewer credit for his charisma and personality, but they have doubts about his ability to stand at the district's helm - especially since he has not yet been able to assemble a senior management team.

"Clearly, he's got to go beyond the inspirational to the managerial, and that, so far, seems like it's been a rocky transition. It's not something he can put off much longer or he will have serious problems," said

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Raphael Sonenshein, a political science professor at California State University, Fullerton.

"Once the managerial issues are under control, then people will hear your reform ideas because they'll believe they'll get implemented. Time is not unlimited for this kind of job. You don't have a career to turn these things around - you have a relatively short time."

Still, Brewer is upbeat and touts successes including lobbying efforts in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., forging a partnership with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and trimming \$95 million and 523 positions from the budget.

He promises to roll out his high-priority schools transformation district in the year ahead, along with expanded safety agreements and innovation division partnerships, including one with the mayor.

And he promises to roll out boys' academies, boarding schools and neighborhood parent literacy centers, and to bring Boys & Girls Club centers onto more campuses.

In a recent interview with the Daily News, Brewer talked about his tenure at the LAUSD and plans for the future. Here are excerpts:

Question: What do you consider your biggest accomplishment this year?

Answer: "Healing the wounds after (Assembly Bill) 1381 (the mayor's unsuccessful legislation that would have given him a

significant role in the district). I wanted to find out what the morale of the organization was, so what I've done is built partnerships with the mayor, political leaders who have not historically had good relationships with the district like Laura Chick, Sen. (Gloria) Romero, worked with businesses and communities.

"But more importantly, I've identified who (is) our political constituency ... the parents, the teachers and the students. So I have created the office of civic and parent engagement, so I have institutionalized this soon-to-be-formal relationship with the community and parents."

Q: Some people believe the teachers union has derailed your agenda. Do you agree with that?

A: "No, I don't agree with that. ... As far as my working relationship with the unions, historically union and management have had relationships that are built around tension. However, I am beginning to move the unions towards one focus - and that is focus on the mission of student achievement."

Q: Do you think you would have gotten more done had you not had to deal with teacher raises and health-care benefits issues?

A: "No, I don't think that I would have gotten much more done. I will be very frank: The (payroll problems) clearly have taken away some of my focus, but as any leader understands, you are going to be confronted with something unexpected in any job."

Q: What steps have you taken to increase accountability, cut down bureaucracy and empower local district superintendents?

A: "We created our office of strategic planning and systemwide accountability. ... That office will help us develop the strategic plans that you will see presented to the board in November. That office also is building one of the best accountability systems that you will see in any school district. ... We will be visiting schools and working with schools in developing that accountability system.

"But we will also be working through our deputy for professional learning, development and leadership to train people on how to hold themselves accountable and to improve student achievement.

"We are basically creating a matrix organization inside of LAUSD. That simply means that we are going to network people across the organization as opposed to in silos."

Q: You had said you would meet quarterly with the 27 mayors. Is that happening?

A: "That's still happening. In fact, we're establishing a formal committee, LAUSD Cities Committee, wherein we will have formal relationships with the mayors and city officials."

Q: One thing you were particularly passionate about when you started - you talked about social ills, poverty, the number of foster-care kids. Where do those efforts stand?

A: "We have signed three formal safety collaboratives - one with LAPD, one with the Sheriff's Department and the other one is Gardena.

"From the intervention perspective, we are putting a Boys & Girls Club on Markham Middle School in South Central. ... So within the context of trying to stabilize - especially that middle school population, and eventually the high school population - we have initiatives.

"And we're also working with the YMCA. We're going to put a YMCA on University High School's campus. And we will be putting those kinds of resources on more campuses during my tenure."

Q: What have you done on instruction?

A: "We have finished the middle school reform plan, that's No. 1. Then the system of accountability is No. 2. No. 3 is that we have established teacher-collaborative learning teams at 80 schools. So that is really critical right there that we have put in a learning teams program.

"It all goes back to what I said, that the professional development of our teachers has been a serious deficit in LAUSD, and so in order to make sure that our teachers were better prepared, we signed a contract with Achievement Solutions to facilitate learning teams for our teachers."

Q: How much time will you need to show change?



A: "Two to three years."

Q: So basically at the end of your four-year contract?

A: "It's really based on what the research and data shows. It will take two to three years before you begin to see any major improvement in a school system. ... LAUSD is like a battleship: When you put the rudder over, you don't necessarily get any movement initially."

Q: How do you respond to criticism that you are working with board President Monica Garcia and Vice President Yolie Flores Aguilar - and, by extension, the mayor - and their agendas are overtaking yours?

A: "I don't agree with that. Every two weeks I meet with each board member. They come in here for a personal session with me. If you look back at my State of the Schools address, and you look at the eight resolutions that follow (proposed by Monica Garcia), link those eight resolutions to my address. You will find that my address set the tone for those eight resolutions."

"We call ourselves a board of eight, and, again, that is how I lead. I lead through collaboration and partnering."

Q: Some people also are saying (your) plans lack substance ... and are not thought-out.

A: "The people who are criticizing don't understand how change is implemented. There is an eight-step process to change. What they'

re seeing is basically the first two or three steps to change. ... The plans will be put together over the next year. ...

"The Partnership of Los Angeles Schools first has to go out, develop the partnerships with the two families of schools that they're going to choose to work with, and then over the next year they put together the plans for the 2008-09 school year. ... Strategic does not mean fully baked plans. That means you have an overarching strategy."

"Over the next year, we will develop at the tactical level the plans for each school. ... That will take at least between now and September. Those plans will be very, very specific, so to my critics, I think they'll have to agree with that once they see them."

Q: Do you think not having a solid team in place . .. has detracted from what you are trying to do?

A: "I will clearly admit that it was frustrating that I could not find the right person at that time, but I've also learned over time that I could fill those gaps with very talented people and still get the job done."

Q: Are you surprised by all this criticism?

A: "No. Criticism comes with the job. ... Coming into this job as superintendent, I fully anticipated that I would be criticized. But I'm strong enough to know that I have to stay on course, and I have to follow that North Star that I have established in order to make sure that we