**Donald J. Jolly II, Superintendent**

**Warrensville Heights City School District**

**Interested Party Testimony**

**HB 21**

**Senate Education Committee**

**May 23, 2018**

**Introduction**

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee. My name is Donald J. Jolly II and I serve as the Superintendent of Warrensville Heights City School District. I come before you today to present testimony on the progress our schools have made towards improving academic performance and to request a temporary moratorium on creating additional Academic Distress Commissions (“ADCs”). The moratorium is necessary to afford the General Assembly sufficient time to access the impact of the Lorain and Youngstown ADCs upon their respective communities, debate the policy implications therein, and propose changes to current law, while temporarily delaying any additional ADCs from being established.

**Warrensville Heights Improvement Plan:**

Since my appointment as the Superintendent of the Warrensville Heights School District in June 2015, the district has made significant and meaningful strides to improve academic achievement. The implementation of our strategies has resulted in increased Ohio State Testing scores and current Kindergarten and 3rd grade achieving at or above the national norm on NWEA MAP testing.

Additionally we have:

1. Reorganized and replaced the entire central office team.
2. Added curriculum and instruction personnel.
3. Hired a Data and Assessment Coordinator to analyze state and internal data and to assist teachers to use the data to improve instruction performance.
4. Replaced all principals in district buildings.
5. Mandated instructional use of research based reading, phonetic awareness and vocabulary strategies.
6. Mandated a full inclusion model throughout the district.
7. Adopted new Ohio Standards based curriculum for ELA, Science, Math and Social Studies.
8. Reconfigured grade levels for building populations.
9. Developed and implemented a scope and sequence for all subjects that are now aligned to the Ohio Learning Standards.
10. Developed and implemented common bi-weekly and quarterly assessments.
11. Promoted the use of extensive professional development opportunities focusing on unpacking the standards, literacy and differentiated instruction.
12. Developed local partnerships to enhance the educational programs.
13. Expanded the pre-school opportunities and obtained a four star “Step up the Quality” rating.
14. Replaced 48% of teaching staff.
15. Secured local funding to build a new Elementary-Pre-K-5 facility, which will be operational by July 2020.

**Three Years of Consistent Improvement**

Our 2017 state assessment data indicates consistent progress. Some highlights include:

1. In Reading, grades 3, 4, 5 and 7, scholars increased by more than 10%. WHCSD improved in 62.5% or 5/8 of all ELA tests.
2. In Math, grades 3, 4, 5 and 8, scholars increased by more than 10%.

WHCSD improved in 75% or 6/8 of all Math tests.

1. In Science, grades 6 and 8, scholars increased by more than 10%. WHCSD improved in 66% or 2/3 of all Science tests.
2. Grade 4 Social Studies and grade 11 Government increased by more than 10%. WHCSD improved in 50% or 2/4 of all Social Studies tests.
3. WHCSD's Performance Index, the calculation of the district's overall performance improved from 52.8 to 59. An increase of 6.2 points. Eastwood Elementary improved 12.7 points and the High School improved by 3 points.
4. The K-3 Literacy measure improved from an F to C. An increase of 25.3%. Our K-2 Facility (John Dewey) earned an overall grade of B.
5. The Graduation Rate improved from 65.2 to 76.9 - an 11.7% increase.
6. The Gap Closing increased from .7% to 36.2%, an increase of 35.5%.
7. AP participation increased by 10.6% and Dual Enrollment increased by 7.9%.

10) In the Progress Measure, WHCSD improved in 75% or 12/16 of tested areas.

1. District Overall

* Lowest 20% improved from F to C
* Students with disabilities improved from F to C

1. High School - Overall grade improved from F to C
   * + - Lowest 20% improved from F to C
       - Students with disabilities from F to C
2. Middle School - overall grade improved from B to A
   * Lowest 20% improved from C to A
   * Students with disabilities from F to D

**Current K-3 Data Indicates Solid Foundational Improvement**

The investment in K-3 teachers and staff has resulted in significant gains in the academic performance of young scholars. We have set a solid foundation that will improve scholar achievement in the district for the future.

However, in spite of all the changes and improved performance, we are still in jeopardy of being subject to an ADC in the fall of this year.

**District Impediments Under Existing Academic Performance Model**

The State of Ohio has had three different testing formats, for three consecutive years, which resulted in significant drops in school grades throughout the state. A Plain Dealer article written on September 16, 2016 entitled “School district grades plummet across state as Ohio raises the bar on state report card” had the following table:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Testing Timeline & Letter Grade Distributions** | | | | | | |
|  |  | **Number of Districts Earning Each Letter Grade** | | | | |
| **Year** | **Test Administered** | **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **F** |
| 15'-16' | Ohio State Test | 2 | 85 | 289 | 225 | 7 |
| 14'-15' | PARCC | 6 | 176 | 343 | 84 | 0 |
| 13'-14' | Ohio Achievement Test &  Ohio Graduation Test | 37 | 434 | 115 | 24 | 0 |

The drop in assessment scores were compounded by the change in the testing format. The drop in scoring was also impacted by the transition from paper to electronic testing. This transition has not been without flaws and during the “Fall 17,” the extended response answers had to be rescored due to an error by the vendor. The rescore accounted for an average increase of 15 points for the scholars in our district.

The three-year value added measure is problematic due to the documented drop in scoring throughout the state. During the three years of transition, there was a documented decrease in scoring throughout the state. In the 2014/2015 school year, we earned a positive **11.68** in value added which resulted in an A grade. During the 2015/2016 transition year, we dropped to a negative **-10.92.** This past year we earned a **-4.17,** an increase of **6.75,** which would have resulted in an A if not combined with the 15/16 school year data. In two out of three years, our scholars have made more significant progress than expected. We are improving the academic performance of our scholars and closing the achievement gap. As we anticipate the release of the 2017/2018 scores, we will still be saddled down with the 15/16 scores which will equate to 1/3 of the total score.

For both the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years, the gap closing component measure was unfair to district’s that had a predominantly minority population. The state measures the total population by each sub-group. Our district has disproportionally high African American, Special Education, and Economically Disadvantaged student populations. Under the current rules, a district can reach its designated target for each population sub-category and still not reach the passing rate that is designated by the state for the district. This phenomenon is the result of the “All Students” goal, which was created on the premise that all districts have a diverse population, and was designed to ensure minority students were receiving adequate help. However, it has the inverse effect in districts where minorities are the majority of the student population.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Graduation Rate** | | | |
|  | **State Interim Target** | **District Score** | **+/-** |
| Economic-Disadvantaged | 72.8% | 79.7% | **+6.9%** |
| Students with Disabilities | 70.7% | 84.8% | **+14.1%** |
| African American | 66.8% | 78.3% | **+11.5%** |
| All Students | 84.% | 76.9% | -7.1% |

**Suggested Considerations**

**Gifted / Learning Disabled Weightings**

We have identified several performance indicators that are more problematic for school districts like ours. If recognition was given to these factors, our performance evaluations would more accurately reflect the complex challenges that we face. For example:

A sliding or weighted scale to reflect the ratio of gifted students vs. learning disabled students when compared to the state average.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percent of Gifted and SWDs in SY 16** | | | |
|  | **State** | **District** | **+/-** |
| Gifted Scholars | 14.5% | 0.2% | -14.3% |
| Students With a Disability (SWD) | 14.8 | 23% | +8.2% |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percent of Gifted and SWDs in SY 17** | | | |
|  | **State** | **District** | **+/-** |
| Gifted Scholars | 15% | 1.8% | -13.2% |
| Students With a Disability (SWD) | 14.6% | 24% | +9.4% |

Our district has a disproportionally low number of gifted students, and high number of students with learning disabilities relative to other similarly-sized districts in Ohio. A more accurate measurement would utilize a weighted adjustment. A district with more gifted students will perform higher on most academic measures.

**Transient students**

We are a high transient district with an average transient rate over the past five years of 24%. While our transient percent has gone down by 3.8% over the past five years, our high mobility can cause significant challenges as well.

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| --- | --- |
| **District Mobility Percentages** | |
| **School Year** | **Percent** |
| 2017 | 21% |
| 2016 | 23.9% |
| 2015 | 24.4% |
| 2014 | 26% |
| 2013 | 24.8% |

The chart below displays our current 6th grade class and the years they have consecutively been within our district. 27% of our current 6th graders have been with us since Kindergarten or Pre-K and over a quarter of our 6th graders are new to the district this year. This holds true in our other cohorts as well.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Current 6th Grade Cohort** | | | |
| **Grade Entered** | **Consecutive # of years in district** | **# of scholars** | **Percent** |
| 6th | 1 | 44 | 27% |
| 5th | 2 | 28 | 17% |
| 4th | 3 | 24 | 15% |
| 3rd | 4 | 8 | 5% |
| 2nd | 5 | 4 | 3% |
| 1st | 6 | 11 | 7% |
| K | 7 | 28 | 17% |
| PK | 8 | 11 | 7% |
| PK for 2 Years | 9 | 4 | 3% |

Even when looking at our graduation cohort the scholars that stay with us have a higher percentage of meeting the graduation requirements and graduating on time. We need to have a discussion about the impact of transient students, and whether a district should be held accountable for new student achievement. Our district has an abnormally high number of scholars who enter the district late in their academic careers. Our graduation rates are significantly higher for students who have been under our instruction for at least three years. We recommend that only students who have been enrolled in the district the two previous years, (three successive) should be counted for purposes of measuring academic achievement.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Graduation Rate for Class of 2017** | | |
|  | **Total Number in 2017 Graduation Cohort** | **Percent**  **Graduated** |
| **K-12 Cohort** | 19 | 94% |
| **Overall 4 Year Graduation Rate** | 125 | 80.3% |

**Mid-Size Urban Districts Collaboration**

Mid-Size Urban Districts is a collaboration of twelve mid-size urban districts that share similar demographics and issues. Mid-sized urban school district leaders embrace the need to transform. We believe in providing innovative and creative strategies to address educational challenges in Ohio. The Mid-Sized Urban Districts Leadership collaborative is volunteering to contribute to the on-going review of the management tools and consequences for failing to meet performance standards contained in HB 70. We have recommendations for specific changes that will help us to meet the needs of all students in Ohio. While we are not requesting the elimination of HB 70, we are requesting an appropriate and immediate modification. We are requesting that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction convene a joint-committee of ODE staff and leadership of the Ohio Mid-Sized Urban Districts Leadership Collaborative and create a template for the creation of a peer-to-peer model. We believe that the peer-to-peer design can be ready for implementation for the 2018-2019 school year.

**Conclusion**

These are all important items to consider as a part of a broader conversation regarding academic performance in our schools. The consideration of each of these concerns may require more time than is available during the current General Assembly. As such, we are requesting that no new schools be subjected to ADCs until the Legislature has had adequate time to address these important issues. The proposed amendment is a simple, short-term and temporary moratorium. Thank you for your consideration.