5/29/19

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I thank you for the time made available to voice my reflections on the impact that HB70 has had on the community of Youngstown and the children the school district serves.  I come before you with over 19 years of experience in Urban education and a track record of success for repairing and transforming schools and school systems that are failing students.  I am a traditional educator raised in a proud union home by 2 parents who were public educators. I began my career in the city of Chicago, where I taught Kindergarten within the inner-city.  In my earliest of years, I learned the impact that a teacher can have on at-risk students. I went on to serve as an Assistant Principal before being asked to lead the lowest performing school in the Pilsen Neighborhood on the Southside of Chicago.  It was there that I learned the power and ability that a principal has to positively impact generations of families, not just the students served. After 5 years, the school was outperforming all schools in the area, including the Regional Gifted Center.  After 6 years as a principal I was asked directly by the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools to join a select group of educators tasked with reinvesting and transforming the most challenged schools across the entire city, in some of the most dangerous areas of Chicago.  I was quickly promoted twice within that year and found myself leading one the largest school transformation efforts in the history of Public Education wihtin our country. I was directly responsible for over 25,000 students in 36 schools while serving as the Chief of Schools and Executive Cabinet Member for the Chicago Public Schools.  After 3 years, not a single school was left in the lowest tier of schools in Chicago, and today these schools continue to find success. From this experience, I learned how to lead a large system of schools through Transformation.

In June 2016, I accepted the offer to lead the Youngstown City Schools, Ohio’s 1st District to function under the governance of HB70.  At the time, I did not realize just how contentious this newly minted law was, or the fierce opposition that did not want to see the changes occur that were needed to unlock the children of Youngstown from the shackles of failure, placed on them by dysfunctional adults seeking to hold tight to the status quo.  The failures to appropriately educate children were entrenched in the city schools. Upon my arrival, I learned of the illegal and unethical practices taking place and affecting our students receiving individualized educational services. These actions by the adults affecting our students receiving special education services, governed by the Youngstown Board of Education and Superintendent were so egregious that a Corrective Action Plan was put in place by the State of Ohio’s Department of Education.  The local Board of Education, nor the Local Union took the needed steps to the legally educate our children as required by state and federal laws. What transpired during the 28 months it took to successfully fix all areas of the Corrective Action plan was grievances by the union on matters that are inherently management rights, and criticism by the Board of Education.

On that very same day that I was informed by the State of the Corrective Action Plan, I was also informed that all school busses were being grounded and all driver certificates were being voided.  This was due to the Districts inability to properly care for the busses that transport thousands of children daily, and train the Drivers as required by the state. In fixing the transportation department we faced similar disdain by the elected school board and grievances by the Union.  Today our Transportation department is regarded as a highly successful unit, with the Director of Transportation receiving the state award in 2018, and being featured in national transportation magazines on two separate occasions.

Within in my first week on the job I met with the local NAACP leadership and I was informed by the Local NAACP that they were filing 9 Civil Rights Violations based on decisions made by the school district while under the governance of the Local School Board.  In reviewing the facts and data surrounding each of these cases, and conferring with legal representation, it was clear that the District was in violation of Civil Rights and we acted quickly to remediate all issues raised by the NAACP. One glaring issue not raised by the NAACP, which I believed to be a Civil Rights Violation was the extremely high number of Out of School Suspensions being handed out to our students.  In one year, the Youngstown City Schools doled out over 13,000 days of out of school suspensions. This rate of suspensions is over ten times the average for school Districts in Ohio. We immediately replaced the punitive Student Code of Conduct which was developed in 1987, with a new Code of Conduct embedded in Restorative Practices and Justice. We developed this code collaboratively with the Union as a partner, while listening to the voices of teachers, parents, and students.  In our first year, we saw a 55% reduction of Out-of-School Suspensions and a 33% decrease of In-School Suspensions.

I have been criticized severely by the Local Board of Education in regards to spending.  However, the abuses and negligent in finances did not occur under my administration. This is a School Board who seems to believe that it is ok to operate a district fraught with inequities.  They show this belief not in their words, but rather in their spending priorities. They believed that our children did not need well maintained busses driven by highly trained drivers, they believed it was ok for our children to attend schools that were not properly cleaned or maintained, they believed it was ok for some rather than all students to receive second language instruction, they believed it was ok for some, rather than all students to receive band and orchestra.  They did not see the value in providing our scholars with sports opportunities at each school. They did not believe it was appropriate to pay our teachers a competitive rate. They allowed our scholars at Youngstown Early College to be crammed into a 6,000 sqft space while central office administrators worked in lavish accommodations and space just a few blocks away. They found it prudent to offer our Pre-School only 4 -half day sessions per week rather than 5 full days of Pre-K.   I spent the second year of my tenure in Youngstown fixing these and other atrocities placed on our children by this body that is asking for control to be returned to them. Yes, I am proud of the spend I did in year 2, because it restored for the children of Youngstown, the school day and the school system they deserve, the school day and the school system that this legislative body expects when providing school funding to school districts. The cost to fix the failures of the previous governing body was over $10 million dollars.  And despite the herculean efforts to bring back equity to our City Schools, the 5-Year Forecast is much healthier now than when I took over control of the School District. In October 2016, the 5-Year Forecast showed their $23-million dollar surplus diminishing to just an $8.3 million dollar surplus in 2021. The latest 5-Year forecast submitted in October of 2019 shows a that by 2021, the District will have a $20-million dollar surplus. The claims of reckless spending by a “Drunken Sailor” as Board Member Jackie Adair often compares me to, or that of a “Dictator”, as Board Member Dario Hunter has been quoted as calling my leadership are unwarranted and untrue.  For the first time in a long time, the Budget of this District matches a Strategic Plan which has rebuilt and transformed the Youngstown City Schools.

Those opposed to our work will point to the K-3 Literacy score falling from a B to a D.  This change in scores is due to an assessment change that better matches where our scholars currently are.  We switched the assessment that informs this score so that we receive better data in order for our teachers to help our children.  What is the point of a B on a K-3 Literacy score if you use an assessment that does not provide teachers the information they need to help build a child’s literacy-skills.  Further what does it say about the K-3 Literacy Score when the same year you receive a B on it, is the same year that state assessment data shows that nearly 75% of 3rd grade students are reading below grade level.  We received a D in this metric, but literacy rates continue to rise each year. I place my priorities on increasing the amount of students reading at grade level, not on a report card metric that can be manipulated based on a choice of assessments.

We have had more successes than failures over the past 3 years.  Through extensive professional development and support for both teachers and principals we have been able to realize unmatched improvements.   Most notably has been our ability to close the Achievement Gap as indicated by the Gap Closing Measure on the ODE Report Card. Last year we increased our score from 3.3% to 42.3%.  This represents a 39% increase overall, but still and F on the Report Card measure. Those looking to vilify our work and claim it is not working will make the claim that we are still an F.  But let's break down the achievements realized in this measure and you can determine for yourself if you believe that our academic efforts are failing:

* Reduced African American Achievement Gap in Reading from 54.6% to 4%.   Led all Urban Districts in African American Reading Gap Closing (18th overall out of 608 Districts)
* Reduced Hispanic Achievement Gap in Reading from 50.5% to 9%.   Led all Urban Districts in Hispanic Reading Gap Closing (15th overall out of 608 Districts)
* Reduced ESL Achievement Gap in Reading from 57.6% to 11%.
* Reduced Students with Disabilities Achievement Gap in Reading from 64.7% to 7%.
* Reduced African American Achievement Gap in Math from 48.3% to 18%.
* Reduced Hispanic Achievement Gap in Math from 39.3% to 18%.
* Reduced ESL Achievement Gap in Math from 45.5% to 20%.
* Reduced Students with Disabilities Achievement Gap in Math from 55.3% to 12%.

In addition to this we have seen an 11.1% increase in graduation rates in ust 2 years.  Last year 100% of seniors from Youngstown Early College graduated, and 91% of those graduates received an Associate’s Degree from Youngstown State University.  This year nearly all graduates from all 3 High Schools received an academic-based scholarship; only 3 students did not receive such scholarships. Freshman on Track has risen from 61% to 93% at East High School, and from 87% to 94% at Chaney High School. Over 55% of students District-Wide met their Growth Targets as measured by the NWEA Assessment.  The HS GPA has increased from 2.26 in SY15-16 to 2.68 in SY 17-18. The results of the Average Test Percentile per grade over the past 2 years as measured by NWEA are as follows:

* 2nd Grade Reading showed an 81.9% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 2nd Grade Math showed a 63.7% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 3rd Grade Reading showed an 23.3% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 3rd Grade Math showed a 4.1% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 4th Grade Reading showed a -11.8 growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 4th Grade Math showed a -22.0% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 5th Grade Reading showed a 33.4% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 5th Grade Math showed a 26.7% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 6th Grade Reading showed a 21.7% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 6th Grade Math showed a 16.3% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 7th Grade Reading showed an 12.8% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 7th Grade Math showed a 22.2% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 8th Grade Reading showed a 21.9% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 8th Grade Math showed a 14.3% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 9th Grade Reading showed a 26.4% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 9th Grade Math showed a 39.0% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 10th Grade Reading showed a 32.0% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 10th Grade Math showed a 69.3% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 11th Grade Reading showed a 9.8% growth in Average Test Percentiles
* 11th Grade Math showed a 43.5% growth in Average Test Percentiles

The Recovery of Youngstown has begun and I point directly at the legislation that allowed for the ADC model as a main reason for the success.  Our teachers are highly skilled and hardworking, and that has not changed due to the legislation. Under my leadership there has been a massive increase in professional development and support for teachers, and additional learning opportunities for students through after school programming.  Students benefit from additional wrap around services as well as 2 ½ hours of after school offerings 5 days per week. This new governance structure has breathed new life into the Youngstown City Schools and our children are the main benefactors.

Sadly, I have chosen not to seek another contract in Youngstown.  This decision was not mine alone. I could no longer function in a position where I feared for my own safety every night as I laid my head on the pillow.  Having bricks thrown through my windows on 4 separate occasions, my car windows smashed two different times, and multiple death threats to my phone. Having my character assassinated by Board members, Union Leaders, and state lawmakers despite the incredible gains made by our teachers and students has led me to this decision.  The vote by the House of Representatives to repeal the ADC structure is disheartening. My hope is the members of this Senate can have the same courage of those that came before them, which created the school governance structure that led to the success realized over the past 3 years in Youngstown. Reverting back to local school governance in Youngstown at this time, places the shackles of failure on our children yet again, the same shackles that my team and I worked so very hard to remove.

Respectfully,

Krish Mohip

Outgoing CEO

Youngstown City Schools