 David Hardy, Lorain City Schools

It was clear then and it is even more clear to me now, that we need your belief in what is in the best interest of the common good.  The fact that you identified education as the way forward for communities that have suffered far too long is not lost on me nor are the many silenced voices that commend you for the foresight to make this the priority.   I thank you for leading the charge with the political will and the common good for all that led many of you to make education the priority that promises our state a bright future.  There is no doubt that your instincts in 2015 with the Passing of HB 70 was right.  Again I thank you.

At the same time, if the notion is that justice will not be served in the current construction of the law, I would agree that we all live in a world of constant improvement. The level of opposition to progress is relentless and the willingness by those who see local control as a means to oppress communities dominated by black and brown children is real.  The viability of corruption is at a height that resembles the challenges seen in some of the most troubling situations our world has to endure. Thinly veiled threats, whispers of oppression, and attention seeking adults who are emotionally high jacked to testify against the very necessary change they refuse to see is present today and will be present tomorrow.   At the same time our voiceless children and marginalized adults rely on others to speak their truth all while being exploited daily by lies and deceit-filled empty promises.

  So, no we cannot proceed as we are.

  A way forward must see that the failures of the past will not change if we don't think differently, and lead differently in the future.

The days of leaving high school and walking into a Ford plant are over; finding a job is no longer an easy task.  We can no longer do the same thing and expect different results. We no longer are competing for jobs against our neighbor, we are competing against other countries. Yet, we are fighting the very innovation and foresight our legislation passed a few years ago that would liberate unwilling and stubborn towns that use their grit to resist change rather than embracing it. If we don't act now to uphold the very laws that created the momentum for change that will make us economically and socially competitive.

However our local politics are nothing more than a veneer of public interest for personal gain.  In communities like Lorain, local control means control that is unaccounted for and the maintenance of more of the same; maintaining financial benefit on the backs of children of color, staining the very democracy that has put them in place with the stench of systemic racial inequities that continue to perpetuate the separation of the haves and have nots.

Some have asked why I have not spoken to the School Board?  Why have not attended their board meetings?

The answer is simple; I refuse to be a part of corruption.

 The calls for a lack of communication where no more than a call for control from a small group of individuals that lacked the transparency that landed our community in academic distress in the first place.

However, if the notion is that communication between the ADC, CEO, and local school board is essential, there would be no disagreement from me. I believe and support the notion that strong collaboration is needed at the local level for sustained progress to be made.  This happens in communities where servant leadership is present and the people that are served believe in the power of democracy.  In the absence of this, you have cities like Lorain.  Less than 5 percent of the city's population voted the top council at large vote getter into office. I have more scholars in our high school than voted for anyone newly elected city council member. So communicating with the board, for this reason, is not the problem.   The problem is our elected officials do not have the voice that lives the reality of our community.   Lorain is likely no different than other regions that are deprived of industry and a seat at the table.  We have a voting base that has been beaten, disenfranchised, misguided, and systemically deprived of prosperity and therefore, no longer votes for its elected officials.   In a city where a Mayor steps down two days down after winning the primary to take a job with a company he provided a contract to while elevating a close friend from the school board to a runoff for his seat as mayor that will be elected by 41 people in a city of 60,000--I too would be disenfranchised with the mockery of democracy that is taken place--I too would want change.

Through monthly community and business meetings, town halls, and endless one on one meetings on weekends, I chose to speak with the people rather than the politics because they wanted to know what we were doing for kids.

They wanted to know what we are doing for 6th graders who have been passed along without the ability to read but labeled as a behavior problem; third graders who received less than five points across the entire grade on the writing components of the state test; hundreds of kids who were exploited because they can dribble a ball better than open a book; and ultimately for people—young and old--in Lorain and across this state that are marginalized because they are a name without a title, a home without a job, or a skin color without a privilege.

 It is only right that your legislation is needed to make our promise just and our intentions aligned with our country's pursuit of happiness.  The happiness that our children and our children's children will again see if we don't put their lives ahead of adult interests.  The happiness that should be cherished for its innocence instead of its financial benefit.  Happiness that that will set our children free.

Freedom we are beginning to see.

There is a path forward to continue the great progress, the path toward freedom, that is just beginning to take shape and we need your continued courage and fortitude to do right by our most marginalized citizens.  The progress that has seen a 54% increase in the number of young people graduating with an Associate's Degree from high school; the progress that has produced over 200 scholars who earned an industry credential, 100 of which graduated this to enter the real world ready; and just a week ago, we topped over 465 graduates from Lorain City Schools for the first time in over ten years.  The progress you, the citizens of Lorain, and the State of Ohio wanted is here.

This is the progress we have been waiting for; progress that can be supported by a committed group of individuals who lead an advisory board that has clearly outlined metrics that lead to real outcomes for kids while relieving the tension of district reform to individual school transformation that ultimately improves a district. A committee comprised of individuals whose only stake in the district's success is the success of its children and are evaluated on the ability to uphold this sacred duty. A committee that provides a quarterly report to its locally elected officials for the officials to communicate to its constituents and returning with outcome-based and solution-oriented questions that foster a common focus centered around the common good.

This is all possible if we take the time to do it, rather than to succumb to the pressures of a persistent few.

So I respectfully leave you a question—which is more important, fighting for the education of our state's future or accommodating the political pressures of the status quo that dominate our past?

I am thankful for the answer to that question rests in your hands.  I will remain hopeful that your answer will be an easy one.  Put our kids first.  Thank you.