

Lorain Testimony | Mark Ballard | May 29, 2019

INTRODUCTION

- Senator Lehner, we appreciate that you are working so hard to prevent HB70 from impacting Dayton, a community I'm sure you love as well as represent. However, please understand how much damage the past two laws have already caused in mine.
- In 2015, our legislators adopted HB70 because they determined the previous law wasn't appropriate - and this move established new criteria by which districts would be placed in academic distress.
- If you'll recall, when HB70 was introduced the state delayed its consequences for every school district in Ohio - except for Youngstown and Lorain.
- And here's the rub - based on the criteria outlined in HB70, I believe that if we had been given the same three-year leeway that all others received, we would not be crowding your meeting today.
- Let me explain.
- Before HB70, Lorain had already acknowledged we needed to expect more from our schools.
- As a result, our community elected new board members and those board members worked in close partnership with our ADC to hire a superintendent with a successful track record as a change agent.

- We also recognized the need for community support. So, we created a Community Business School partnership that grew to 500 partners in less than six months - bringing wraparound services into our schools - and our community felt, for the first time in a long time, that we were on the right track.
- In fact, we finally saw an end to our annual loss of an average of 220 students per year. Families began bringing their children back into the district because we were earning their trust.
- Together, the district and the ADC created an Academic Recovery Plan that was working. Dr. Michael White, an assessment expert for ODE, wrote,

“The Lorain City School District should be held up as a “light house district” – and their road map to academic recovery broadly shared with the field.”

- And now, based on what we’ve been told, legislators are again secretly developing a law that tells districts to develop a plan that includes **exactly what the Lorain City Schools had before the state appointed a CEO**, if they want to recapture local control.
- So with that history, forgive me for not having faith in what comes next for Lorain.
- The difference with this year’s version of HB70 is that in order to regain local control, our board would have to develop a new plan in “collaboration” with our CEO.
- Pick up any newspaper and you’ll see why this approach gives us pause. Our CEO refuses to attend our board meetings. He directs

us to submit public records requests for even the most basic information about our district. In fact, from day 1, our CEO told board members that if we wanted to know what was going on in our schools, then we could visit the district website.

- Let me summarize that, because we feel it is very important for you to understand what you're asking:

A new law is being crafted, in secret, AGAIN - because you admit the last two laws were ineffective - all while Lorain is dealing with the negative consequences of those bills.

Now, if this new bill is approved, we will be required to collaborate with our CEO, even though he doesn't believe in collaboration and refuses to meet with us.

And our end goal is to create a plan that is exactly...the... same...as what we already had in place before you gave us a CEO?

- *The latest insult to the people of Lorain came when the state superintendent stated that HB70 doesn't work and that districts should have more local control.*
- *With this in mind we waited with great interest to see who his appointment would be to chair our ADC. And much to our lack of surprise, he appointed someone who lives in: **Columbus**.*
- *Now he too continues the pattern we're used to by now: excluding our locally-appointed ADC members in communications about this important work, all while routinely getting in Twitter wars with our parents and elected officials.*

- *We deserve better.*
- Our State Superintendent doesn't seem to think so. He has not even been in Lorain in the two years since our CEO, his "Chief for Change" colleague, began his destruction of our district.
- Shockingly, he even blames our CEO's lack of success - on us. Please remember - we knew we needed a change. We took aggressive steps for improvement with the ODE, ADC, and a strong superintendent in the past. We were seeing results. But when we were handed a CEO who ostracizes our community leaders, fires building union reps without explanation, lies to the media, and refuses to move to the city he represents "for the safety of his children" - he cannot give us the courtesy of admitting this particular CEO is supremely unsuited to this task.
- Instead, he states in his March Review and Recommendations on ADC's that we "champion the status quo and criticize any change" and that we are the ones who created an "unstable environment that makes it nearly impossible to build trust among those trying to bring about change and impede the productive collaboration necessary to drive district improvement."

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- Please remember this: If the state of Ohio thinks it can continue to experiment with it's poor children because our communities are somehow too disengaged to fight for them, you are very mistaken.

- We are the International City. And fighting for the right to have the same opportunities as middle class white people is something we have been doing all of our lives.