

Dear Committee Members,

This written testimony is tendered in support of keeping HB70, the reform that has changed the governance structure in the Youngstown City Schools that I have been able to witness first hand in many roles. Currently the Chief of Core Curriculum in the district, I previously served as an Elementary Principal in the district for many years, as well as the Supervisor of Gifted/Talented and Externally Funded Programs. I was considered a turn-around Principal as I was able to take a school that had no gains in student achievement for 7 years and lead the staff through a series of reforms that gave Youngstown its first school designated with an "Effective" rating on the state report card. Reading scores had improved so dramatically that Governor Taft launched his entire OhioReads project from the stage in our auditorium at Paul C. Bunn Elementary School. As Principal, I got to introduce him which was a career high for me. The work that gleaned those results was solely building-led through OhioReads grants of \$30,000 per year that helped build our literacy program. The gains in student achievement took 2-3 years and were not realized anywhere else in the district. Because of that data, CEO Krish Mohip asked me to come back to the district to coach new Principals and struggling teachers, and then last year, when he created a department of Core Curriculum, he asked me to lead it. The work we do now is so different as it is district-wide and systemic with accountability checks and feedback all along the continuum --- feedback that oftentimes was met initially with resistance and confusion, despite it being so necessary in the pursuit of progress, the pursuit of excellence.

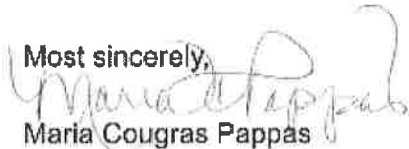
The most obvious shift that the community at large has exhibited has been the focus from a Board of Education that owns the power in the district --- a split Board that has often argued publicly among themselves --- to a community of parents and students who have largely become empowered and more engaged than I have ever seen. We have gone from having only 1 parent show up for a parent meeting to filling cafeterias, auditoriums and stadiums now. The return of athletic programs and Krish's investment in parent and community programs and partnerships has been amazing. Designing programs, measuring outcomes and letting the data lead us has become the focus of our work. Prior to that, much of our work was generated by assignments that came from our school board that may not have necessarily been relevant to our work as leaders, did not serve students, and had some other motive. I am sure that Dr. Ben McGee, former Superintendent and current ADC member can confirm this. We have shifted from being reactionary, from crisis intervention, to planning for instruction. There is a greater focus on instruction than I have ever witnessed. Proof of this alone can be found in the ODE Status Reports as we now have curriculum artifacts that we have never had before --- a Scope and Sequence for each content area that is aligned to the ODE Blueprint, K-12 Curriculum Maps in Reading and Mathematics, Interim, quarterly Assessments that measure growth, District-wide Professional Development for all staff, and program evaluations that inform our purchasing decisions. I would have been thrilled to have the comprehensive after-school and summer programs that we have now when I was a Principal here.

I know that others are sharing our data dashboards with you so allow me to also address the aspect of transformational leadership. No one likes change, but change is always necessary in order to glean better results. I am asking this committee to reflect on the fact that, largely, the loudest voices of resistance in our district have been from the people whose governance structures have changed, who have lost their power --- unions and school board members. Happy parents and community members and students who have benefitted from our transformation will not speak up until it is too late. Happy people never complain. They do not provide Senate testimony. I have been a member of this school district since 1989, save a few years that I served as a Superintendent in Pennsylvania. I am convinced that our school community overwhelmingly feels that we are on the right path. I implore you to use this filter as you listen to testimony from Youngstown.

Most recently I have had the opportunity to interact with our new CEO Justin Jennings. I truly believe that under his leadership that we will continue the progress and pray that you allow us the opportunity to continue this very important work in the cause of service to building the capacity of our dedicated staff and in the cause of service to Youngstown's children.

Please feel free to call upon me if I may be of further service.

Most sincerely,


Maria Cougras Pappas

330 301 8700