**Dr. Charles Keenan, Superintendent**

**Maple Heights City Schools**

**Senate Education Committee**

**May 23,2018**

Chairman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify before your committee. My name is Dr. Charles Keenan and I have served as the Superintendent of the Maple Heights City School District for the past 14 years. I come before you today to provide testimony on the work going on in our district to raise student achievement and to request a moratorium on creating additional Academic Distress Commissions.

Maple Heights is a district with a 95% African American student demographic and 100% of our students receive free lunch. When I arrived in the district nearly a decade and a half ago, the state report card rating for Maple Heights at that time was “Academic Emergency,” had never been rated higher than “Academic Watch,” in the history of the district and the district had just come off of nine week long strike. The following year our district was rated as “Continuous Improvement” and we never fell below that status while ODE used this rating system. In fact, the district continued to show a solid standing each of those next 8 years as evidenced by our “Effective” rating just one year prior to the state changing to a different report card rating system. Since that time, the rating system has continued to change each year, but we have continued to stay focused on strengths and work to improve areas of weakness based on this data.

In September of this past school year our state report card data indicated that we would be in the first year of a three year process that would lead to an academic distress committee. We were formally notified of this in February by the Ohio Department of Education, and a district review by ODE followed shortly thereafter. We are awaiting the final report of that review which will help give us guidance on areas where we can improve, and fully intend on using this feedback to make our district even better, but I want to assure you that we have been working every year to find ways to provide a better education for our students.

Nearly a decade and a half ago, our top ten students of the graduating class were all career technical students who were not going to college. Since that time, our top students not only are all going on to college, they are attending Ivy League Schools, Military Academies, Historical Black Colleges and Universities, very selective Private Colleges and Esteemed Public Universities such as the University of Virginia and Stanford University. This progression of success has occurred because we have created a culture of high expectations for our students in our schools.

These raised expectations do not just apply to our top students, as evidenced by our increase in graduation rate over the past three years. While our reported graduation rate was at 73% four years ago, we were over 80% this past year and believe we will be near 90% when this school year ends. And while this data indicates a higher expectation, it does not truly depict the actual work that our staff does to inspire our students as they progress through our school system. Based on last year’s data, seniors who had spent 6 or more years in our district had a graduation rate of 92%; high levels of transiency in our impoverished district mislead the public about that strong graduation rate. Only 62% of the students who move into Maple Heights in their last two years of school graduate, almost all of these students came to our district credit deficient, and they pull down the state reported graduation rate of our district.

Instead of making excuses about how this is an unfair representation of our district work, we came up with strategies to address issues. That’s why we added a quarter million dollar support system to not only help accelerate these upper class students who come to us credit deficient, but also to work with them to create semi-annually reviewed plans for career and educational goals.

We do this in all areas where we see deficiencies; when we see data indicating our students are not prepared to read when they come to school, we seek out and get implemented programs such as SPARK, Imagination Libraries and even added a full day pre-school program at our K-1 building. Again, where others may complain because school districts are not responsible for learning before kindergarten, we seek out solutions and resources to support the issues that impact our data and our students.

We look forward to the feedback from ODE following our district review and intend on meeting with our full administrative team in June to assess what strategies we can implement to improve ourselves based on that report. We have also strengthened our ability to make improvements by collaborating with a group of mid-sized urban school districts in Ohio to provide even greater detail into areas where we might improve and to see best practices that work in districts with similar demographics.

Lastly, the assessment that our students take has been changed three times in the last four years. Changing the format, testing method, and goals puts undue stress on both our students and our teachers by “moving the goal posts”. Additionally, the lack of certainty and continuity in testing has made it difficult for our districts to put sufficient plans in place to improve our standing.

In closing, I am requesting that no new schools be subjected to Academic Distress Commissions until the legislature has had time to address these important issues. The proposed amendment of a two year moratorium would allow this to occur and would also allow districts like ours to identify and implement strategies to show growth in students achievement in our districts. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to you and I would welcome the opportunity to address any questions you might have.