**Senate Education Committee**

**Regarding Academic Stress Commission**

**Interested Party Testimony**

**May 29, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Terhar and members of the Senate Education Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify about House Bill 70 and the Academic Stress Commission. I am Rev William Harris, President of the Dayton Board of Education. I have served in that role for the past two years and I also am pastor of Believers Christian Church, which serves families within the Dayton Public Schools attendance areas.

As Dr Lolli indicated, the mandate of this legislation is of immense interest to Dayton Public Schools and to the entire Dayton community. We believe that for our community and for our students the state takeover of our schools would be disastrous.

We believe that Dayton should not be the fourth community to be subject to the ADC experiment. We are strategically acting to improve our schools. We are taking the steps, under Dr Lolli’s leadership and with community support, to strengthen our schools. We know what has to be done, and as the policymaking body for the Dayton schools, the school board is acting to implement the right programs and interventions for our students.

As Dr Lolli indicated, we have already undertaken a *root cause analysis* during this current academic year and we have developed a detailed Transformation Plan for the school district. We believe that our actions, especially if further supported by the state of Ohio, have the potential to truly transform our underperforming schools.

BUT let me remind you that although we have some failing schools, we also have a significant number of schools that are successful or on the right trajectory for success. Our goal is to significantly strengthen our failing schools while not compromising the Dayton schools ( for example, Stivers School for the Performing Arts ) that are demonstrating success in a complex urban context..

As Dr Lolli shared, bringing about high achievement requires a painstaking commitment to excellence and a deep understanding of local conditions. Expecting outsiders to understand the reasons why some of our schools are failing is an impossible and unrealistic task and has the potential for compromising so much of the good that is real or emergent in the school district.

We are proud of so many things occurring in Dayton, even as we know that changes still must occur if the needs of all our students are to be met. The majority of the 25 Dayton schools that will be open next fall are making positive progress and we are committed to doing what it takes to sustain their efforts just as we take the steps to transform what is happening in our failing schools. That important work is occurring.

Specifically:

* We are reconstituting the teaching and administrative staffs at many of our schools
* We are closing low-performing elementary schools that also have low enrollments.
* We are offering teachers financial bonuses when their students show significant value-added improvement.
* We are providing teachers with intensive additional training in high-impact instruction, AND what would really help us would be for the state to provide the needed resources required to ensure that our teachers are implementing those high-impact practices with fidelity. That process requires a level of observation and feedback that goes well beyond what a principal can provide.
* We are engaged in a public awareness campaign to help parents understand that students must be at school every day and on time to ensure their classroom success.

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The school board and Dr Lolli will gladly share our Transformation Plan with you. Our success is predicated on that plan being implemented with fidelity. That will require more resources, with the potential technical assistance of outside providers who possess levels of expertise that we simply cannot access currently with the human capital that is available within and to the Dayton Public Schools.

Ohio has a long tradition of local control of its school districts. The families and taxpayers of Dayton want to have authority over their own institutions and over the leaders who profoundly affect their children. If permitted to implement that Transformation Plan that we have developed this past year, I have no doubts that our community and the state will see the kind of growth and success that we all want and that our students need.

Dayton’s families empowered this school board through their votes to do what is necessary to transform our schools. We expect to be held accountable and are taking the steps necessary to the success of the Dayton Public Schools.

The school board and all those within the Dayton Public Schools ( and that includes our teachers, school building administrators and all those who serve our students) are absolutely committed to meaningful and positive change.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts. As you can see, I believe strongly in the leadership team that we now have in place. I am asking that instead of using the ADC as a hammer to punish Dayton’s schools, you use it as a lever to foster the changes that truly will be organic and transformational. We want and need for the state to partner with us in the transition to excellence.