Good afternoon,

My name is Justin Jennings and I am the incoming chief executive officer of the Youngstown City School District. I would like first to apologize for not being in person today. But school reform is dear to my heart and helps drive my passion for educating our youths.

While I haven’t officially started my CEO duties yet, I have educated myself about the district both before and since the creation of the academic distress commission that appoints the CEO.

To put it bluntly, our district scholars were not being well served under the old model of a locally-elected school board and a superintendent. For many years, student test scores were some of the lowest in the state and class after class was sent out into the world ill-prepared to handle it let alone succeed in it.

Under the new model, that’s beginning to change. Data shows the tide is turning. The changes aren’t dramatic yet, but with scholars meeting their growth targets, narrowing achievement gaps and graduating at a higher rate prepared for the future, we have also improved our Career Technical Education offerings and graduates, things certainly are headed in the right direction.

I plan to keep that progress going and to build upon it. Please don’t disrupt that. Returning to the old way of doing business wouldn’t serve the children of the Youngstown City School District any better now than it did prior to 2015. In fact, it likely would be worse. We need continuity and the plans and academic infrastructure built by my predecessor need time to work.

School transformation doesn’t happen quickly, but it is happening. In order to enact change you need 3 years to see growth and 5 years to see the process working. Any disruption in that would be disastrous for our young people. Those scholars, those young people and what’s best for them should be at the heart of everything we do and every decision we make.

The Youngstown City Schools have undergone a lot of change and that makes many people uncomfortable. Putting the correct people and curriculum in place is essential and it takes the courage of the CEO along with stakeholders to make sure we do what is right for our scholars. But going back to the old way of doing things because some adults are uncomfortable would only hurt our scholars.

Let’s work together -- really work together -- to do what’s best for our children. That’s the least of what they deserve.

Justin M. Jennings

Incoming CEO

Youngstown City Schools