

To all:

I write to you today with tremendous concern and personal disappointment. Most of you have been following the controversy concerning me and our district for over a year now. I continue to believe that our district has taken many positive steps over the last five years that have been largely ignored in favor of inflammatory rhetoric and political posturing. I have been maligned and attacked repeatedly, both personally and professionally, and that continues. Abraham Lincoln once said, "If you look for the bad in people expecting to find it, you surely will." Meanwhile our positive moves continue to be ignored. Most of you do not know me very well as in a large district it is hard to get to know each other as well as we would like. I hope by reading below you will gain an understanding of me, my professional background and the great things we are doing together in this district. These things are larger than any one of us and need to continue into the future.

Nearly twenty-nine years ago I entered the profession of teaching in a small district in southern Ohio. I taught mathematics and general science for the next thirteen years and enjoyed a successful teaching career and spent countless hours coaching young people in various sports. My message to my young athletes was always about playing to win with intensity, integrity and honor and to never give up, sort of the "go hard or go home" approach you've heard from many coaches.

In 1990, I decided to pursue my Masters degree in educational administration without any true desire to become a principal or administrator of any kind; but in Ohio you needed a Masters degree to get tenured as a teacher. In 1992, after receiving my Masters degree, I was persuaded by my graduate professors to continue my education and eventually became certified as a high school principal, assistant superintendent and then superintendent. In 1994, once I obtained my high school principal's certificate, I was approached by a city school district superintendent who I had tutored through our school finance class and he encouraged me to pursue a position as a Unit Principal in Huber Hts., Ohio. He passed away shortly after I took that position, but his support and his genuine caring for children and younger educators became his legacy to me. He saw something in me that I did not know was there. He once told me that he thought I was destined to be a school administrator and he took it upon himself to drag me into the next level of my career as an educator.

I spent ten years as a principal in schools that most people thought were not salvageable. The first one, Wayne High School, became the first high school to ever win recognition as a Brad Tillson School of Excellence in my second year as head principal. The Tillson award was sponsored by the Dayton Daily News and named after its former publisher. My second high school, Zanesville High School, was meeting 5 out of 17 academic state standards when I became principal in 1999. When I left in 2002, Zanesville High School was meeting 13 out of 17 standards. I left Zanesville when I received a telephone call from a superintendent in New Hampshire whom I had never met. He was looking for a high school principal to take over leadership of Dover High School following a very bad second semester of administrative turnover, student and staff rebellion and public outcry. He had been told by a colleague in New Hampshire that I was interested in relocating to

the East Coast and that I was gaining a reputation as a change agent who could turn around poor situations. Within two weeks, I was on my way to New Hampshire. Two years later, Dover High School was the runner-up for New Hampshire High School of the Year and in the third year (my first year in Schenectady) Dover High School actually was named the New Hampshire High School of the Year.

I made the decision to come to Schenectady as Assistant Superintendent for Operations because it gave me an opportunity to gain experience at the central office level and advance my career while using what I had learned as a teacher and a principal to help a District in Need of Improvement for English Language Arts student achievement levels. I then became superintendent in January, 2006, at a time when none of the three middle schools had made Adequate Yearly Progress and nor had the high school. Together, we have made many changes since then in our district. To name a few:

- We now have a comprehensive professional development plan and Professional Development Center devoted to addressing five core areas of: Differentiated Instruction, Literacy, Classroom Management, Cultural Understanding, and Data Analysis.
- We now have a K-12 Balanced Literacy Plan to ensure consistent literacy instruction and expectations across the district and across all content areas.
- We have embarked on a district-wide curriculum mapping project that spans all subject areas and grade levels to ensure the written and taught curricula match and meet state standards.
- We have fully implemented the District's 2005 Strategic Plan and have now completed and adopted and are beginning to implement the second generation District Strategic Plan focused on improving student achievement.
- We have Restructured our middle school program and implemented such innovative strategies as vertical teaming to address curriculum and instruction.
- We have developed a Restructuring Plan for Schenectady High School that addresses the primary concerns of freshman success rate and student attendance.
- We have developed the District's first Contract for Excellence and.....
 - Reduced Class Size particularly at MS level
 - Created Extended Day Program w/Busing
 - Created Instructional Coaching Program
 - Negotiated Longer School Day
 - Created two Early Childhood Education Centers
 - Increased Math and ELA support staff in secondary schools
 - Created the technology-based Alternative Education Program
 - Created the Credit Recovery Program at SHS
- Changed the District School Configuration
 - Moved to a ECE, K-6, K-8, 7-8, 9-12 Configuration in four years
- We have experienced the closure of one large failing charter school and are about to undergo that transition again.

- We have seen our student population increase by 8.6% over the last five years.
- We have opened four new buildings in the last three years.
- We have seen five consecutive kindergarten classes of over 830 students.
- In the area of Facilities, we have:
 - Finished a \$30.5 million capital improvement project
 - Passed a \$48.2 million capital improvement project
 - Replaced or replacing all boiler systems and roof systems
 - Completed building condition surveys of all buildings
 - Saved over \$3 million in energy usage over the last five years using the Energy Management, Inc. guidelines
 - Completed Additions at King and Paige schools
 - Completed Addition at SHS
 - Renovated Fulton, Blodgett, FDR and Keane
 - Remodeled Central Park school....will complete this summer

- In the area of community and family partnerships, we have:
 - Created the Parent Liaison position and developed a district PTO Council
 - Created a partnership with Ellis Medical and opened our Family Welcome Center at the Ellis Medical Home
 - Formed the Bigelow Corners Strategic Partnership with SCSD, SCAP, Parson's and Child Care Council
 - Welcomed the city's Hispanic Outreach Office into our Washington Irving Education Center
 - Seen and expansion of our Adult and Continuing Education Program
 - Become a partner in an Alternative Energy Study with NYSERDA and Brown Transportation
 - Formed many other strategic alliances that make our school district an integral part of the community.

- In the area of School Safety and Security and Discipline, we have:
 - Created a position of Chief of Security for the district.
 - Created a School Safety Officer program to replace the four city police officers the City of Schenectady removed from the schools.
 - Created the Discipline Data Management Committee (DDMC) to monitor district discipline data for trends and potential inequity and bias in discipline.
 - See a Reduction in Disciplinary Incidents as the chart below describes....attributable PBIS, security and safety plans, staff initiatives in buildings, Incident Reduction Plan at SHS, etc.
 - Developed and implemented the Academic Transitions for Learning and Success (ATLAS) Program with counseling for those students who are suspended long term.

Discipline Statistics (total disciplines)

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010 to date
Elementary Schools	8,291	8,519	8,101	7,239 12.7% Reduction	4,120
Middle Schools	7,304	7,059	4,978	5,283 27.7% Reduction	3,289
High School	16,391	13,549	11,936 27.2% Reduction	15,334 6.4% Reduction	10,051

- We have created Leadership Teams for our buildings and department and made attempts to extend the role of leadership in our district to include all employees and community members. We have used such strategies as.....
 - Having staff present as part of our Professional Development Program
 - Created Literacy Coaches to advance the level of literacy instruction in our district
 - Created Instructional Coaches in elementary schools to help our teachers implement strategies driven by our PD program such as differentiating instruction and teaching literacy across the content areas
 - Expanded the Dean position to help further reduce major discipline issues and address attendance concerns in our buildings
 - Developed a District Strategic Plan with involvement from all constituent groups
 - Heavily involved highly qualified teacher in the development of and adoption of our District Literacy Plan
 - Expanded our Mentoring and Peer Coaching approach to embedded staff development
 - Engaged in Curriculum Mapping and Curriculum Development

So what are the results of all of these efforts? The charts below certainly demonstrate the positive effect we have had on student achievement in our district.

- For the first time ever, the district has made Adequate Yearly Progress in both Mathematics and English Language Arts for the Elementary and Middle School Levels.
- Mont Pleasant and Central Park Middle Schools both made Adequate Yearly Progress in both ELA and Mathematics for all sub-groups for the first time and Oneida Middle School made AYP in Mathematics for all sub-groups and in English Language Arts in all sub-groups except special education. This is by far the best performance for our middle schools ever.
- The high school performance on Regents and Graduation Rate continue to be major stumbling blocks to getting our district out of its status as a District in Need of Improvement.

Progress in Grade 3-8 ELA
(% at or above proficiency)

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
All Students	40%	42%	47%	62%
Asian or Pacific Islander	44%	45%	53%	68%
Black or African American	32%	34%	40%	56%
Hispanic or Latino	30%	31%	37%	54%
White	48%	52%	56%	62%

Progress in Grade 3-8 Math

(% at or above proficiency)

	2005-2006 Baseline	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
All Students	46%	49%	59%	75%
Asian or Pacific Islander	55%	57%	70%	86%
Black or African American	36%	38%	50%	65%
Hispanic or Latino	37%	40%	48%	64%
White	54%	60%	67%	79%

Professionally, I will always believe that our approach to school district improvement centered on high levels of learning for all children is the only approach that will work in the long run.

Personally, I believe that perfection was meant for only one Man and I can only hope to overcome my own failings and one day look back and say “I helped children.” While local critics will continue to attack and accuse, never forget that together the Schenectady City School District will continue to move forward for all children, not just a privileged few.

I leave you with this quote by Henry Ford: “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

Eric Ely