

**Evanston/Skokie School District 65****Board of Education Meeting – January 25, 2016*****Superintendent's Comments***

I would like to take this opportunity to respond respectfully to concerns raised at the December Board Meeting on how we, in District 65, are moving and how the community must move forward.

Tonight, we present the Achievement and Accountability Report. I remain committed to transparency around our data and our performance. The report is sobering in terms of overall performance, yet shows what we hope is a leveling of performance and a slight uptick after four consecutive years with decreases in performance.

In addition to the Achievement and Accountability Report, we also have a preliminary report on Black student achievement focused on questions raised by the NAACP and other community partners. This is a preliminary report and something we will continue to work on.

I think it is important to both present the data on Black students, yet also to do that within the context of the district and the state. We must also look at achievement gaps at large as many of our Hispanic and Latino students are struggling as well.

We are committed to having a dedicated Board meeting on April 25, 2016 where we will have a summit on Black and African American achievement – both what the data tells us, what we are doing, and can do to address concerns.

I see this all of this work through multiple lenses –

President Obama noted recently, when emphasizing his commitment to gun control, the sentiments of Dr. King when he stated that we have “an urgency of now.”

This is both a sprint (reflecting the urgency of now) and a marathon (where we must change over time to sustain progress).

Most importantly, I see this work through a personal lens and one that is reflected in my personal and professional commitments – that all of us who are educators want to make a difference in the lives of all students and their families, to serve every child, every day, whatever it takes.

This means that we must treat our children and their families as people first. Not just as a number or a data point or someone to whom we throw education jargon.

We must do our jobs as educators. We must do our jobs as residents of Evanston. We must do our job as citizens (to address education disparity, and disparities in housing, health care, and income).

We are acting in many ways to move forward to serve our children, our children of color, our Black children. Yet, we also have to be honest that we don't have the simple solution, the silver bullet, the instant improvement – if we did we would act on it.

However, we have the ability to recognize where we are and where we must go, together as educators, as neighbors, and as citizens. And, we recognize that we must continue to listen and learn so that we can work together on next steps.

Here is what we are doing and will do. Driven by our strategic plan, we are focused on literacy improvement, interventions for children with high needs, collaboration with ETHS, community agencies, and institutions. We must continue our commitment to social and emotional learning, embracing culturally relevant pedagogy, and expanding the diversity of our staff.

It is key to intervene early and at important transition points – entrance into kindergarten, grades 3, 5 and 8.

Overall, we are focusing on three key areas:

1. Interventions for struggling students
2. Improving district and school climate
3. Engaging community partners

I will start with my first point.

#### 1) Implementing interventions for struggling students

- We have identified all students at/below the 25th percentile in reading at each school. We will work directly with principals to set improvement goals for these students. By the end of the school year, we will have a viable intervention plan (RtI or IEP) for these children.
- We will also identify children between the 26<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> percentile for monitoring. I will, on each of my school visits, have the list of these kids who need help and will regularly ask principals about these children and successes they are having.
- We already regularly share with ETHS the list of students who are landing at the high school still in need of intervention. I commit to working on interventions within District 65 and to work with District

202 on joint efforts, as discussed in a joint board committee meeting last week .

- In the early grades, we will fine tune our interventions in kindergarten through second grade for all Black and African-American students who are below the benchmark on our DRA assessment so that each student has a viable intervention plan. We will do this for our Hispanic and Latino students as well. We will carefully monitor this progress and share this information at parent teacher conferences.
- Within District 65's early childhood programs and services, we are developing an Instructional Leadership Team in addition to intervention plans (RtI) for children. This work will be completed by the end of the school year. We will also highlight the need for a continuum of services, from ages birth through five years, and will learn from and leverage the Early Childhood Community Needs Assessment.
- We are currently working on culturally relevant teaching and will expand our work in this area. We have started with Dr. Adraal Davis from the Wisconsin Department of Education at Lincolnwood. We have also engaged colleagues from Chute, Willard, and Oakton in this work. We will draw from the lessons learned, in addition to work being done in the African Centered Curriculum program, and share these with our district community. We will develop a plan to expand culturally relevant curricula across the district by the end of the summer.

## 2) Improving district and school climate

- By the end of the summer, we will intentionally develop a diversity training program for all staff that will include a focus on race and racism. I have already reached out to a consultant to help on this effort.
- We are committed to expanding the diversity of our staff. By the end of the year, we will expand our outreach on recruiting and will reach out to Unity Scholars, Cherry Scholars, several sororities and fraternities, and colleagues in District 202. We will also look to enter into partnerships with local universities and potentially with historically black colleges and universities to proactively identify teacher and administrator candidates.
- We will ensure that our work on school climate and social and emotional learning is activated in every school by 2017. Every school

will have a school climate team that examines performance data, disciplinary data, and school climate. Climate teams will help facilitate data-driven conversations that address the needs of all students.

- We will continue our efforts to offer alternatives to suspension so that children do not miss school. To ensure continued progress, we will continue working with our principals to monitor suspensions and office discipline referrals.
- With regard to school and district climate, relationships matter. Creating an atmosphere where kids are happy at school matters. Responding to parents in a timely manner matters. Schools need to be safe places for all children. We will stress this and provide time for training and action planning during our spring and summer professional training for principals so that we continually echo our commitment to embracing and including all children.

### 3) Engaging partners in the community

- This spring, I will convene advisory committees on African-American and on Latino/Hispanic student achievement and will periodically bring the two together.
- Our Family and Community Engagement Coordinator is conducting six community conversations, to be completed by the end of February, to understand even more so community issues and concerns. Our Family and Community Engagement Coordinator will also be deployed regularly to community meetings to ensure direct lines of communication.
- By the end of the school year, we will convene a group of students of color (Black, African-American, Hispanic, and Latino) including fourth, fifth seventh, and eighth graders, and from ETHS to engage student voice on next steps.
- We will focus our work with community partners on literacy/reading and summer learning loss through the Whole Child Council Advisory Committee, the early childhood community, and our partnerships with ETHS and Cradle to Career. Working with our community partners, we will emphasize the importance of academic growth, social and emotional learning, and cultural identity and engagement. We will focus on engaging all children and develop even more strategies for community literacy and addressing summer learning loss with our partners.
- We are currently exploring our community schools efforts with our partners to determine how to best expand efforts at Chute to feeder pattern schools that link community services to community needs and to better engage our families.

In an address to employees at the start of the school year, I quoted from an African Proverb that states, "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together." We need to go fast, and yet we need to go far. We stand committed. We stand willing. And, we know that we must do this work together.