



Assembly Standing Committee on
Education
Public Hearing
Wednesday, October 14, 2015

Conference of Big 5 School Districts Testimony
Buffalo Public Schools

Presented by: Darren J. Brown, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources, Buffalo Public Schools

First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss Persistently Struggling, and struggling schools in relation to School Receivership.

Current Situation:

Buffalo Public Schools, the second largest school district in NY State enrolls approximately 34,000 students. We currently have 25 schools identified as struggling or persistently struggling. 5 persistently struggling and 20 struggling schools. Our new Superintendent Dr. Kriner Cash, with support of all stakeholders, is dedicated to the mission of all students succeeding, with added emphasis on sustainable change in our schools identified as persistently struggling and struggling.

Receivership:

Section 211-f of Education Law grants the district Superintendent "Receiver" powers once conditions are met of a conditionally approved plan, however, negotiations must take place with necessary unions in the district to alter collective bargaining agreements.

All of our schools – struggling and persistently struggling have completed all necessary requirements of receivership at this point – Community Engagement Team (CET) meetings, stakeholder and parent notification, submission of CET recommendations and updated plans – of the schools which we have receivership power for – to the State Education Department by the September 30th deadline.

We intend to take full advantage of the Receivership powers that are afforded our Superintendent. We are also mindful of the condensed time-frame, which makes some of these powers a non-reality for this first year of "Superintendent as Receiver." Although we realize the need for swift increases in student achievement, we also know the reality of school districts, relationships with unions and union leadership, and the need for parent/community involvement

and buy-in – all which require time for considerable change to take affect and planned sustainability.

Funding:

For our Persistently struggling schools, the additional funds that were made available will make a difference for the next two years. Our struggling schools – for which we have 20, require additional funding also to make the swift increase in student achievement a reality for those schools, students, parents and families.

As we all know the infusion of additional funding for our persistently struggling schools is not guaranteed after 2017. Turnaround strategies require time and continued funding to make a difference in these schools. While our district is looking to alter budgets and make financial changes, most large urban school districts have tight budgets that allow for very little room to move.

Negotiations:

Our district is currently in negotiations with our teacher’s and administrator’s union regarding changes to the collective bargaining agreement that would enhance our ability to bring a quality education to every child. Confusion around the timelines necessary for notice, and negotiation, have lengthened the amount of time it has taken to implement changes.

I would like to reiterate our sincere appreciation of the additional resources made available to persistently struggling schools and the receivership powers afforded our Superintendent as Receiver. We would like to ask for continued review for additional funding for our schools identified as struggling, along with continued funding for our persistently struggling schools, and an enhanced timeline that acknowledges the several challenges faced by districts across the state with implementation of this education law.