



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Testimony before Assembly Standing Committee on Education Chronically Struggling Schools and School Receivership

October 14, 2015

Presented by: Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, Deputy Superintendent

Distinguished members of the Assembly Standing Committee on Education, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers Public Schools regarding the topic of Chronically Struggling Schools and School Receivership.

I am Dr. Edwin Quezada, Deputy Superintendent for the Yonkers Public Schools. Today I represent the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Michael Yazurlo and the dedicated members of our Board of Education. Most importantly, I represent the 27,000 students who, on a daily basis, seek the American Dream that appears to be slipping further away from them.

For a moment, I'd like to invite everyone to forget about the demoralizing terms such as Chronically Struggling, Receivership, Priority Schools or Schools Under Registration Review. Instead, let us truly focus on meaningful outcomes that will, if implemented well, change our children, our schools, our teachers, our administrators, our families and our communities.

As legislators and educators, we are charged with the responsibility and moral imperative to provide a quality education to the children we serve. Let me give you some statistics about Yonkers' eight receivership schools. These schools enroll over 5,400 students or 20% of the total district enrollment. Seventy percent (70%) of these students are Hispanic, 22% are Black or African American, 21% are English Language Learners, 13% are Special Education Students and 79.5% live below the poverty line, they are considered economically disadvantaged. These are the children that must receive the benefits of meaningful academic outcomes thoughtfully developed by the people in this room. These children live in poverty and hope to receive an education so they can acquire the American Dream like some many here today.

What is the true meaning of receivership? These are complicated challenges. Is it the daily public relations nightmare as a result of the constant scrutiny? Is it insufficient funding that cripples districts trying to provide needed services to children? Is it the dilapidated physical plants that hinder learning? Quite frankly it is all of these. It is not the students who are failing to reach appropriate achievement levels rather it is the inability of adults who lack the courage to receive constructive input and take corrective action to empower our children to receive their education.

In Yonkers, we embrace the concept of Receivership. Why?

- It has created a sense of urgency necessary to the task at hand (Similar to a code black in the emergency room.).
- It has spurred research into schools that are beating the odds for students in traditionally underperforming demographic groups. (The concept of network improvement teams from hospitals.)
- It has advanced the use of data to analyze school performance.
- It has leveraged the power of communities and staff, through the Community Engagement Team Forums.
- It has focused all stakeholders on the need for educational equity and access in order for our children to receive the American Dream.

Unfortunately, there are roadblocks in the current receivership process that impede our mission to create schools where children and their families are valued, respected, and educated.

- It is difficult for a Superintendent to use receivership powers due to lack of funding for struggling schools and contractual agreements.
- The statute's short timelines for closing performance gaps are unreasonable.
- The required frenzy of special events for families does not necessarily result in meaningful engagement.
- The short timeline and paperwork do not allow for the depth of study that each school must embrace to develop meaningful change for chronic issues that have hindered student achievement.
- Yonkers growing enrollment forces us to place incoming students in Receivership Schools that are already overburdened and struggling.

These are significant concerns that I invite the committee to further explore. We are smart practitioners; we are research and data driven. Instead of adding negative pressures to schools facing real challenges, let us use research to create learning environments that will have the sustainability for students to receive quality instruction.

Doug Reeves introduced us to the 90/90/90 – High Performance in High Priority Schools Concepts. His research concluded that: a focus on academic achievement, clear curriculum choices, frequent assessment of student progress, multiple opportunities for improvement, emphasis on writing, and collaborative scoring of student work result in high performance for all students.

Is Receivership resulting in the implementation of these practices? The answer is NO. High performing schools are the outcome of administrators, teachers, parents and students working collaboratively to implement Dr. Reeves' recommendations. Schools will not truly succeed with the fear of a State takeover.

Again, we embrace the moral responsibility that all students MUST succeed. Through Receivership let us work with you to create the conditions where all students receive sustained quality instruction and the ability to attain the American Dream.

Thank you.