



COLUMBUS CITY SCHOOLS

President Gary L. Baker, II **Key Talking Points**

May 14, 2015

*Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission
(OCMC) Education, Public Institutions, &
Local Government Committee*

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and esteemed committee members. I am Gary Baker, President of the Columbus Board of Education. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input as the committee considers these important issues.

Columbus City Schools is a billion dollar political subdivision to which parents of this community entrust more than 50,000 of their children. The Columbus Board of Education is responsible for governing the district. Our three direct reports – the superintendent, treasurer, and internal auditor manage their respective parts of the district based upon mutually agreed upon goals. I have been a member of this Board for almost eight years and have had the privilege of serving as president since 2014. The Columbus Board of Education is focused on student achievement. We know that effective School Boards positively impact student achievement.

The Center for Public Education has identified eight characteristics of effective School Boards. They are as follows: 1. Effective School Boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision 2. Effective School Boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels 3. Effective School Boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve academic achievement 4. Effective School Boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals 5. Effective School Boards are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement 6. Effective School Boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals and see a responsibility to maintain high standards even in the midst of budget challenges 7. Effective School Boards lead as a unified team with the superintendent,

each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust 8. Effective School Boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.

The Board of Education is the instrument of the community, elected to provide and to guide the free public schools to which most parents entrust the education of their children. There is no better instrument for democracy. The similarities and differences among members of the Board reflect the similarities and differences among the citizens of the school district. The public schools belong to the community. The Board of Education is both the voice of the community speaking to the schools and the voice of the schools speaking to the community. The public schools are among the largest public enterprises in the City of Columbus, in the State of Ohio, and in the United States. The financing of the enterprise, the management of its income and expenses, and the operations of its buildings, buses, and food services are a massive business. That business requires the same kind of expertise as any other large business and many of the same techniques.

I have personally witnessed the dedication and hard work of hundreds of people who are focused on tackling everything they can control in order to ensure that our students receive the best possible education.

I would like to provide you with a quick overview of the demographic make-up of the students of Columbus City Schools.

AN OVERVIEW OF COLUMBUS CITY SCHOOLS (Demographic Data)

Columbus City Schools has slightly more than 51,000 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through twelfth. Our student demographics are represented as follows:

- African American – 58.09%
- Caucasian – 27.28%
- Hispanic – 6.79%
- Multi-racial – 5.35%
- Asian – 2.15%
- American Indian/Alaskan Native – .20%
- Pacific Islander – .04%

More than 83 percent of our students are considered economically disadvantaged, based on their household incomes. Nearly 12 percent of our students' first language is something other than English, with more than 90 languages spoken across the District.

Approximately 14 percent of our students have been identified as having a disability. Approximately one fifth of our students attend the same school that they began in at the beginning of the year.

Columbus City Schools is the state's largest school district with more than 51,000 students. The District covers approximately 127 square miles, and employs more than 8,000 staff members.

Finances:

General fund expenditures: More than \$773 million in General Fund expenditures. The breakdown in general revenue funds includes:

52.2% in real estate taxes, 37.1% in state funding, 8.1% Property Tax Allocation, and 2.8% in other revenue.

The other half billion of our combined budget is made up of grant funds, title funds, and capital funds.

More than 90,000 people serve on more than 13,000 Boards of Education across the country. 50,000,000 students attend public schools. The focus must be on student achievement.

We can cite improvements in every school and non-school worksite because they are well documented—with data behind which we now can be proud to stand. **We have made unprecedented gains in student achievement over the past year. One example:**

Third Grade Reading/OAA Test Results

- Improving third grade reading scores has been and will continue to be among our top priorities.
- While only 42.4 percent of students earned a score high enough for fourth grade promotion on the fall reading assessment, **88 percent of our third grade students** were promoted to fourth grade by the end of the summer.

- We implemented several initiatives in order to improve third grade reading achievement.
 - Literacy Collaborative Model in which teachers receive intensive training in a proven, researched-based literacy education model.
 - Reading Buddies program
 - Partnered with Columbus Metropolitan Libraries to redesign and expand the Reading Buddies program.
 - Hosted a Parent Literacy Academy to provide parents with tips to support their child’s reading efforts at home, with more than 500 people attending.
 - Had weekly broadcasts of our Parent Literacy Academy program.
 - The Books on the Bus initiative was received with great excitement.
 - Implemented an aggressive communications outreach campaign to provide updates to Third-grade parents regarding the status of their child’s progress.
 - Doubled the number of summer school sites and expanded the length of the summer school program.

- Behavior incidents have decreased as we’ve increased the variety of strategies utilized to address disruptive behavior
 - 2012-13; 76% reduction in tardiness & truancy
 - 2012-2013 36% reduction in suspensions due to tardiness & truancy
 - 70% reduction in disruptive behaviors

- CCS is developing partnerships with university and college programs in order to connect with pre-service teachers and dispelling myths about teaching in urban schools
- Increasing Professional Development opportunities to develop in-depth lesson plans for the capacity teachers in their schools and in relation to the academic development of students
- Our **graduation numbers are up** (Our 4 year cohort graduation rate is 77%, and our 5 year cohort graduation rate is rate is 85%): our **Discipline incidents are down**: we’ve increased the diversity of our methodologies and we’ve decreased the Achievement Gap between Groups of Students.
- We are investing in innovative programs for our students—one of our new initiatives for the 2014-15 school year is the Hubbard Mastery School. The program is designed to allow students to move through instruction at their own pace as they master each new skill or content area before moving onto new information.

- We are working to expand high quality activities for our students—such as our STEM clubs, greater development of our literacy and numeracy methodologies including mathematics
- We are focused on growing our mentorship programs—such as those provided by Big Brother/Big Sister, City Year, Communities in Schools, Diplomas Now, Project Mentor, and others that have made a measurable difference in student attendance, behavior, and course completion choices.
- Ensuring students get the nutrition they need is a big step in helping them achieve their full potential. This year **ALL** Columbus City School students receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of the family’s income. Students will continue to receive the same nutritious meals they have been receiving—including fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk.
- And, we’ve made strides in maximizing use of our facilities and we are improving the efficiency of non-school-based administration.

Under the Board and Superintendent Good’s leadership, the District has been focused on three primary goals during the past year,

- Each and every child reaches her/his full potential; prepared to go to college, secure a job, serve in the military, or start a business.
- Learning environments are student-centered, efficient, and stable.
- The District is accountable to the community; the community’s confidence in the District is maintained.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. I would be happy to entertain any questions you may have at this time.

Testimony before The Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission

Eric K. Germann
Board Member, Lincolnview Local and Vantage Career Center
Van Wert County, OH

May 14, 2015

Chair Reader, Vice Chair Gilbert and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to be given the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the role of local Board of Education members, especially as it pertains to small and rural school districts.

I currently serve as an elected board member for Lincolnview Local Schools, covering the eastern half of Van Wert County in Northwest Ohio. Agribusiness is the dominant industry in our school district, including both grain farms and livestock barns. We serve approximately 900 students K-12 with an \$8.6M annual operating budget.

I am in my sixth year of service, midway through my second term. I also am serving in my second year as an appointed member to the Vantage Career Center Board, after the legislative restructuring of their governing boards. I am currently serving my fourth term as President of our local Board. I believe strongly in engaged, informed leadership and am a lifelong learner. I dedicate a substantial amount of time to continuing education and engagement in Local, State and Federal issues.

Local Boards of Education are, to me, the epitome of this concept we term representative government. We are most likely the closest form of government most people will encounter. Our constituents entrust us on a daily basis with their most precious possession, their children.

For example:

- We demonstrate the legislative function of government, adopting and enforcing policy, which effectively serve as the law of the district for operational and disciplinary issues.
- We demonstrate the ability to shape our policy to conform with superior legal authority, namely State and Federal and administrative rules and laws.
- We demonstrate the ability to levy, collect and operate on tax revenue with a balanced budget in changing and challenging times, engaging our local communities for operating priorities in developing both budgets and tax policy.

- We demonstrate a quasi-judicial function in serving as an arbiter for student and employee discipline.
- We serve as a forum for those who wish to petition their governing body for change.
- We work with local economic development groups and business developers to shape tax policy to encourage economic development and growth of the wage and tax base

In short, we serve many of the functions seen across various other levels of government, just at a very local and personal level.

As elected board members, we are forced to engage the community and shape education policy, wants and needs. Whether levying taxes, deciding on new facilities or programs, weighing contract renewals or employment decisions, our decisions and governance are always accountable to the local electorate.

As a governing body who is very local and overseeing the operation of a business very close to their children, we're also very likely to hear frequently and vocally from the electorate, whether at the basketball game, the ball park, the grocery or late at night in a phone call. In short, people aren't afraid to engage us.

While we serve in all the previously mentioned roles, we also spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about the changes we are faced with and the decisions we make. It's not uncommon to engage in discussions and spend a considerable amount of time thinking about:

- Student discipline issues
- Employee relations and contract renewals
- Tax policy changes and their effect on renewals or new levy issues
- Curriculum changes and new programming
- Transportation policies

Within 25 miles of our district, we have a range of districts, ranging from an urban district with high poverty to some of the smallest in the state. Each of the districts face their own unique issues, challenges and successes and each their own unique flavor of electorate. As such, locally elected governance accountable to the local district at the ballot box is essential to ongoing operational accountability.

Again, I thank you for your time and would be happy to take your questions.