

Testimony of Principal Jason Carrion, Cayuga Elementary School
The School District of Philadelphia
June 7, 2017

Good morning and thank you for having me here today.

Mr. Chairman my name is Jason Carrion. I have been an educator with the School District of Philadelphia since September 2004. I am currently the Principal of Cayuga Elementary which serves over 450 students in North Philadelphia. Cayuga Elementary isn't just the school where I proudly serve as Principal, it's the school I would walk by in the same the neighborhood where I grew up as a child.

I became an educator because of my passion to promote life-long learning. Everyday my dedicated staff goes to work believing that we can, working together, make huge differences in the children of Cayuga Elementary, their families and our neighborhood.

Public schooling in the Philadelphia School District successfully contributed to my education and ultimately to my ability to lead a school that is located only blocks away from where I grew up. I am proud to say public education is working...even in some of the poorest areas in Philadelphia.

My school is over 60% Hispanic and 27% African-American. In my two years as principal I am proud of how we have implemented and instituted new instructional programs that let teachers teach and students learn to the best of their ability.

We have successfully brought together groups of teachers to analyze data and plan focused instruction that responds to and meets the needs of all of our students, in the form of daily Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These PLC's have allowed us to provide job embedded professional development in real time in response to areas of need for our students.

Close to 20% of my students are ELL and 15% of my students are enrolled in special education programs. As principal I work every day to make sure our teachers are meeting students where their needs are and ensuring those students have educational safety nets to help them make academic progress.

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I and other public school officials are ready to use our unique on the ground experience and expertise to help you identify and shape key areas for change and improvement in Pennsylvania classrooms.

The School District of Philadelphia is committed to building a system of great schools that serves all students close to where they live. This calls for lifting the performance of all schools in the best way for each school community. The School District has 2 options for improving the chronically, lowest performing schools: Renaissance Charter or in-District Turnaround. Unlike Renaissance Charters, Turnaround schools remain fully managed and operated by the School District.

Turnaround schools focus on what we know works. The model is grounded in research and designed to improve schools and build capacity so that schools can exit the Turnaround Network and remain successful into the future. The Turnaround Network will focus on schools that are the lowest performing over multiple years. Schools in the network will:

- Have great leaders who are supported in their work;
- Use data and analysis to constantly improve teaching;
- Support teachers and help them improve their instruction;
- Create a healthy and safe learning environment; and
- Engage the school community in the turnaround process.

Research from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research found that schools that succeed in changing at least three of the five essential elements for school turnaround were ten times more likely to improve and thirty times less likely to stagnate.

There are currently 11 schools within the Turnaround Network and 4 schools will be added beginning next school year. The total cost of the Turnaround Network for school year 16/17 is \$23.7 million. All investments across the Turnaround Network are aligned to the essential elements and paid for through redirecting current resources and new investments.

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With regards to ESSA and how the bottom 5% of schools are regarded, currently states must identify and address low-performing schools and while the law provides states flexibility to develop their own systems of intervention and accountability this committee would be wise to redefine the requirements of the lowest performing 5% of schools in our state including:

- ✓ The state needs to be more comprehensive in the criteria when differentiating the bottom 5% and 10%
- ✓ Should there be additional metrics other than performance – there needs to be more quantitative support for school districts in this matter.
- ✓ Perhaps a “band” strategy could be used for accountability within the state
 - Use poverty concentration, ELL concentration, urban setting when determining bands (rather than size of districts)
 - Accountability may mean different things in each band, including standards and timeframe to show progress, but that is what will make it meaningful

I appreciate your time and am happy to answer any questions from you, Mr. Chairman, and from members of the Joint Committee.