



BUFFALO
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*"Putting children & families first to ensure
high academic achievement for all"*

TESTIMONY

TO THE
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
ON
THE REGENTS REFORM AGENDA:
"ASSESSING" OUR PROGRESS

Naomi Cerre, Principal
Lafayette High School
Buffalo Public Schools

OCTOBER 16, 2013
BUFFALO, NEW YORK

***"Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its
foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy, and
sustainable human development."***

-Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

**TESTIMONY OF
NAOMI CERRE
PRINCIPAL, LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL
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My name is Naomi Cerre, I am the school principal at Lafayette High School on the West Side of the City of Buffalo. I have worked in the Buffalo Public Schools for over 25 years. I see every day the potential of our students and the hope they all have for their futures. Each student deserves a high quality education no matter their race, religion, or socio-economic status.

A "one size fits all" approach to education has never worked, and never will. The best approach for the better outcome for students is a child-centered education customized to each student with appropriate resources and support for educators.

Lafayette is a school that has wonderful demographics of students from all over the world that includes forty-five different languages from 30 different countries.

The native tongue for my students is varied and complex. Students and their families have arrived to Buffalo seeking refuge. Many come from war-torn locations and have seen horrors that young people should have never viewed. Yet they come, to this region, with the greatest reverence for education and a tireless work ethic.

Despite limits as it relates to navigating schools, community, language, and different customs, they pursue their educational goals with humility. The school is a temple that opens doors to opportunities for them. It is not a "failing school".

You may have read and seen versions of media that describe Lafayette as a "failing" school. This "failing" label is coming from the results of the New York State tests on ELA and Math. These scores are not a reflection of the learning and quality of teaching happening in my school. Nor are these test scores a reflection of the learning and quality of teaching happening in any Buffalo school.

The question that should be raised, who has failed the students of Buffalo and Lafayette High School?

These are the facts:

- 4 of 6 “failing” high schools in Buffalo have the highest concentration of non-English speakers.
- 70% of Lafayette High School students are English Language Learners.
- 4 of 6 “failing” high schools in Buffalo have a poverty rate above 80%.
- Many students are SIFE students. Students with interrupted or no formal education at all.
- Language fluency takes 5-7 years.
- Despite language navigation, students are expected to meet graduation requirements.
- Across the nation including our region, lawmakers have not taken supported research seriously, that indicates that ESL students require native language supports (interpreters) during instruction, not just at test times.
- Students are not tested in their own native language as a true baseline before entering the school system. Some arrive speaking in their native language; but cannot read or write in their native language. The question is raised, again without native language supports how can students move to levels of fluency and proficiency in English as well as meet commencement levels. Tailored supports must be in place!
- Students who arrived in this country with no school records, were automatically placed in the ninth grade regardless of age.
- Under credited over-age students were placed inappropriately and had great impact on the instances of drop out and graduation rates.
- Districts across the state have not properly staffed and/or trained teachers to teach the ESL population.
- Customized supports such as: Reading specialists, Literacy specialists, interpreters, ESL coaches, coordinators and co-teaching framework should become the standard for ESL supports.

These are facts!! The approach to advocating for these services has been difficult, because we still live in a community that has great disparity and inequities. A two tiered system cannot support equal progress without levels of diagnostic and prescriptive approaches. I represent every students face and their families, because many cannot represent themselves.

The question still remains in this century, if education is a civil right then why isn't school supports and resources directly available to priority schools--the neediest students? Secondly, do we value this clientele?

New York Public school systems and all stakeholders involved in the educational process must be authentic and individualized in our approach to teaching and learning.

No longer can we stand by with "one size fits all" system! Transformation requires not just a different approach, but a courageous approach. Courageous in a way that supports integrity and truth about the needs of students and the resources required to move students to the next level.

Reform takes on a movement that seeks justice and restoration.

One Size does not fit all.

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