

Statement to the SRC re Corrective Action II  
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My purpose in addressing you today is to emphasize the importance of any steps you take on the plans for the 64 or so schools who have been in corrective action for five years. These are the lowest performing schools in the district- they account for probably 25 percent of the students in the district - and improving student achievement at those schools is at the heart of your responsibilities under the state takeover legislation.

Aside from your choice of CEO, I can not imagine any single decision you will make in the coming year which will be more important in determining the educational fate of students in Philadelphia. Setting this course deserves the utmost of your time and attention, and of the District's staff. These decisions need to be based on evidence and best practices, and not on best guesses, hopes or ideology.

What was disturbing about the plan put forth by the former chief academic officer was that it suggested that you were going to turn to outside contractors with no experience with these schools to do the thinking and planning about what are the necessary school improvements. Fortunately, after five years, quite a bit is known by the district about the needs of these schools. There have been SWAT teams from the central administration, reports by regional administrators and school improvement plans at most if not all of these schools. There has been the experience with the Office for Restructured Schools which was highly successful with some underperforming schools before it was disbanded. All of this knowledge should be assembled and examined to determine at each school whether the problem has been faulty implementation of good plans, or whether new programs are needed to raise

performance levels. I hope that you are not concluding that the last five years have been wasted and all of the accumulated experience should be cast aside and ignored. And I don't think that I need remind you that the NCLB requires parents be involved in the development of any restructuring plan. I am confident that you can meet any looming deadlines with some relatively innocuous changes that will not foreclose real consideration of what should be done or through extension requests.

There are two other reasons why I want to encourage you to carefully plan the next steps, besides the obvious need to get it right for the sake of the students at these schools. Although it is reasonable to seek outside help which is knowledgeable about new approaches and best practices, **it would be downright crazy to turn to vendors who themselves are operating schools which are on the list of schools needing help. No vendor should be permitted to bid on assisting new schools before they have cleaned up their own act at schools already under their management.** That policy will severely limit where you can find outside assistance which has actual hands on experience with creating change in Philadelphia schools. Moreover, there needs to be substantial evidence why outside management rather than consulting help is needed in light of the greater success that the district had with its restructured schools than outside contractors. If you do turn to outside managers, this time you must set strict accountability standards.

Finally, I think that given the importance of the course that you will be creating here for what the district will be doing over the next several years, you should solicit the input of your new CEO so that any decisions are completely consistent with his, or her, ideas for advancing achievement levels. This is very feasible, for it will probably take the staff several months to conduct the kind of

thorough analysis necessary and to formulate recommendations school by school for you, the school-parent community, and the new CEO to review.

Moving these 64 schools forward is vital to the mission of the District. It is your biggest and most urgent challenge. No doubt bold action will be required at some, and additional resources such as the lower class size you provided at the elementary schools may be necessary too. But these schools are not all at the same place on the road to reform, the needs at each of these schools will be very different, and it is clear that there is no "one size fits all" solution. I am not asking you to back away from necessary changes, but I am asking that you take the time to make sure they are the right ones, with the right process. This is too important to fail at because of an artificial timetable.