

Dr. Gene Harris, Superintendent of Columbus Public Schools
Keynote Speech
Summit on Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP)
Columbus Airport Marriott
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5:30-8 p.m.

I am so honored to be here among all of you – my colleagues and my dear friends – and to have the opportunity to address you on this auspicious occasion.

It is appropriate that I begin my remarks this evening by **recognizing and thanking** the many organizations that have been so instrumental in making the Teacher Quality Partnership come into being. As you hear their names, please ponder for a moment just how **BIG** this initiative is.

And also hold your applause as I recognize:

- All 50 institutions of higher learning in Ohio that prepare tomorrow's teachers;
- The governor's office;
- Members of the Audit Panel (*as with ours in the district, they criticize us with love*);
- The Ohio Department of Education;
- The Ohio Education Association;
- The Ohio Federation of Teachers;
- The Ohio Board of Regents;
- The SAS Institute (*aka Dr. Bill Sanders and the Value Added folks*);
- Members of the Advisory Board;
- The funders – and we do thank the funders: the Carnegie and Joyce Foundations and Proctor and Gamble;
- Battelle for Kids; and, of course,
- The Columbus Public Schools in partnership with the Columbus Education Association.

Okay, let's share the love we feel for these and all the folks who have made the Teacher Quality Partnership dream a reality! (*pause*)

Thank you.

We have before us a tremendous opportunity to impact the academic achievement of Ohio's children today, and tomorrow.

The Teacher Quality Partnership will take to the next level our quest for discovering how best to prepare new and current teachers to ensure every student in their classrooms achieve every single day. It will also, for the first time, allow us to connect **all the dots** in such a way that I am confident we **will improve the quality of education** provided by all

Ohio school districts in measurable ways. In the process, we will further reduce the various kinds of achievement gaps that show us – sometimes painfully – that we have not yet reached equity and adequacy of educational opportunity from school to school and district to district in Ohio.

The scope of the Teacher Quality Partnership maximizes its potential for major impact in three ways:

- The Teacher Quality Partnership can help the 50 Ohio colleges and universities that prepare students who want to become teachers to maximize gains in student achievement to understand the interaction of helpful theory and replicable practices and to help them develop skills that address the variables and the context of the teaching and learning process.
- The Teacher Quality Partnership can provide first-year and relatively new teachers with specific skills sets and best practices along with the ongoing support and encouragement they need to make teaching their life-long career.
- And finally, the Teacher Quality Partnership will give experienced teachers the ongoing, direct feedback they need on their effectiveness by subject area and their school's performance against standards common within a specific district and from district to district throughout the state.

I think we are all really excited about this partnership because we understand that each of these essential teacher groups will be able to increase their understanding and use of research to **develop and practice** a range of effective strategies to better reach all students and achieve consistent improvement in student achievement that is both measurable and measured.

Teachers in the Columbus Public Schools and, later, in other districts throughout the state will be able to do this because they will have specific, tested strategies to address the many types of significant barriers to student achievement that exist within our communities, within our families, within our schools and within our classrooms.

The days are long gone when we can look at **any** factor impacting student achievement in isolation. For far too many years, professors in teachers' colleges, school boards, school administrators and classroom teachers tried to find a one-size-helps-all tool to improve teacher quality. In fact, many people today – most of them *not surprisingly* outside the educational community – think the standardized achievement test is that Holy Grail, but we know it's not.

A standardized test, given at any level, is but one element – important but **not the only or most crucial element** – on which to base changes in how we train new teachers or help practicing teachers improve their effectiveness in assuring all students make measurable gains.

In the Columbus Public Schools, we have been working internally through our Management Information Services Department at Kingswood and externally through organizations including the Ohio Department of Education, The Ohio State University, and KIDSOHIO to get the many kinds of aggregated and disaggregated student and community data we need and have it reported out in ways our staff, parents and the public can understand.

The research generated from the Teacher Quality Partnership will provide us with key puzzle pieces we need to build a clearer picture of where we are and where we need to go to improve student achievement through high-quality teachers.

I want to borrow a bit from the soon-to-be-published manuscript of Dean Thomas Lasley II of the University of Dayton, Professor Emeritus Daryl Siedentop of The Ohio State University and Research Director Robert Yinger of the University of Cincinnati. I believe that together they have described in bold, broad strokes the work we are now committing to undertake.

Lasley, Siedentop and Yinger see the Teacher Quality Partnership as a focus on improving the quality of education by studying, in depth, the characteristics of the most effective teachers and identifying the patterns of teacher performance in both novice and experienced teachers that will enhance student achievement at different grade levels, in different subjects and with different types of students.

Lasley, Siedentop, and Yinger boldly declare that the Teacher Quality Partnership will allow us to:

- Examine the degree to which students entering teacher preparation programs reflect the qualities and characteristics associated with teachers who add value to student achievement;
- Improve teacher education course work and clinical experiences so they better contribute to the development of quality teachers;
- Compare the characteristics and effectiveness of teachers who earned regular licenses and alternate licenses;
- Inform school professional development programs that better enable teachers to continue to improve the quality of their teachers [in ways] specific to the subjects they teach and the students in their classes;
- Enable school districts to better understand how their assessment and accountability data could be used to enhance teacher quality within their districts; and
- Enable school leadership to utilize knowledge of student performance and teacher quality data to devise a more strategic use of teachers within districts, buildings, subjects and grade levels.

That's exactly why the Columbus Public Schools and Columbus Education Association have agreed to be the first district to invite Teacher Quality Partnership researchers into the district and into our data.

We are primarily concerned with providing the best education possible for all Columbus children...and we can do so only through the best teachers.

The Teacher Quality Partnership study, and other initiatives such as SAELP and Millken, is part of the Columbus plan to identify the characteristics of effective teachers. The broader context of our work is a national movement to focus on student achievement, and value-added assessment offers an alternative to measure students' growth toward proficiency.

Value-added assessment in the Columbus Public Schools is **not** being used to take punitive measures against teachers whose scores are below the average score. Rather, the aggregated data will help us structure professional development activities for the district, for schools and for individual teachers. It will also help our PAR teachers better help new and struggling teachers, reducing faculty turnover that is as deadly to increasing and sustaining higher standards of student achievement as high student mobility.

Once we have a firm research base supporting the identification of characteristics of the best teachers, we can hone in on hiring them and supporting them within the Columbus Public Schools.

There's a misperception **out there** that school districts, schools and teachers are afraid of research studies and hard streams of data...especially in the large urban districts that are constantly compared in the press with smaller suburban districts around them rather than with other urban districts of similar size and demographics.

I disagree...I believe our teachers want to know what works and what doesn't and how their students compare with students across the district and throughout the state...where they most need more professional development as well as the areas in which they can model best teaching practices... They need the small disaggregated picture **and** the big picture.

While they **do** need to know how their students' levels of achievement compare with other students in their school, other district students and with students throughout Ohio and the nation, they don't need such data used as a weapon in a coordinated campaign against urban schools in particular and public schools in general throughout our nation. We must become the wave of change that lifts all students' achievement, or they – and we – will be crushed beneath it.

Therefore, I'm very pleased that the research side of the Teacher Quality Partnership is beginning in the Columbus Public Schools...if we do not know where the strengths and weaknesses of our teachers lie and develop strategies for improvement using all the tools that are available...how can we begin to place before our children the range of opportunities available to them...right here and right now? How can we prepare them to use what they are learning for their own benefit, for the economic health and quality of life of our local communities, and to preserve our very way of life and the freedoms we take for granted?

My staff members are used to my sharing with them what I did on my summer vacation. Last year I went to Ghana in West Africa; this year I went to China. Both trips have expanded my educational vision.

We're now in the process of establishing partnerships with schools in China, using a Memorandum of Understanding structure similar to the Columbus Public Schools' Higher Education Partnership Agreement.

When I came back from China, I proposed policies regarding student dress and student cell phone use that will be on the Columbus Board of Education's Consent Agenda next week. I thought I might be wading into deep water telling students they couldn't wear pants that said "Bootylicious" on the seat or sunglasses in class or take a call in the middle of a lesson. I was prepared for some heavy flack, but staff and parents have been supportive. The board has also been supportive.

We need to think bigger than we are accustomed to thinking most of the time. I used to think keeping more than 60,000 Columbus students alive literally and figuratively while moving them toward the prize...the high school diploma, their passport to higher education and productive lives in the 21st century...was big. What I saw in China is bigness on a scale I hadn't imagined. One example...

Last year, 65,000 American students across the United States competed in the largest pre-collegiate science fair in the world sponsored by Intel. Sixty-five thousand American students competing sounded pretty good to me...until I learned that 6 million Chinese students competed.

In China, when Bill Gates comes to speak, students and faculty are standing room only...in the halls, hanging from the chandeliers...the kind of crowds that comes out here to see Britney Spears. In China, Bill Gates is Britney Spears...and in the United States Britney Spears is Britney Spears. Representatives of the pop, athletic and hip hop cultures bring out the crowds and many of our students do not know who Bill Gates is.

Chinese classrooms often contain 60 students...but students lead other students in many more ways than our student leaders here are accustomed to. We visited International Baccalaureate Schools at the high school level, the middle school level and the elementary school level, and spoke English with students who spoke it better than some of our teachers here...they had studied English since third grade.

Many Chinese students think American students are lazy, unfocused and self-indulgent. The Chinese students we met also want not only to go to college but to come here for their higher education.

We have to open up the doors to the world to our students. We must take responsibility for moving a whole group of young people forward who do not see the urgent necessity

of their doing so. I saw firsthand that the future of the United States depends on what we do – and how successful we are – in public schools today.

We must keep our teachers excited about learning...if they are excited about learning, they will be excited about teaching and sharing and mentoring and guiding and coaching and helping their students in all the ways they need to move forward.

In everything we do, we must create a compelling vision...a vision of who we are as a people that encompasses where we've been, where we are and where we're going... we must see what our kids **can be** and **should be** to continue our leadership role in the world.

I ask you to create a vision for yourself of who you are and what you can do, what you desire to do, and how what you can do connects at the highest levels to a shared vision of higher student achievement through bold educational leadership...leadership that together we can provide today.

I have put the power of vision to work in my life and have seen what can result in relatively short periods of time from having the vision and for getting those around us to share the vision. Let me conclude with an example from the Columbus Public Schools.

When I became superintendent of the district in 2001, I set an ambitious goal: the Columbus Public Schools would leave the state-designated category of “academic emergency” by summer 2003. In spite of changing standards – an oxymoron if ever I heard one – we met the goal in the summer of 2003. That's the power of our teachers, our administrators, our parents, our business and faith communities, and many others buying into the goal and supporting it.

I'm now on record as saying the district will make continuous improvement in the summer of 2006. I believe we will because collectively we believe we will. It's because of our partnerships and enlarging the scope of our vision...carried forward on a stream of data that lets us know what we need to know to reach – and teach – each child.

On our last two state report cards, we met 36 of 42 Adequate Yearly Progress indicators. This year, we met or earned a Safe Harbor designation on 41 of the 42 indicators.

Most of you here know that AYP indicators are used to measure a district's progress in improving student achievement and closing learning gaps. Basically, in meeting 41 of 42 AYP requirements, the data indicate that we are taking all students, at whatever ability level they come to us, and we are helping them succeed and achieve in the classroom.

The one category in which the district did not meet the AYP requirement is mathematics for special education students. This is the category in which we were just nine students short of meeting the requirement and earning Continuous Improvement. It broke my heart that we missed making the goal of continuous improvement this year – a year early – by nine students. Nine students! But AYP also tells me that we are moving in the right direction: we are increasing achievement while reducing gaps when scores are

disaggregated by race, poverty and other factors. YES! We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

The district can because our teachers can. The overwhelming majority want to be better teachers. They want to continue to learn new ways to reach students who do not respond to typical classroom structures and activities.

Ohio's teachers also need to see, in concrete ways, what they are doing right in teaching their students, right now, today, as well as the areas that can be improved.

Last week I hosted 20 of the district's Student Ambassadors at my home and listened.

- They said, "The principal makes a difference."
- They said, "We want teachers who push us hard."
- They said, "We want the students who are out wandering around and disrupting work to be engaged in the work of the class and be successful."

Everybody needs to focus on what's good for our kids...we must push the envelope hard and provide higher-level challenges to our students from pre-kindergarten through college.

That means:

- Higher levels of knowledge and confidence for teachers...
- Higher levels of pedagogy, teacher skills...
- Higher levels of respect and trust among all the professionals of the Pre-K to Grade 16 continuum...
- Higher levels of cooperation and coordination...and
- Better quality data focused on the key elements of the work we are doing with a goal of continuous improvement, for our students first and then for ourselves, professionally and personally.

Every child can learn...the Teacher Quality Partnership will help ensure that every child will learn... and we in Ohio will lead the way in providing the research base that supports our efforts in ensuring that every child **must** learn. As I saw for myself in China, our future and our freedoms depend on it.