

REMARKS TO HOUSE EDUCATION POLICY REVIEW AND
REFORM TASK FORCE
APRIL 27, 2015

I WANT TO BEGIN MY REMARKS WITH A THANK YOU TO EACH OF THE TASK FORCE MEMBERS FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO PUBLIC EDUCATION. THE TIME YOU ARE SPENDING HERE TODAY TO HEAR COMMENTS IN REGARD TO CHALLENGES OF HIGH POVERTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OUR STATE MEANS A GREAT DEAL TO OUR CHILDREN, OUR COMMUNITY, AND TO THOSE OF US WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO SPEND OUR EDUCATIONAL CAREERS IN HIGH POVERTY AREAS.

FIRST, A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME. I AM FINISHING MY 32ND YEAR OF SERVICE TO LAURENS SCHOOL DISTRICT 56 IN CLINTON. FOR THE MAJORITY OF MY CAREER, MY PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY HAS BEEN PROVIDING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. THOUGH THIS FIELD HAS ITS STRUGGLES, I HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE TO BE A PART OF A WONDERFUL TEAM OF TEACHERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO STRIVE DILIGENTLY TO IMPART SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN STUDENTS WHO ARE CHALLENGED BY THE DEMANDS OF ACADEMIC CURRICULUM. SPECIAL EDUCATION IS A UNIQUE AND INCREDIBLE SYSTEM OF SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS. THERE IS NO SYSTEM IN THE WORLD THAT COMPARES TO THE LEVEL OF SERVICES WE PROVIDE HERE.

LAST THURSDAY AFTERNOON, I DROVE OUT TO CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL FOR AN IEP MEETING. I ARRIVED SAFELY AMID THE AFTERNOON SCHOOL DISMISSAL TRAFFIC AND WALKED TOWARD THE ENTRANCE TO THE SCHOOL. I STOPPED MOMENTARILY TO SAY HELLO TO TWO OF THE

ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS STATIONED ON CAR DUTY. THE SUN WAS SHINING BRIGHTLY AND THE TEMPERATURE WAS PLEASANT. IT WAS THE PERFECT DAY FOR CAR DUTY.

MY GOOD FRIEND HENRY SIMMONS, ONE OF THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS, SAID TO ME, "KAY, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD GRAY HAIR!" OF COURSE I RESPONDED, "HENRY, I'VE HAD GRAY HAIR FOR SOME TIME NOW BUT I DON'T HAVE AS MUCH AS YOU!" I GUESS THE ANGLE OF THE SUN ON MY HEAD THAT AFTERNOON WAS JUST RIGHT!

LITTLE DID HENRY KNOW THAT I HAD SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME THE PREVIOUS FEW DAYS TRYING TO GENERATE A BALANCED BUDGET FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR THE 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR, ADDING YET MORE GRAY TO MY HAIR. AS OF THIS MOMENT, MY BUDGET STILL IS A WORK IN PROGRESS AND IS NOT BALANCED.

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU ONE EXAMPLE OF WHAT SOME WOULD CALL A BUDGET CHALLENGE; I PREFER TO CALL IT A CONTINUING BUDGET WOE GIVEN OUR IMPOVERISHED DISTRICT.

NEXT YEAR, OUR DISTRICT WILL NEED TO FUND **FOUR** PRESCHOOL DISABILITIES CLASSES FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-5 YEARS. UNDER FEDERAL SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW, SERVICES MUST BEGIN UPON THE ELIGIBLE CHILD'S THIRD BIRTHDAY.

MY BUDGET FOR **ONE** OF THESE CLASSES IS AS FOLLOWS:

EXPENSES:

- SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER – SALARY (49,765) AND BENEFITS (20,542) COST - \$70,307 (COMMENT – TEACHER SHORTAGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION)
- SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANT – SALARY (18,821) AND BENEFITS (8,921) COST – \$27,742
- SPEECH – 8 HOURS OF THERAPY PER WEEK @ \$60 PER HOUR FOR 36 WEEKS OF SCHOOL - \$17,280 (COMMENT – SPEECH THERAPIST SHORTAGE)
- PHYSICAL THERAPY – 2 HOURS PER WEEK @ \$60 PER HOUR FOR 36 WEEKS OF SCHOOL - \$4,320 (COMMENT – THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS)
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY – 2 HOURS PER WEEK @ \$70 PER HOUR FOR 36 WEEKS OF SCHOOL - \$5,040 (COMMENT – THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS)
- APPLIED BEHAVIOR THERAPY CONSULTATIVE SERVICES – 4 HOURS PER WEEK @ \$35 PER HOUR FOR 36 WEEKS OF SCHOOL - \$5,040 (COMMENT – WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE INCREASING NUMBERS OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM)
- TOTAL COSTS: \$129,729

REVENUES:

- STATE REVENUES:
STUDENT ENROLLMENT 8 STUDENTS FULL DAY, 6 OF WHOM HAVE AUTISM; THE OTHER 2 STUDENTS HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES; ALL 8 STUDENTS ARE 3 OR 4 YEARS OF AGE SO NO FUNDING COMES TO THE DISTRICT THROUGH THE EDUCATION FINANCE ACT. EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT FUNDS FOR PRESCHOOL DISABILITIES WAS DONE AWAY WITH 2-3 YEARS AGO. THUS, NO STATE REVENUES FOR THIS CLASS.
- FEDERAL REVENUES:
IDEA PRESCHOOL: FOR 86 PRESCHOOL STUDENTS (3-5 YEARS) SERVED IN THE DISTRICT, WE RECEIVE A FEDERAL ALLOCATION OF \$55,118.
IDEA: FOR 593 DISABLED STUDENTS (3-21 YEARS) SERVED IN THE DISTRICT, WE RECEIVE A FEDERAL ALLOCATION OF \$897,095.
- MEDICAID: TOTAL FUNDS BUDGETED FOR ALL DISABLED STUDENTS IN ANY ONE YEAR IS ABOUT \$550,000
- OF COURSE, THESE FEDERAL REVENUES MUST BE USED TO HELP PROVIDE FOR THE OTHER REMAINING 585 DISABLED STUDENTS IN OUR DISTRICT FOR THE 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR.

FOR THOSE OF YOU UNFAMILIAR WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND REGULATION, THE COST OF A SERVICE CANNOT BE A FACTOR IN DETERMINING IF IT IS REQUIRED BY THE IDEA FOR A PARTICULAR STUDENT. SPECIAL EDUCATION IS AN ENTITLEMENT PROGRAM.

I THINK YOU CAN BEGIN TO GET A SENSE OF THE BUDGET CHALLENGES I WORK WITH IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. THERE ARE MANY OTHER PROGRAM MANAGERS IN OUR DISTRICT WHO STRUGGLE WITH SIMILAR SITUATIONS.

MANY DISTRICTS CAN TURN TO LOCAL REVENUES TO HELP OFFSET INADEQUATE STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING FOR REQUIRED PROGRAMS. IN AREAS SUCH AS OURS, THE TAX BASE IS NOT PRESENT TO PROVIDE ANY SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF INCREASE IN DAY TO DAY PROGRAMMATIC REVENUES.

IN THE DAYS AHEAD AS IN EVERY YEAR, I WILL DO AWAY WITH NEEDED STAFF, ITEMS, AND SERVICES TO GET MY EXPENSES TO ALIGN WITH MY REVENUES. SOMEONE WILL DEPART AND I WILL CHOOSE NOT TO FILL THE POSITION. I WILL PUT A FEW MORE CHILDREN IN A TEACHER'S CLASS OR NOT PROVIDE AN INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT WHERE ONE SHOULD BE PRESENT. I WILL NOT PURCHASE AN ITEM A TEACHER NEEDS FOR HER CLASSROOM. THE LIST WILL GO ON AND ON.

I KNOW THAT ADDITIONAL MONEY DOES NOT ALWAYS TRANSLATE INTO SUCCESS; HOWEVER, THERE CAN BE LITTLE PROGRESS WITHOUT ADEQUATE AND STABLE FINANCING.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION.

KAY CLEVELAND
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROGRAMS
LAURENS SCHOOL DISTRICT 56
kaycleveland@lcsd56.org 864-938-2542