

Message to Columbus Principals, Teachers and Management Team

2012-2013 School Calendar/Proposed Re-Instating Early Release Wednesdays

As you know, there was a lengthy discussion tonight regarding my proposal to re-establish Early Release Wednesdays for focused professional development in Columbus Schools. My purpose for making this recommendation was based solely our school district's need to raise student achievement in the district and prepare effectively for the new common core assessment coming in 2014.

Our School District Achievement Near the Bottom & Common Core State Tests Much Harder

I respect the parent that spoke tonight and all the community members who came out to the meeting to hear actions on the agenda tonight. After we returned from Executive Session tonight, I provided additional discussion to the Board as to why I believe our school district is on "Academic Watch" and why I believe leaders have a responsibility to do something about it-even if it means doing some things differently. I explained how re-instating ERW will give us the dedicated professional development time principals and teachers need for systemic professional development.

The Board of Trustees voted (3, yea, 1 Nay & 1 Abstain) after we returned from Executive Session to re-instate Early Release Wednesdays under "Such Other Matters That May Come Before the Board." My intention was not to hide anything from our parents and community. I was prepared to discuss the matter in more detail after Executive Session for the same number of persons present before E/S that had they been present earlier. The future achievement of our school district is at stake. As much as I would have liked to taken the easy way out tonight, my commitment to students made me advocate for them even harder. They deserve our best.

Early Release Wednesday (ERW) Needed to Get Off the Bottom

The question was asked why parents weren't allowed to have input on the process in which I replied my experience as an Asst. Superintendent with the Success Calendar process a few years ago confirmed that regardless sometimes of the input mechanisms districts make available for the community, it doesn't always work in the best interest of students. Success

Calendar received significant back lash that ultimately led to only 2 schools having an extended summer calendar. Even with the best of intentions regarding the success calendar, many students were not afforded the opportunity to extend their learning using this process. My question became what about the rest of the schools. I proposed ERWs because it will allow the district to address the achievement needs at all schools and for all students.

Dedicated Time for Quality Professional Development for All CMSD Schools

The research tells us if we want to raise student achievement we have to help teachers through professional development. I have only one agenda and that is get our school district achievement off the bottom using research-based practices by helping teachers teach in a more rigorous manner through quality professional development. In the end, we have to find time to prepare teachers to better educate all students. I'm standing up for the achievement of our school district, for you, for our children, for our teachers and for our parents who want their children to have the skills needed to go to college in the future.

Parents Will Know Early This Summer About ERW

Our parents are critical to the success of their child's future by helping the school district do what's right for them. Each and every parent will be notified by letter before the end of this week about the re-instated Early Release Wednesdays in our school district. The letter will be prepared and mailed to all parents from district office.

A Re-Registration Day will be held at all schools in July where parents and principals will communicate on the transportation plan needed for every student on ERW. Many of our parents know that CMSD pioneered ERW in our area and Lowndes County School District picked up the strategy a few years later and are now a High Performing school district. The school calendar for the city and county school system are now very similar with both implementing Early Release Wednesdays this coming school term.

In addition, we are really looking forward to offering a Summer Leadership Institute in July for teachers, principals, parents, and Board members to develop Columbus Schools continuous improvement plan and professional development calendar together. Our school district will not improve without a plan.

School District Officials & Principals Will Adjust Transportation Routes to Help Parents on ERWs

The district through building leadership will help parents secure safe after school care by ensuring students can be dropped off at an alternate location (for example, grandparents home) in the district attendance zone on Wednesdays as parents inform principals of this need. Schools will also provide parents with local daycare and after school services that offer a school pick up services for students. District buses will also drop students off at the Boys and Girls Club or other after school locations on Wednesdays as requested and needed by parents. The needs of our special education students will be addressed case by case with the assurance that each child's IEP needs are honored and special busing will be provided based on IEPs.

School Day Extended by 35 - 45 Minutes (Buses Leave @ 3:00 p.m./Elem & 3:38 p.m./CMS & CHS

The school day for Early Release Wednesday for elementary students will end at 12:45 p.m., and 12:15 for middle and high school students. Elementary students will be dismissed from school at 3:00 p.m., and middle and high school students will be dismissed at 3:38 p.m. (on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). As you can see, the school day for next year will not be exceedingly long and is in line with what most schools in the state do now (dismiss between 2:45 - 3:45 p.m.) so students can get home before dark.

CMSD Continuous Improvement Plan - Available to the Public

Keeping you informed as we work to grow student achievement in Columbus. If you haven't had the opportunity yet this summer, I invite you all to visit www.columbuscityschools.org and click on Believe and Achieve Strategic Plan that addresses the work ahead to be done for the sake of our district's future. It will take teamwork and commitment to get our beloved school district off the bottom rung of the Mississippi achievement ladder. Thanks for all you do!

Dr. Martha Liddell, Superintendent