

August 22, 2011

Dear Members of the Philadelphia Community,

It is after prayerful deliberation and consultation with my family that I have agreed to step down as Superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia.

When I accepted this superintendent's job three years ago, I did not imagine just how difficult an assignment it would be. However, in a short time, through the hard work of staff across the system, the District has overcome numerous challenges and made tremendous strides in many areas. I take great pride and satisfaction in knowing that I am leaving the District better than I found it for thousands of young people.

So many people have played important roles in our successes that it would be impossible to name them all. However, I want to share with you just a few of the significant accomplishments that should make all of us proud.

1. Increased student achievement for three consecutive years
2. More than one half of our students now scoring above the state level in reading and mathematics
3. Developed and implemented "Imagine 2014," the District's five year strategic plan
4. Settled the 40 year old desegregation case
5. Settled five union contracts including a groundbreaking contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
6. Implemented school and District report cards
7. Implemented new teacher and administrator evaluations
8. Implemented the Empowerment Schools Initiative to provide critical systemic supports and resources to struggling schools

9. Development of School Performance Index (SPI) to measure school performance within the District and across similar schools
10. Implemented Renaissance Charter Schools Initiative that engages charter organizations in the process of improving the District's lowest performing schools
11. Implemented 6 Promise Academies that are the District's answer to turning around low performing schools. First year results indicate improvement in all performance areas for all six schools with most achievement higher than district average
12. 29% decline in violent incidents in past three years
13. 12 schools now on the Persistently Dangerous list (down from 20 in 2010)
14. Development of the District's first five year master facilities plan in two decades
15. Opened a new translation office which provides written and oral translation services to better serve our limited English student and parent populations
16. Purchased and implemented new curriculum for bi-lingual students
17. Hired more than 80 new bilingual staff including 63 teachers
18. Opened regional Parent Resource Centers throughout the city to provide one-stop services for parents
19. Expanded the number of Reengagement Centers for drop out students
20. Met with more than 4,000 parents at monthly parent roundtables and parent home visits
21. Met with hundreds of teachers and principals at monthly and quarterly roundtables
22. Received national recognition for enrolling more than 40,000 parents in courses through the District's successful Parent University program

I believe the foundation for continuous progress is already in place. The School District of Philadelphia is now gaining national attention for its systemic reform initiatives that have produced significant results in student achievement. The important work that lies ahead is to sustain and accelerate the performance. I urge you to stay the course.

During my time in Philadelphia, I have had the opportunity to meet some incredible people. I have worked along side some of the most talented and committed staff members I've ever known. I have found these experiences deeply rewarding.

As I step down, I want to thank parents and guardians for entrusting me with the gift of serving your daughters, sons, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. I thank you for coming out to the parent roundtables and for opening up your homes for me to visit with you and your neighbors.

It is with respect and admiration that I also thank the thousands of dedicated educators including principals, teachers, administrators and other staff members who work tirelessly everyday making big and small miracles for children. Whether you are an educator, support personnel, or work in offices and cubicles in central office, always remember it is your collective efforts that make a difference in the lives of our students. Additionally, I am deeply appreciative to community members from all sectors of Philadelphia for your support of our public school system.

Finally, to the beautiful children in this city of brotherly love, I want you to know that you have been my inspiration. I have come to work each day as a servant for you. I sincerely believe in your ability to achieve at high levels! Remember to come to school each day with your multitude of talents and proudly show them off. Work hard and make education a priority in your lives. I promise you won't be sorry!!

I have dedicated more than 40 years of my life serving other people's children in urban schools across the country. Often this service has been at great sacrifice to my sons, grandchildren and other family members who accepted second place in my life even when it was not their preference. I am truly thankful for their unconditional love. I look forward to spending quality time with them moving forward.

In closing, I may be leaving my post as Superintendent, but Philadelphia's children will always remain in my heart.

Respectfully,

Arlene C. Ackerman