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April 23, 2016

Re: Parent Assembly & Summit

Dr. Kriner Cash
Superintendent
Buffalo Public Schools
712 City Hall
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Dr. Cash:

It has come to the attention of the Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization (BPTO) that the Office of Parent and Family Engagement has finalized plans for the Parent Assembly & Summit scheduled for May 13 & 14. To date, the BPTO has not been involved in the planning of this event, invited to attend, or even notified of the actual event. As a District-wide parent group representing various parents throughout Buffalo Public Schools, we believe that the BPTO, along with other parent groups, should be involved in the planning and implementation of this event. In a memo to schools, the Office of Parent and Family Engagement has indicated an expectation to have a "legion of parents" attend this event. With this expectation, how is it possible that a District-wide parent group was excluded from this process?

Furthermore, the memo indicates the keynote speaker will be Dr. Steve Perry of Capital Prep Schools Inc. As per the memo: "Since 2006, Capital Prep has sent 100% of its predominately low-income, minority, first generation, high school graduates to four year colleges." Dr. Perry first came to the attention of the Buffalo community when he spoke at our very own Waterfront Elementary last school year. At this event, attendees reported that he hurled many inflammatory remarks about public schools, particularly about teachers. A bit of research on Dr. Perry shows that he is known for this divisive behavior and sometimes his rhetoric includes threats. In 2013, after his company's charter school application to take over Capital Prep was denied by the Hartford Board of Education, Dr. Perry tweeted: "All this did was piss me off. It's on. Strap up, there will be head injuries."

Perry has referred to public schools in Hartford as "failing raggedy-ass schools" and has claimed that teachers are responsible for killing kids. Parents of Capital Prep have complained of punitive discipline policies for students including punishment for wearing the wrong belt, making students stand to eat lunch, and sitting kids at a table in the cafeteria labeled the "Table of Shame."

Dr. Perry claims to be "America's Most Trusted Educator", driven by worthy and relevant issues, such as systemic racism in our schools and the achievement gap. Correspondingly, one would think that there is some substance to his convictions and that his school, the now former Capital Prep School in Hartford, would hold the key to solutions for the many challenges in our public schools. However, according to the Connecticut State Department of Education many of his claims are seriously flawed.

BPTO Mission

In order to facilitate student success within the Buffalo Public School District (BPSD) voices of all members of the community must be engaged through ongoing relationships. Thus, it is the mission of the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) to initiate, support, advocate for and recognize positive projects, programs and accomplishments of the students and schools.



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In 2012-13, Capital Prep enrolled 40% free and reduced lunch students, 45% Black students, and 19% Hispanic students, far from predominately low income and minority student demographics that had been claimed. At Capital Prep, performance on the state assessment was lower than the entire District, where there is double the rate of free lunch, 3x the rate of students with disabilities, 10x the rate of English Language Learners, and a shorter school year. None of the subgroups met achievement targets at Capital Prep, while Connecticut Public Schools have shown higher SAT and state reading scores than Capital Prep.

As for the 100% graduates attending 4 year colleges, data shows that about 36% of students who enter Capital Prep are exited before graduation. There are reports of students being expelled or counseled out. Furthermore, the 100% rate only includes those who actually make it to graduation, with one year graduating as few as 28 students. In response to criticism of this, Dr. Perry has stated: "I've seen the right and wrong student come to Capital Prep....A small number of students are brats....students and parents know as well, and if they don't like it, they can get out, too. Not every school is for everybody. This cannot be overstated." There is also documentation to show that Dr. Perry actively recruited "non-minority" students from surrounding suburbs and Catholic Schools to attend Capital Prep.

The evidence shows a lack of substance to Dr. Perry's claims and contributes to doubt that he is invested in educating all children, as traditional public schools are rightfully required to do. Dr. Perry is a profiteer, whose agenda consists of making millions from public tax dollars and off the backs of children and families. His very own contract, denied by the Hartford Board of Education, stated management fees collected would be about \$500,000 per year, with conservative estimates of a cash balance of \$2 million by year 5. Perhaps it was this lost opportunity for profit that provoked his inflammatory threat.

This school year, the Buffalo Public School District has made great strides to include various stakeholders in decision-making toward advancing all Buffalo Public Schools for all of our students. Dr. Cash's "Education Bargain", which many BPTO members believe in and have advocated for full funding by the state, has repeatedly been used to guide process, future decisions, and programming. The decision, however, to host Dr. Steve Perry in the Parent Assembly & Summit as keynote speaker in a Buffalo Public School, is in stark contrast to the District's Mission Statement: "Putting children and families first to ensure for high academic achievement for all", which the "Education Bargain" references and pledges to deliver (Element 6).

It's also in stark contrast to the "Education Bargain", Element 7, which demands a "new relationship with teachers", "recognizing them as professionals" and providing them support to "ensure the best instruction for ALL children."

The BPTO calls on the District to uphold its commitment to its mission statement and your proposed and Board of Education approved "Education Bargain", and not permit Dr. Perry from participating in the District's Parent Assembly & Summit. This event is paid for with public tax dollars. We, as taxpayers, do not believe this man should receive a dime of our public money to hurl insults and fraudulent claims in one of our Buffalo Public Schools.

The Parent Assembly & Summit should aim to welcome all parents and create a space to partner with, rather than divide, all relevant education stakeholders, especially our teachers. To achieve this, the process to plan the event should encompass this sentiment and be inclusive of the BPTO and other parent groups.

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We request that a balanced view be made available to our parents and that alternative speakers be included in this event, particularly those who value public education. Two suggested speakers the BPTO recommends are Mr. Jamaal Bowman, a parent and Principal from Bronx, NY, who emphasizes educating the whole-child, and the Chancellor of the Board of Regents, Mrs. Betty Rosa.

At the BPTO Membership Meeting on April 23, 2016, 32 attendees (70% Buffalo parents), overwhelmingly endorsed the content and positions outlined in this letter. Member input and edits have been included. The BPTO Membership has also agreed to take further action absent concessions to the requests made in this letter.

We look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss and remedy this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence Scott".

Lawrence Scott
Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization Co-Chair
School 81 Parent
716-830-3136
lawrencescott19@gmail.com

Cc: Mr. Darren Brown, Chief of Staff
Dr. William Keresztes, Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs, Planning, & Community Engagement
Dr. David Mauricio, Chief of Strategic Alignment & Innovation
Dr. Anne Botticelli, Chief Academic Officer
Dr. Eric Rosser, Interim Associate Superintendent for Student Support Services
Mrs. Ramona Reynolds, Director of Parent & Family Engagement
Buffalo Board of Education

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