



Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham Testimony on SB 619

Madison Metropolitan School District Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham shared the following testimony at today's Senate Education Committee hearing on SB 619.

"Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you. My name is Jennifer Cheatham and since last spring, I have been the superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District. Today I'd like to give you an on-the-ground perspective from an urban district working on getting the best results for **all** children, including those students who have traditionally been under-served.

"We have a lot to be excited about in the Madison schools. This year, we released our strategic framework, which guides all of our work as a district. The vision of our framework is to ensure that every school will be a thriving school that prepares every student to graduate from high school ready for college, career and community.

"We know that to be successful in making that vision a reality, we must stay incredibly focused on the day-to-day work of great teaching and learning for every child. That is where change happens. And that is why we are working hard at doing what we know works in schools, challenging ourselves and the status quo, and making exciting progress.

"An essential component of our strategic framework includes learning district-wide about great teaching. As a district, we are learning how to better plan instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards, deliver instruction that supports all students in meeting these higher standards, and use data to monitor students' progress along the way. Through the new standards, we've been able to elevate the professional dialogue in and across schools in a way that is inspiring to our teachers.

"The introduction of the new standards into our district has also been enormously beneficial to our students. That's because all students are now being held to higher expectations than ever before. The Common Core asks our students to use multiple sources of information, to think critically and solve complex problems. It is the kind of learning that truly engages students and prepares them with the skills they need to be successful - the skills that employers look for in today's economy. Through the new standards, our students are being challenged in a way that many of them haven't been before—not through bubble sheets and memorization, but through application of skills to meaningful and complex tasks.

"The ultimate tragedy of this bill is that it distracts from our crucial day-to-day focus on teaching and learning, which is the key to any urban district's success. If passed, both our teachers and students would be taking a huge step backwards.

"It would also put legislators instead of educators and students, at the center of the process. Districts need to focus their time and energy on providing the very best instruction to children, not on the ongoing political uncertainty this bill would create.

"In Madison, we are working hard this year on learning about and thoughtfully implementing the Common Core. Like every district, we need to be thoughtful consumers of any standards and

make sure they fit our local context. But we don't need for the legislature to meddle in issues that are best addressed at the local level.

"I can tell you from my experience here in Madison and in other districts that have worked with the Common Core that this kind of thoughtful implementation, focused on the day-to-day work educators do with children, gets results. That is the path that we are on. I hope that you will let us continue on that path and keep our focus on children, rather than create a politicized process that would significantly disrupt the progress that real teachers are making in real classrooms today. Thank you for your time."

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