



Opening Remarks CREA

1/24/18

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon to the initial proposal for the Cedar Rapids Community School District. Thank you, also, for the work you are doing to strengthen our district and offer valuable academic experiences to the students of this community.

We began this year excited, together, about the Power of We. Sure, it's a catchy phrase, but it was always intended to be more than that. It's a threshold into a new era. It's a statement to say we are in this work together, all of us. It is a reminder that we are deeply committed to this work, and an acknowledgement that we desire to build a collaborative workforce that perhaps has not been experienced in recent years—or decades—in our school district.

Each employee, whether he or she is a food and nutrition worker, teacher, paraprofessional, bus driver, administrator or administrative assistant, custodian or maintenance staffer, principal, secretary, daycare and early learning worker, or a member of any of our additional work groups—each employee—is equally valued and is a vital asset to our school district.

This year we have made gains in a variety of areas including blended learning pilots and innovative learning opportunities. We have operated in the spirit of the Power of We, though perhaps some of us have done so a bit skeptically at times.

I realize that, for some, it is difficult to imagine a school district in which you feel fully valued, listened to, and supported by the building and district administrators with whom you work. Decades of mistrust discolor our relationship. That is clear. It is clear, too, that with changes in legislation, tremendous work lies ahead for us all. But it is also clear that we share common goals to improve the experiences for all employees.

It is my hope that we proceed—in the face of potential apprehension—with a steadfast devotion to working together toward a new future characterized by inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration.

It was with great excitement that I discovered we are eager to discuss the same critical themes and that we agree: changes must be made to our current system. Your points of concern are those which we are already aiming to address or also desire to improve such as sub shortages, lane changes, the calendar, evaluations and contents of those evaluations, and professional learning.

As one step in addressing some of these critical themes, the District is proposing that all items from the contract will be moved to a handbook with the exception of mandatory items. This will help to establish an equitable experience for all employees across the entire district workforce.

For instance, we recently had to make weather-related calls to cancel or delay school. The annual confusion regarding what this means for staff is a symptom of a broken system. For decades, different work groups have been differentially impacted because of wildly disparate contracts. We see the formation of a handbook as an opportunity to create an equitable system.

When items are moved to the handbook, as the District proposes, adjustments would be made to language in the areas of course approvals and lane changes, grievance and resolution procedures, and staffing procedures.

You are likely already considering what you might lose from the change we propose. But I invite you to consider that if the goal of our Leadership Team is to gain your trust, improve morale, and work with you towards optimal experiences for our employees, it is counterproductive to address critical themes in such a manner that would alienate or demoralize a workforce.

Once parties have discussed and determined which items will be transferred to the handbook, we would assemble collaborative work groups to review those themes which we collectively believe are urgent matters and which, if addressed, will improve the experience of all employees of the Cedar Rapids Community School District. Themes may include lane changes, evaluations, professional development, or leave of absences. Work groups will be open to all employees, including union members and non-union members, and include a variety of representatives whose professional roles would be appropriate to the themes.

We also aim to address total compensation. It is our desire that all funds from the FY19 SSA general program increase will be distributed to our workforce across all of our various general fund employment groups.

Though the balance between skepticism and trust remains to be struck, I invite you to consider this as the beginning of an inclusive process to engage all staff in conversations about how to improve working conditions for all CRCSD employees.

And though we may disagree on how we approach the changes, I am hopeful that because we are all ultimately invested in a common goal, through a collaborative process, we will create better working conditions for all staff and learning experiences for all students.

We desire to treat our entire staff more fairly than ever. Let that be clear. At the root of the proposed changes is the belief of this Leadership Team that the best educational experiences for students are only possible with a staff of experts who work collaboratively, are engaged, and feel

supported in this important work. You are vital to the future of our school district. The cornerstones of our relationship must be inclusivity, trust, transparency, and collaboration.