

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

I find myself needing to give you my testimony in support of HB 1355. I am not able to be at the hearing in person due to other responsibilities that can't be neglected on Thursday afternoon.

Greeley School District has just over 22,000 students, 64% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Approximately 67% of our students are of color. As superintendent, I wear many hats and play many roles. But the only thing that really matters, and the thing I focus on every day, is giving every one of those students the best possible opportunity to learn so they can be successful in life. Our educators work tirelessly for our students, but it's not just about effort. It's about results. And I own the responsibility for those results.

We went through accountability clock hearings for two middle schools in spring 2017. The State Board of Education approved our proposed innovation plans for both schools. We are also working with outside partners to support instruction, and four of our schools are a part of CDE's Turnaround Network. The Turnaround Network provides intensive professional development to help our schools implement turnaround best practices, as well as help the district build out our support structures. One of the two middle schools that had reached Year 6 of Priority Improvement/Turnaround status, Franklin Middle School, improved outcomes for students and earned a Performance rating on the 2017 performance frameworks—thus exiting the clock. The other middle school, Prairie Heights, is fully implementing its innovation plan. Students are receiving improved instruction and a more conducive learning climate in school this year. From the district's perspective, we are seeing indicators of early success.

The partnership we have had with CDE and the State Board has been very helpful and meaningful. Having an accountability system matters, because that's what tells us how we are doing. It highlights where we need to pay attention. When I came to Greeley as the Superintendent in 2015, the accountability system highlighted where I needed to focus our resources in the district. Our schools furthest along on the accountability clock were my priority. The accountability system helped me to come together with our board and really figure out what district systems we needed to put into place to support our most struggling students. We've adjusted hiring processes and district administrator roles to best meet the needs of our students and schools. The board has been by my side doing this work.

In my personal opinion, we have a good balance between locally driven solutions that meet the needs of individual communities and state support through CDE when we need it. For example, through the Turnaround Network, we have received supports with instruction, leadership, climate and culture in our schools, as well as building the district systems and supports to enable rapid improvement. CDE staff have worked with us on our accountability pathway plan, strengthening that plan and sharing it with the State Board of Education. The state board has listened to our story, trusted our expertise, and is holding us accountable for meeting the goals we have laid out for our students and our schools. We need all those components to improve outcomes for students.

It is my understanding that HB1355 makes a number of important updates to the accountability process, based on what was learned as the accountability clock process was first fully implemented in 2017. I see ideas that I shared during my debrief with CDE and the state board reflected in this bill, including ways to start taking significant actions earlier than Year 5 and expanded support for our most struggling schools. I agree with the provisions that facilitate early involvement of educators, parents and community members and ensuring that we know what the school rating means and what our options are for improving student outcomes sooner than later. I like that districts can request to come to the

state board with an action plan earlier than Year 5. I appreciate the expanded uses for the state resources. The Turnaround Network has been invaluable to our district. Allowing state funds to support that work is critical. Finally, I appreciate the focus on partnerships—between districts and their communities, between the state and districts, and with external partners supporting districts and schools. It's hard to legislate partnering, but we've seen that when we can successfully collaborate to bring expertise and resources together, great things happen for students. The work to encourage and incentivize partnerships for school improvement is greatly appreciated.

These are complex times for education reform, and we must work together to ensure we are addressing the needs of our students throughout the state.

With Respect,  
Deirdre Pilch

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