**Building on last year’s success- Part 1**

Though you might not hear it through the grumbling, Oakland schools had a pretty darn good year last year. To recap, OUSD signed a strong multi-year agreement with labor, begun to address the most challenged schools, utilized data in a more robust and public way, hired a strong and visionary superintendent, expanded learning time, and brought significantly more resources to the schools. More importantly, these actions are showing some initial signs of success with strong data from 3rd grade reading scores, that not only show overall improvements, but also subgroup growth among our historically underperforming students. Again, if you just listened to some of the criticism you would think things were terrible and getting worse, but let’s look at what happened, rather than what is screamed the loudest or most often, and while still imperfect, things are getting better.

**OUSD negotiated a well-deserved and unprecedented double digit raise** for school staff, tying future raises to revenue increases. This was done without a strike and really without too much rancor or blood spilt. And the District is looking at partnering around teacher housing, another smart and proactive move, to make Oakland a sustainable place for teachers. Staff are the backbone of the schools and we need to make Oakland an attractive place to stay and work for top staff.

**Action has begun around improving Oakland’s most challenged school communities**, with a more thoughtful approach analyzing school challenges within the context of tk-12 continuums situated within specific communities. So just focusing on the troubling results from the large Intensive Support high schools, Mac, Fremont, and Castlemont, misses the bigger issues that include both what happened in the student’s previous 9 years, as well as the out of school challenges that students are facing that interfere with their ability to learn in school. Smartly, the reform initiative and the school communities themselves are looking at this issue more comprehensively and trying to address it. And while I personally think that the schools need a longer runway, and more external resources and support, what we have is a move in the right direction, if we can support these communities and sustain the improvements.

**Using community data to better plan schools and school reforms**. OUSD’s [Strategic Regional Analysis](http://www.ousd.org/Page/12781) (SRA) has deliberately included crucial context data (like environmental stress factors) into its planning, and is attempting to address these challenges within a cradle to college/career continuum, and to proactively plan for more responsive schools and communities. For the first time in Oakland, I have seen the deliberate and public use of data to structure community conversations and doing those out at schools. And again, while this may not have been perfect, the first step in communities really owning their schools and improving them is in understanding what is happening. So again I have to applaud OUSD on getting out and doing this, despite some of the roll out challenges.

**Hiring a visionary leader and building a leadership team**. Experienced superintendents who can relate to a community like Oakland are rare, we did well to hire Superintindent Wilson, and should work to create an ecology that supports and keeps him while holding him accountable. Though for some reason there has been some acutely vitriolic rhetoric highlighted in this NAACP [letter](https://www.facebook.com/118708091512086/photos/a.477554558960769.1073741825.118708091512086/775159385866950/?type=1&theater), and intensely personal attacks. One can guess as to the reasons..., but that’s for another day.

**Expanding learning time and Pre-k-** Many of our students need more time in high quality engaging programs to catch up and/or excel. The availability of Pre-K programs, summer programs and internships has grown exponentially over the last couple of years, providing crucial social and academic supports for students and giving them the opportunity to succeed. There is an increasing partnership with foundations, the City, and the District, creating strategic and aligned ways of supporting students and families.

Early results on reading scores are promising. While we won’t be able to compare state tests because the test itself changed, on one measure, The Scholastic Reading Inventory, which is given to all OUSD 3rd graders there is very good news. To quote from the Oakland Reads Network, “(t)his year, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores for spring assessments showed a nearly 7 percentage point increase in proficiency for third grade students, with African American students achieving the most gains with an almost 10 percentage point improvement. For the first time in years of stagnation and decline, we can show that the arrow is finally moving in the right direction.”

So let’s take some time to celebrate some of these successes, turn down the rhetoric some, and see how we can work together to sustain our progress Time’s up. Lots of work still to do.