

Q Corner...The Return of CMSD Doublespeak

First and foremost I want to thank all CTU members, who have been incredible in showing support for our members at Investment Schools. With as great as that support has been, a huge shout out has to go to our members at these schools who remain strong and united, and continue to do what they do best--educate Cleveland's children, every day with passion and commitment.

Actually, we all need to quit using the CMSD term Investment Schools and call them by what the state law refers to them as...Corrective Action Schools. In fact, using the term "investment" is little more than doublespeak. Webster's dictionary defines doublespeak with these words: evasive, ambiguous, high-flown language intended to deceive or confuse. In his bestselling book *Doublespeak*, William Lutz notes that doublespeak is not an accident or a "slip of the tongue." Instead, it is a deliberate, calculated misuse of language. Between the Corrective Action Plans that were presented to schools yesterday and CEO Gordon's confusing letter attempting to divide CTU members, much of the language used by the district is little more than doublespeak.

While I won't critique his letter (distributed to staffs at meetings held yesterday to go over the new Corrective Action Plans), I want to address a couple key items that have infuriated many CTU members. To state, "***The Commitment Letters previously signed by our Investment School educators are not now and never have been legally binding documents***" and, "***there is no plan in any of our Investment Schools to request Commitment Letters, for even ceremonious purposes this year,***" is doublespeak at its best. Phase I commitment letters start out with, "***All staff in Phase I Investment Schools must review and sign this agreement to re-commit to their current schools OR to voluntarily transfer into other Investment Schools, thus demonstrating their dedication to the school transformation process.***" These signed letters did protect teachers and paraprofessionals from Necessary Transfer (the district did follow this term of the commitment letter). These signed letters were used as a template of things that teachers, paraprofessionals, and other members were expected to do as a part of this school. The letters also maintained the right to transfer a teacher, paraprofessional, or other member for not meeting the commitments in the letter. So, the CEO says the letters are not legally binding but then creates new letters, takes out the page where a person would sign, and says if you do not do these things you will be disciplined. Does that make the new CAP non-binding? This is either a deliberate, calculated misuse of the language in the original letter or a deliberate, calculated misuse of the language in CEO Gordon's explanation. It's doublespeak one way or another.

The other statement that jumps out in CEO Gordon's letter is: "***To be clear, every Corrective Action Plan... was drafted to a large extent based on thoughtful and meaningful feedback provided by:***

Strategic School Design Teams, including educators, parents, community members and union reps at each school."

This truly left members especially Chapter Chairs, shaking their heads in disbelief. How could the CEO imply that there was a Design Committee that met with educators and our Chairs, a committee that was making recommendations about the next steps and future of their school, when it did not exist? I kept re-reading that sentence about the Strategic School Design Team and then it dawned on me – the Strategic School Design Team is the name that the district gave team that worked on the school budget this year. Working with the school budget is not the same as providing meaningful feedback for this Action Plan. Union Chairs are not required to be on the budget team, and I do not know of any schools (there could be some) that have parents and community members on the team. This is team that talks about allocations being reduced due to a decreased budget or which allocations to increase due to a gain in funding. This is gross doublespeak. So, the CEO was either referring to the budget team, or maybe he thinks there is a Strategic Design Team that met and gave specific recommendations to him for the Corrective Action Plans. Show me the names of the people, an agenda, and the recommendations that they made. **THERE WAS NO THOUGHTFUL AND MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK GIVEN – BECAUSE IT WAS NEVER ASKED FOR.** Additionally, CEO Gordon's sentence implies that somehow CTU members were involved in drafting a document that is focused on how to diminish, demoralize, and punish teachers, paraprofessionals, and other CTU members. This is

clearly an attempt to confuse and deceive. This is DOUBLESPEAK and everyone that reads his letter needs to know it.

At the beginning of our Collective Bargaining Agreement book, there is a joint statement that was signed by CEO Eric Gordon and me. It states in part:

“...more will be accomplished for our students if our Collective Bargaining Agreement and our collective efforts to implement that Agreement are focused on strengthening our labor-management relationship... Our greatest success will not be found in the District’s offices or the CTU’s headquarters, but in the labor-management relationships in our schools and departments that turn the elements of this document into success for students.”

I think of this positive statement whenever I open the agreement book. But the reality is the current mentality we face on an almost daily basis from CMSD leaders is a total contradiction of that noble statement.

As we end year two of the Cleveland Plan, those words seem to ring hollow in many dealings CTU has had with the District. You need not look much further to understand that this is part of the reason our **upcoming negotiations will be brutal.**

I will have more for you on the actions that the CTU will be taking and the actions that we will ask you to join us in as we continue to stand together with our brothers and sisters in Corrective Action Schools. CTU – we are not done.

PLEASE JOIN YOUR CTU BROTHERS AND SISTERS AT THE NEXT CMSD SCHOOL BOARD MEETING, TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2015 AT 6:30 P.M. AT JAMES FORD RHODES HIGH SCHOOL!

In Union,

David