

Education Summit opening remarks

Seattle Mayor Edward B. Murray

April 30, 2016

Thank you, Ron, for the introduction

Thank you Principal Ted Howard, Superintendent Dr. Larry Nyland, School Board President Betty Patu, and School Board members for hosting us here at Garfield High School.

Thank you to all the elected officials, including Seattle City Council President, Bruce Harrell, a proud Bulldog, who have joined us today.

And a thank you to all who are here today for your commitment, time and attention.

We can all agree that our school district is made up of some incredible schools, with extremely inspiring stories among students, parents and teachers. Which is why I especially want to thank the students, parents and teachers who are here with us today – you are the reason we have all come together for this Summit.

Our City government's first big commitment to our schools came out of the last Education Summit under Mayor Norm Rice in the form of the Families & Education levy.

Last year, we made another major commitment by forming the Department of Education & Early Learning and launching the Seattle Preschool Program.

Since I came into office the central themes of my administration have been equity and affordability, and the central task of my administration has been confronting the massive and growing problem of income inequality.

In my first year, we began our effort to increase the minimum wage.

In my second year, we began to address our housing affordability crisis.

These are major, nation-leading efforts. They were made possible through collaboration and compromise. And they remain ongoing.

But, alone, they are not enough.

Since the Common School movement of the 1850s and on through the Brown vs the Board of Education decision in the 1950s, Americans have understood education to be the great equalizer, the means by which all kids can have the chance to improve their prospects in life, no matter their starting point.

But reality today tells a different story.

In his book 'Our Kids', Robert Putnam writes that "inequality in the United States increasingly operates *through education*."

Wealthy and poor children are increasingly growing up in separate and unequal worlds, a segregation of class and race that leads to class-based and race-based segregation of schools.

It is a self-reinforcing cycle: Poor outcomes in school contribute to more poverty, and poverty contributes to more poor outcomes in school.

And unfortunately, a recent study found that almost half of American public school students now live in low-income households – the first time we have reached this level in 50 years.

This is a national problem. And it is unacceptable.

While this problem may be a national one, it is felt as acutely in Seattle as it is anywhere else.

Which is why the great equity challenge in my administration's third year is education – and, of course, it is why we are all here today.

The goal for our city must be to make our public schools places where economic and racial disparities are narrowed – not places where these disparities are perpetuated or made worse.

Today, we must begin by acknowledging that, for all the attention to equity by Seattle's progressives, for decades we have failed to change the outcomes for too many poor students and students of color, depriving them of the opportunity to achieve excellence.

We have to admit this fact, or ideology will prevent us from moving forward.

We have to admit that too many of our students are not getting the education they deserve, and the responsibility lies with the adults.

Let's take a closer look at these disparities.

In Seattle Public Schools, students of color meet 3rd grade reading standards at a rate 31 percent lower than White students.

They are suspended or expelled at three times the rate of their White peers in grades 6 through 12.

They graduate on-time at a rate 24 percent lower than White students. Drilling deeper, 43 percent of African American and Latino students do not graduate on-time or at all.

Making matters even more difficult, the student population and the population of the city do not resemble one another.

In the city as a whole, a majority of our school-age children are White. Yet in Seattle Public Schools, a majority of students are children of color.

In fact, a third of all White students in Seattle are enrolled in private school, while a third of all students of color attend a high-poverty school.

In the city as a whole, 27 percent of school-age children qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. In Seattle Public Schools, 40 percent of students do.

I highlight these statistics not to point the finger at the school district: These are all our students and they are more than these statistics. And we are *all* responsible for the disparities in success, particularly between students of color and white students.

We must *all* own these outcomes.

Addressing these disparities in outcomes and ensuring excellence is what this Summit is all about.

In addition, the homelessness crisis that is gripping this city and this nation is also affecting Seattle Public Schools, where over 2,900 students are homeless. Half of

whom are African American, compared to a city population of 8 percent. And a quarter of whom are Latino, compared to a city population of 7 percent.

And in the last year alone, on any given night, there were at least 66 children with no shelter, attending our public schools.

Given the wealth in our city, this is unacceptable. I call upon all those with resources to partner with the City and the District to ensure that by the end of this year, the number of students who are sleeping on our streets is zero.

How do we take on our many challenges?

How do we ensure that *all* students have safe, supportive environments? That all students have robust opportunities to achieve? And that all students can pursue the path they choose, whether a job or college?

This is going to require us to engage in a conversation where the answers will be difficult and the conversation itself will make us uncomfortable.

For example, how will we support schools dealing with the effects of poverty, violence, drugs, disorder, unstable homes and other trauma?

How will we account for the fact that the social and emotional health of children and their families is as essential to their learning as anything that takes place in a classroom?

These are some of the challenges and the answers are not going to be easy. But, as I have said, we simply cannot accept business as usual.

We can and we must transcend the school reform wars, and move beyond the same tired place where the battles between philanthropy, business, unions, and school districts are failing students who are already being left behind.

The fact is, while public education is the bedrock of democracy, the democratic process is too often ignored when it comes to repairing our schools.

We *can* model the way forward democratically. Just as we are doing with the minimum wage and with affordable housing, we can take education to the next level collaboratively.

That requires us, first, to listen...

...listen to teachers...

...listen to parents...

...listen to students...

....and listen to each other.

During our community conversations over the last several weeks, I heard from a number of students struggling under incredibly challenging circumstances.

I heard about the pain of race in our schools and the role it plays in their educational experience.

I heard from too many that even in 12th grade, with graduation coming soon, they still had no idea what they will be doing next year.

I heard how, when students ultimately do find a path to success, it is often a teacher or a coach who encourages them, believes in them, and, perhaps most importantly, *helps them believe in themselves*.

We need to listen to their experiences, and we need to learn how we can make sure that all students, no matter the circumstances they are in, can receive similar encouragement and support.

We need to understand how we can support our teachers and ensure *their* success.

We are not going to reach the solution today, of course.

This Education Summit is not the end point. It is the launching point toward a destination that we have not yet determined.

I am not here to tell you what we should do.

My hope is that with this Summit we can begin to unite around a common vision. That instead of the school district, and the city, and philanthropy and the community all pulling in different directions, we embrace a shared, sustainable

vision with measurable outcomes, outcomes that will take time to produce results but that we will commit together to seeing through.

Ultimately, our goal is to create an environment where our public schools are centers of excellence and equity - and where opportunities to achieve are shared by all our students.

Thank you.

Now, we have a special guest in the audience, Mayor Norm Rice.

It was Norm Rice's Education Summit twenty-six years ago that was the inspiration for today's gathering. Please join me in welcoming Mayor Rice to the podium.

[Mayor Rice speaks]

Thank you Norm.

Next I want to introduce a tremendous leader who, throughout his career, has exemplified what this Summit is all about: pursuing excellence and equity in education.

Whether as a teacher, an assistant principal in Texas, or principal at Rainier Beach High School, Dwane Chappelle has always believed in setting high expectations for his students.

As my new Director of the City's Department of Education and Early Learning, he's brought that same unwavering philosophy to the Department.

He is the City's lead on education and early learning issues, and my lead in developing and implementing recommendations that will come out of today.

Please join me in welcoming Dwane Chappelle