



The time has come to shift

The time is now to shift! Good morning, everyone! Antonique Martin—I'm going to invite you back on stage with me.

<Share Antonique's story>

We need to create the conditions for every student to overcome barriers and be successful!

I am so glad that all of you have taken the time to be here today. I know that in your busy schedules, time is one of your most precious assets. To spend your time concerned with the future of our public schools and the children we serve is a tremendous investment by you that is deeply appreciated by all. I hope that the time we have together today will help us begin to build a collective voice that will resonate with clarity and commitment across our classrooms and community. That clear and unified voice will propel Minneapolis Public Schools to meet the challenges of today as well as our shared and rapidly changing future.

Together, we can and must reshape the educational experience of our students at Minneapolis Public Schools and ensure our vision of preparing every child for college, career and life.

I intend to provide you, our students and families, our employees and our community with two clear insights today:

1. Our current reality, assets and opportunities, and
2. A call to real partnership to meet our promise, our vision and our mission as a critical public institution in this fine city of Minneapolis, with its rich and diverse communities that make it such a special and unique place to live, work and learn.

It's time to get off the dime, to stop protecting the status quo, to stop being satisfied with poor performance, to stop blaming others and get focused, with partnership and innovation, to finally solve the riddle of Minneapolis Public Schools... Why aren't all children learning?

I am, at the heart, a teacher. Children are my passion, teaching is my profession and every student excelling is my heart's goal. This is why I get up in the morning, day after day – and many times, this is why I am up at 3 a.m.

So yes, I need more sleep.

I am not a politician, nor a power player, nor a bureaucrat. I am a teacher.

For being this, I am proud and humbled. And my time as a teacher and principal was a time of some of my best work, deepest learning and most enduring relationships.

Yet even in those days, I was confronted and perplexed by an educational system and culture of power over partnership, politics over performance and adult privilege over student results.

Our stagnant performance has been grounded in two fundamentally different approaches over these years, either:

- Bottom-up, school free agency, with little accountability and discipline, or
- Top-down, power-based, “Central Office has the answers and schools need to comply,” again, with little accountability and discipline

Neither way worked. We have made incredible investments with little return.

This is irresponsible.

Our students who relied on us the most flowed through an educational system with little improvement, little real change and status quo over student learning.

This is unacceptable.

So today we find ourselves with performance that is a combination of unacceptable results and pockets of success. Too many of our children, particularly those of color, either drop out before graduation or graduate unprepared for life in today's economy. Saying we care about the success of all students matters little if too few of them actually succeed.

An African American student who lives in poverty and attends Minneapolis Public Schools:

- Is six times as likely as a white student to be suspended for at least one day
- Is absent for almost a week more per year
- Is only half as likely to become proficient or advanced in reading and math, and is about half as likely to graduate from high school as a white student
- That same student is also three times more likely to drop out – and for a Latino student, the rate is five times that of a white student.

We know the data too well. We admire the problem too much. We blame others too easily.

It is the adults, all of us, who share the blame and the burden. For a minute I want to take you to church. The minister would tell you, “Turn to your neighbor on the left and say neighbor, it is us.” And if you're at the end of a row, say to yourself, “it's me.”

Our students and families also hold accountability for their learning and success.

It is time for Minneapolis to stop the well-known, worn-out and politically popular rhetoric and start some “straight talk” with each other and real work, together. Our teachers are at the core of our work and we can't cast them as “villains” in our current reality.

General Omar Bradley said, “Teachers are the real soldiers of Democracy. Others can defend it, but only teachers can make it work.” Day after day, our teachers stand on the frontline, before the thousands of children they inspire each day and bring learning to life. MPS has remarkable teachers who are getting results for students—and now, we need every student experiencing effective teachers in their classrooms, making this great democracy work in their favor.

We must engage in a new approach and sound practice of partnership to become the architects and builders of an excellent educational experience for every child.

None of us is smart enough working in isolation, yet together we can be wise enough to take action to ensure that all children equitably share in the gift of a high-quality educational experience in our schools.

We must not let time run out for another generation of Minneapolis students.

And let's be honest. Low performing charter schools are not the answer. Yes, we are already embracing the work of the handful of high-performing charter schools that are getting results for students, particularly black and brown students. Standout charter programs like Hiawatha Leadership Academies and Mastery School play a vital role in our work. They are modeling the performance that will soon be our norm.

MPS will be the best choice and the favored choice by families in Minneapolis within five years. And we will increase our market share by increasing our performance and our responsiveness to the needs of our students and families. We have been guided over the past few years by a strategic plan, but implementation has been challenging and

taken longer than we planned. We have made pockets of improvement, but overall we have not moved our performance enough.

I am not satisfied. Our school board is not satisfied. Many of our leaders, teachers and staff are not satisfied. Yet some adults in our system are satisfied with the status quo – and they will need to change or they will need to leave. It is their choice.

Rev. Martin Luther King was an inspirational leader for whom being stuck in the present wasn't good enough. He was a man of vision who saw the societal imperative to take positive action to shape a brighter future. He told us, "We must use time creatively, and forever realize that time is always the hope to do great things."

The Minneapolis Public Schools community cannot waste another minute of our children's time. We are stewards of their young lives for over 13 years. We must use that time wisely. Now is not the time for more talk; it is the time for action.

I believe we will ultimately demonstrate results – not just rhetoric – if we continue to concentrate and deliver on four big things:

First: Constancy of Purpose

We will all come and go, but our students will remain. Our goal is to make sure all students stay with us through graduation and leave us with the knowledge and skills to be ready for college or careers without remediation courses. This means high standards for all, not just some. If our students succeed after they leave Minneapolis Public Schools, we have succeeded.

Second: A diverse workforce with great teaching and strong school leadership

We have a teaching corps that needs to get stronger. We need every teacher in every school to hold high expectations and a strong belief in their own capacity as teachers—and that of their students as lifelong learners, regardless of their backgrounds and abilities.

We strengthen teaching through rigorous evaluation that recognizes performance and drives accountability. This is why I will continue to prioritize Focused Instruction and teacher evaluation in our work. Our teachers need the tools, space and support to adjust and improve instructional practice based on student learning needs. Focused Instruction gives teachers a framework for planning quality instruction and monitoring student learning. Teacher evaluation defines what effective instruction looks like and provides teachers feedback on their practice. Taken together, these bodies of work comprise our commitment to continuous improvement in the classroom.

But even the best teachers need strong leadership in the schools to help harness their abilities and capture their talents. A school without strong leadership is like a ship without a captain – lacking direction and wavering off course. We are focused on strengthening the principal pipeline, holding current principals accountable for performance and providing better professional development to help them transition from building managers to instructional leaders.

This year we created the Aspiring Transformational Principal Academy to attract visionary, passionate leaders who are eager to assume principal roles and dramatically increase outcomes and opportunities for MPS students, families and schools.

And it is critical that our teaching and leadership teams reflect our students, which is why we are developing an aggressive human capital strategy that recruits and retains a diverse instructional staff that mirrors the diversity of our student body.

This is not just a concept.

<Story on Homeroom with Superintendent Johnson visit to Sheridan>

Our youth must see themselves reflected in the adults who are working with them on a daily basis. Recruiting, training and retaining a diverse, culturally competent staff is essential to closing the opportunity gap. We need more quality teachers and staff members who look like the students they serve.

Third: Good Choices

Minneapolis has a long history of providing families with choices in the schools their children attend. We will make sure they have only good choices. Good choices, a variety of choices, with clear focus and alignment to our shared purpose and mission. But we will no longer confuse program design with performance. Our programs work or they don't. And we will not keep programs that are not working for our students and families.

And finally: Strong Partnerships

Prime Minister Winston Churchill once said, "If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find we have lost the future." We cannot afford to lose the future for another generation of Minneapolis children. Now is not the time to quarrel. Now is the time to find common ground. More unites us than divides us in this worthy work.

These goals can be achieved if we continue to work in partnership with our employee organizations to unlock the human and fiscal resources in our contracts. We need to strip away outdated restrictions and confining practices that create stumbling blocks for real transformation so we can release the full potential of our exemplary teaching staff and all our employees.

People often say that children are our future. But let's be clear: their futures are shaped by the decisions we make and the actions we take. It's time to make things happen.

The Board of Education and I agree that it is time to shift...and these will be the cornerstones of our position heading into contract talks with our employee unions this year...

It's time to shift...

To have an effective teacher with high-caliber skills in every classroom in every school...

MPS has some of the best and brightest teachers doing amazing work with students every day. We want to ensure that every student has this opportunity for a high quality experience. We want to improve our ability to hire and retain the best teachers at each school and be able to make offers to the best candidates sooner. We want to align the process for supporting all teachers to improve in their profession and create incentives to serve in hard to fill license areas and schools. We want to collaborate with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers on a "grow your own" program for critical need staffing areas.

It's time to shift...

To expand the learning day and change the allocation of our instructional time to allow more time for students who need it the most and more time for educators to collaborate...

We added four instructional days to the school year, but many of our students need even more time in the classroom. We want to create a guiding coalition with teachers and union leaders to collaborate around ways to provide more time in the work day for teachers to collaborate and get better results for students. We want to explore how we can best use summer programming to support students who need more time and challenge those who are excelling. We want our schools to become community hubs that are open to learners of all ages and whose lives call for educational opportunities beyond the school day.

It's time to shift...

To build career ladders and promote teacher leadership...

We want our teachers to seek leadership opportunities in our schools that drive them to better serve students. We want to create defined teacher leadership ladders with stipends for taking on school leadership roles that focus on student achievement. We want all teacher professional development opportunities to focus on better outcomes for students.

It's time to shift...

To promote fiscal responsibility with sustainable compensation and staffing structures...

We want to be good stewards of our resources. We have unlimited needs, but we must balance these needs while also balancing our budget. We want to pay our employees fairly and live within our means, not draw from our reserves. We want to eliminate compensation costs that don't support student learning and align them with our strategic goals that will get results for students.

We need all of our employee unions at our side, leading a movement to change the way we do business. We cannot drive into the future looking in the rearview mirror. I am confident that our teachers will answer this call to action to put the needs of students first. I am confident that people of good will can forge common interest into collective action to focus on the needs of students MORE than the needs of adults.

Accelerating the strategic plan and negotiating with our teachers are two shifts that we must make that I believe will make a much needed difference for students. But the plan and the people alone are not going to get us the results students deserve as quickly as our city needs them.

Today, I am announcing what I believe will be a significant, real and challenging shift for our schools and students:

It's time to shift...

To create an innovative partnership zone where school teams exchange autonomy for accountability, governed by performance contracts with clear standards of effective school performance...

We want to work with our principals and teacher unions to establish a partnership zone in which 20-30 percent of our schools, including our high priority and most struggling schools in the city, will have the opportunity to shift into a new relationship with the central office based on partnership, achievement, autonomy and accountability. To accomplish this, we need to work together to increase flexibility around providing more time for schools that need it the most. In these schools, we want to work together to set aside old ways of thinking, program and practices that no longer add value and outdated contract provisions in areas such as staffing and instructional time. In these schools, the teachers and principals would be freed from many central office or contract rules so they can build school teams, innovate and deliver what students need at that site.

This approach will take partnership at every level of our school district and community: board and administration, central office and union, teachers and principals, schools and families, businesses and partners.

We will invite the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers to partner to secure needed resources for schools in the partnership zone.

We will commit to partner with principals, teachers, other MPS staff members and their unions to establish schools in the partnership zone that will use the 2013-14 school year for identification of schools and capacity building, 2014-2015 to begin performance contract implementation, and 2015-2016 to begin scaling up the opportunity across MPS schools.

We will seek to partner with our businesses and community for extended and wrap-around services and will commit our own funds to invest in this shift in our strategic plan.

We are committing to a fundamental change in MPS culture, programs, preferences and practices. Here is what schools will have ownership of in the partnership zone:

Schools will own critical decisions, like hiring the people that best match the needs of students and ensuring that students and staff members have the time they need in the school day and school year to support improved academic outcomes for students. And there will be clear and transparent accountability for these choices and consequences. Partnership, achievement, autonomy and accountability are at the center of this approach. The performance management contract between the schools and the central office will focus on five key areas: college, career and core life skills; instructional processes; student engagement and ownership of learning; family and community engagement; and financial and legal performance.

This shift begins now with this partnership approach to our work. The heavy lifting begins at the top, with me and my committed leadership team, a focusing of resources on teaching and learning and ownership of decision-making and responsibility at the school level. This will require the central office to SHIFT our own practices to better support and serve schools and students in the partnership zone.

How can we expect our teachers and staff to shift to learn a new way of working, if we ourselves do not shift?...if I do not ask my leadership team to shift, the school board to shift, union leadership to shift and even our partners to shift, alongside our teachers?

We cannot, in good conscience, ask teachers and staff to shift and change, if we are not willing to do so first.

My ask of you today is for each and every one of you here to take a seat at the MPS table and partner with us in the shift we are about to take.

The clock is ticking. Henry Ford observed, “Most people get ahead during the time that others waste.” We cannot afford to waste another minute or school year. Now is the time to redesign our school district – adding what it takes to accelerate student achievement and discard functions that get in the way of real growth and improvement.

We cannot achieve these shifts if we simply do things right. We must also do the right things to get the results we care about. But we cannot wait for things to be perfect to act. The world will not wait; our students cannot wait. This is urgent work.

I ask that leaders of good will and determination inside our schools and within our community join us in pursuing this vision of success.

I invite the office of the mayor to partnership. I invite our families and communities to partnership. I invite our key civic and community partners to partnership. I invite our high quality charter schools to partnership. I invite our businesses and non-profits to partnership. And most importantly, I invite our teachers to partnership. I promise we will partner differently and better with you for our children. I ask that you commit to learn and change with us for the same.

Commit now so this teacher at heart, and the teacher in all of us, can rewrite the Minneapolis story together.

We must partner in this shift because Antonique Martin from Patrick Henry High could very well be a future President of the United States, and her peer Shameelah Abdullah from South High may discover the cure for cancer, and William Brown from Edison High could find the solution to a problem we don't even know exists yet.

And because each and every child who puts their own future in our hands deserves the opportunity to reach his or her full potential –the opportunity to fulfill the American Dream, and the opportunity to lead this world to greater heights.

Together... we must shift!

Thank you!

Now, I'd like to ask the MPS students who are here today to join me on stage to share their goals and dreams!