

INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that we present the 2002 Citizens Panel for a Community Progress Report on Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. This past year has truly been an exciting one, to say the least, for our public school system and our community. It was a year marked by new and aggressive leadership; clear and dramatic mandates from our Board of Education; bold promises; significant organizational, programmatic, and curricular changes; and the natural outgrowth of questions, unrest, and concerns that arise whenever an established institution is challenged with major transformation. On the one hand, a lot has taken place for our panel to examine and consider; on the other, we have had the added challenge of sorting and making sense out of a wide array of changes and initiatives in order to determine their overall effect on systemic progress.

The work of the Citizens Panel for a Community Report is essential. While our school system has a variety of information and data at its disposal that can be used to assess success and performance, the report we generate is truly unique and of singular value. Ours is a studied report delivered by passionate, committed citizens dedicated to public education. It is a report that, while dependent on hard data and information for its conclusions and recommendations, truly represents the thinking and varied voices of our community. Our panel fully understands that our community and its citizens rely on the success of our public school system and that Nashvillians rightfully deserve nothing less than improved performance and steady, consistent growth from our public school system. However, our panel also recognizes that making significant improvements in a large, diverse urban school system such as ours represents a daunting challenge that cannot possibly be met overnight.

Given this daunting challenge, this year's panel adopted the theme, "**The Journey Begins.**" Dr. Garcia accepted a clear mandate from our Board of Education to facilitate the improvement of instruction and to increase test scores. After just a year on the job, he has already been the catalyst for many changes that have brought hope to many that improvement is, indeed, possible. He joined our community pledging change and improvement, but acknowledged that while some improvement would be noted immediately, significant, sustained improvement would take time. Accordingly, Dr. Garcia made a multi-year commitment to remain on the job. The charge of this year's Citizens Panel Progress Report was to evaluate the first year in what will hopefully be an exciting and successful tenure for him. Given that not enough time has evolved for system-wide results to be measured, some of this year's report will attend to process in addition to results. In the years that follow, our panel will carefully watch with interest, and a critical eye, the success generated in each of future legs of this journey. We accept the reality that improvement and change are incremental, that reasonable time needs to be attached to community hopes and expectations, and that change adds pressure and stress to those in the trenches who implement it. While this may be true, however, we have identified recommendations and issues that we believe require immediate attention.

I feel fortunate to have worked this year with an outstanding, dedicated group of Nashville citizens, each committed to the improvement and success of our public school system. Serving as a member of the Citizens Panel for a Community Report is not an easy task. It takes a great deal of time and collaboration to generate a fair and reasoned report. Our panel has met weekly since the start of the school year to gather, discuss, and assess information that could lend to our work. I am extremely grateful to each of our members for their dedication to task and their unwavering commitment to public education. I am also very appreciative of the support, consultation, and assistance we received from our two panel advisors - Dr. LaVoneia Steele, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and Ms. Vesia Wilson-Hawkins from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not express my sincere appreciation to Avi Poster who so passionately and diligently executed this progress report.

Ted Helm

Chair, 2002 Citizens Panel