

Kriner Cash—Miracle Worker?

Reform Superintendent is New Leader of Buffalo Schools.

Headlined as a “can do” administrator, Dr. Kriner Cash comes to Buffalo by way of Memphis, TN. During his time in Memphis, the District’s graduation rate rose to 72.6%. He secured a Gates Grant for \$90m for teacher-effectiveness initiatives. He was also the Superintendent in Martha’s Vineyard, Chief of Accountability in Miami-Dade, Dean of the Howard University School of Education and professor and Department Chair at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. It was during his time in Florida, that he got to know Mary Ellen Elia, our NYS Commissioner of Education. When Buffalo’s search for a Superintendent bogged down, it was the Commissioner who recommended Dr. Cash for the position. After being interviewed by the Board of Education to generally good reviews, Dr. Cash was introduced to the City at a public meeting. A cross section of the community was represented there and Dr. Cash won them over with his track record and passionate attitude toward children.

Dr. Cash has a huge job. There are 25 receivership schools in the District, the Board of Education is divided along racial lines and often replaces civil discourse with personal attacks leaving the real issues going unattended in the conflict. There has been no teacher or administrator contract for 11 years. Parent engagement is illusive. Outreach efforts have largely come up lacking. There are organized parent political groups but minimal general parent participation. The BCSA will be watching closely to see how Dr. Cash wields his receivership power without destroying important relationships with teachers and administrators.

It appears that Dr. Cash recognizes the importance of principals and administrators by having general and individual talks with them. He acknowledges the power of the unions and has pledged to “reboot” the system with a five-year goal of a 100 percent graduation rate with 80 percent of the students meeting the State standards. For his efforts, he receives a salary of \$275,000 annually.

Buffalo administrators have worked in a cloud of uncertainty for many years. They have been responsive to changing superintendents, changing commissioners, changing rules and a contentious Board. They have done so without a contract. Everyone acknowledges that vast student achievement gains must be made. Let’s also acknowledge that those students who have succeeded in the uncertain years have done so because of the steadfastness of administrators who buffered the rhetoric and kept their focus on the students in their care. Administrators can be far more effective if Dr. Cash can create an atmosphere of trust and stability. The obstacles are enormous. In a city that is enjoying a renaissance, all eyes are on Dr. Cash—miracle worker?