April 2, 2018

Dear Mr. Bowman,

Let me begin by stating firmly and without equivocation what a privilege and honor it has been to serve the eastern New Orleans community, especially the Michoud/Village de L'est area, as a teacher, Assistant Principal, Interim Principal, Principal, and currently as CEO of Einstein Charter Schools over the past 30 years.

As Chief Executive Officer of the Einstein Charter Schools Group, I have worked alongside our incredible staff, parents, and community as we successfully operated four previously historically failing schools. Einstein provided this otherwise-neglected community with consistently high-quality, open-admissions charter schools. The Michoud community has had, for the first time in over thirty years, high-performing schools, including Reed High School, to serve the local population.

The group effort to operate these schools has focused on the needs of our children; these students' needs have been put before all other concerns so that this culturally rich and diverse population could benefit from a uniquely-tailored academic program to achieve success. Einstein Charter Schools have educated students who have become heart surgeons, pharmacists, engineers, and citizens in many other areas and occupations for more than 10 years.

I am extremely proud.

I count many student and staff successes and achievements during my tenure at Einstein Charter Schools.

Einstein students were recognized by the national organization of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color for bridging the gap in student achievement – a recognition not received by any other Orleans Parish Public School that I am aware. Our students were also recognized by the United States Department of Education for their achievements and was designated as a High Quality Charter School.

We were the only Louisiana charter to receive a $5 million replication grant to expand our program, recognizing our success teaching children in an underserved area.

I strongly believe that the success of Einstein Charter Schools is due to our priorities. Above all else, we prioritize funding the necessary programs for our children to reach their full academic potential while adhering to all federal mandates, state and local laws and policies.

I tender my resignation, effective immediately, due to my belief that the Orleans Parish School Board and Administration are pressuring Einstein's Board to fund private transportation services at the expense of our academic programs. Einstein serves 1400 plus students at four campuses. The costs associated with educating ELL, Special Education, High Poverty, and At-Risk students are high. Under my leadership, Einstein has made it a priority to commit funding to serve these students. I believe that this misinterpretation of OPSB transportation requirements along with the misunderstanding of our fund balance will fail our students by significantly reducing the funding our educational program requires.

Einstein fills a vacuum in the community by addressing the academic and extracurricular needs of students in order to bring equity into a community that has historically suffered with sub-par schools and recreational activities. The Michoud Community, although neglected by OPSB by previously providing subpar schools and most city services since the 1980s, is a strong community. Immigrants from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon settled in the Michoud community and with their African American neighbors built a self-contained commercial and residential area east of I-510. They have welcomed all immigrants, and families of all races, beliefs and color. The hub of this community is Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, which supports Einstein because Einstein is the only educational organization that has provided high quality, free public charter schools for the children of their community.

It is my hope that my predecessors and Einstein Board of Directors prioritize these issues that I've outlined above, while also the serious, long-standing problems that plague our sites. One such is the asbestos in the Village de L'est facility now sitting vacant and deteriorating going on for a third year. Students attending Village de L'est were forced to move into modulars which were filled with mold, rotting wood, past their life expectancy, and which Einstein had to demand remediation. A second issue demanding immediate attention is that LDOE and OPSB translate State-mandated tests or provide translators for the Vietnamese-speaking population in our school. OPSB and LDOE currently provide the State-mandated tests in English and Spanish but NOT in Vietnamese, causing a major inequity in our system.

I am proud of all that Einstein and our community have accomplished. We have consistently proven that, despite any challenges one may face, our students are just as smart or smarter than anyone anywhere, and we make sure they know it. My focus, as CEO of Einstein, was to provide our students a competitive education in a safe, responsible, respectful, caring, and clean school environment. I truly hope that, in the future, Superintendent Lewis spends time meeting with our teachers, staff and students, to observe the great things they are doing at Einstein.

I appreciate all this community did to support my mission to serve our students, as we shared in the joint mission of shaping the next generation. I regretfully submit my resignation effective immediately and hopefully leave Einstein schools to a well-trained team of administrators, teachers and supporters who will carry on the Einstein mission and to adhere to the transition plan that I provided to the Einstein Board of Director's to ensure a seamless transition.

Respectfully,
Shawn Toranto