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Madam chair, board members, families and attendees, thank you for joining us this evening. I'm very happy to be at Fuentes Elementary with all of you.

As Chairwoman Rojas indicated, there are great things underway here and I want to applaud Ms. Tanner and our Fuentes teachers and staff for all of the wonderful work you do every day.

Because of the thoughtfulness and actions of Fuentes' teacher Kimber Bermudez, our school was in the news. It's such an incredible story to share. After having what we've all come to know is a typical conversation for Kimber where she expressed support for and a desire to further help her students and families . . . her seatmates, the whole country - the whole world, responded. The \$500 dollars that perfect strangers gave her to support her students turned into thousands of dollars for Fuentes and a \$300,000 in-kind donation to this school and others around the network. Fuentes was showcased on Good Morning America - something that required the entire school community and our support staff to rally around to surprise our deserving teachers, students and families. It's one of the best examples I've seen in a long time demonstrating exactly what we are capable of when we come together as *Acero Schools* - one community including *all* teachers, *all* staff, *our* administrators and leaders, *our* kids, *our* families - all of us. We are at our best when we come together.

Kimber - if you're here, please stand so that this board and our audience can thank you for all of your efforts.

This hits home right now and is an important reminder for all of us. I'm going to speak directly to what's on everyone's mind. We're in contract negotiations and everyone is feeling it.

So let's talk about what is guiding Acero Schools in this process. We want to:

- Preserve and increase excellent student outcomes;



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- Continue to implement culturally-relevant, high-impact instructional frameworks that leverage individual student strengths;
- Ensure that our educational model appreciates local context and strong family and community partnerships;
- Retain our high-quality teachers and staff and enhance professional opportunities;
- And maintain a safe and secure campus environment.

This philosophy requires a whole student approach to negotiations. This means paying our teacher's a competitive wage. Some have implied that our bargaining team, I, or this board, don't want to pay our teachers and staff competitive wages.

From 2016 to 2018 – the average salary of an Acero Schools teacher increased by 6.7% from \$60,495 to \$65,009.

Yes, this is less than what the average CPS teacher brings home. I want to acknowledge that immediately. It also represents our clear commitment to increasing teacher pay. What we must balance are increases that work within our budget, are equitable and considerate of all colleagues and school priorities.

We aren't the Chicago Public Schools. If we were we'd be closed. A quick glance at their budget makes this clear. The Chicago Public Schools operate with billions of dollars and have the full faith and credit of the City of Chicago to back them up. Unlike CPS, we don't have a rich uncle. Acero Schools operates more like a household, that must budget. We have to save for an emergency, and plan for several different kinds of expenses. We can't put all of our dollars into one bucket – but yes, we want more dollars for all buckets, period. I've talked to our union members in the past and we have agreed – there remains opportunity and willingness to push for full charter school funding equity. Any claim that Acero Schools is funded at a rate that is 8 percent higher than a CPS neighborhood school is antithetical to what we've all known to be true. Funding equity is what we've pushed so hard for. It's why our families have testified in



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favor of it. Our organization has demonstrated this month after month for years. We push this for Acero kids, Acero teachers, Acero staff, Acero families. We do what we do for Acero Schools and *our* communities.

Over the last two years, our network of schools has regained stability and made real and positive traction. I've seen it in all of our schools. I've heard about it from teachers, kids, parents and principals. None of us wants to see that momentum lost. And so we must work together and not give in to cynicism. We have to work together to continue to serve the students we're privileged to serve, even against the demographic winds that are moving people and kids out of our city and our own schools. We want to serve more kids who need us, not less. We want to maintain our identity and what we offer as Acero Schools – we promised that to our families and communities. This means holding on to critical instructional time for our kids, this means having presentations of learning –this demands figuring out how to balance our resources so that we pay teachers a competitive wage but also have funds for other professional staff like office coordinators, instructional coaches, deans of culture and community and support staff who care deeply about our schools, too.

I'm passionate about this. If we had unlimited funds we would happily invest even further in our classrooms so that we can be even more innovative. But in the meantime – I'm proud of what we are, doing more good with what we have, and I believe we can get through this negotiation by working together focused on a single agenda – radically looking out for our kids' needs, and their Acero Schools responsibly.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.