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Dr. Shawn Ginwright's Testimony
Basic Education Funding Commission
September 14, 2023

Good afternoon, members of the Basic Education Funding Commission.

My name is Dr. Shawn Ginwright, and I hold the Jerome T. Murphy Endowed Chair of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I am also the Co-Founder and CEO of Flourish Agenda, a national consulting firm that provides professional development and training to educators focused on trauma and healing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the commission today.

It is perhaps the best of times and the worst of times for Pennsylvania Public Schools. Pennsylvania is showing signs of recovery from the dramatic impact of COVID.

- Rising Graduation Rates: Pennsylvania has witnessed a steady increase in high school graduation rates over the past decade.
- STEM Education Advancements: Schools across Pennsylvania are making remarkable strides in promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education.
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Success: CTE programs in Pennsylvania are thriving, offering students practical skills and pathways to well-paying careers.

However, like many states in this country, Pennsylvania continues to struggle with the pervasive trauma exposure among students, particularly students of color. Traumatic experiences, whether due to violence, poverty, or other adverse circumstances, can have profound and lasting effects on a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. These experiences can hinder their ability to learn, form healthy relationships, and thrive in school.

Nationally, research suggests that approximately 25% of America's children will experience at least one traumatic event by the age of 16.

Black and Latino children and youth are more likely than other groups to have traumatic experiences. It is estimated that nearly half of all students in Pennsylvania have experienced at least one traumatic event by the time they reach adulthood.

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These traumas can range from witnessing domestic violence to living in neighborhoods plagued by crime and poverty. We know from research that there are significant consequences of this trauma on our students' lives and future prospects.

Research has shown that students who have experienced trauma are more likely to struggle academically, exhibit behavioral problems, and have lower attendance rates. These challenges can lead to a cycle of academic underachievement and can severely limit their potential.

As a society, we have an urgent obligation to address the trauma that our students face and provide them with the support they need to heal and succeed.

Healing-centered engagement is a promising approach that supports the well-being of the entire ecosystem that surrounds young people's lives. Based on their unique culture and ethnic identity, healing-centered strategies surround youth, their parents, and their teachers with tools that foster and promote healing well-being.

Investing in healing-centered practices and healing resources for our students is critical and a smart investment in the future of Pennsylvania. Here are a few reasons why this investment is crucial:

- **FIRST:** Unresolved trauma can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Early healing-centered interventions and support can prevent these issues from escalating and improve overall mental health outcomes.
- **SECOND:** Traumatized students often struggle to concentrate, regulate their emotions, and form positive relationships. By providing healing-centered supports, we can help these students overcome these barriers and excel academically.
- **THIRD:** Research has shown a strong correlation between childhood trauma and involvement in the criminal justice system. By addressing trauma early, we can help break the cycle of incarceration and reduce the burden on our justice system.

In order to address this issue effectively, I urge the Basic Education Funding Commission to consider the following:

- **FIRST:** Expand access and participation in healing-centered strategies and programs: Our pilot of Camp Akili, a 4-day healing-centered summer camp, and training 150 teachers in healing-centered practices in the School District of Philadelphia can be a

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model for how Pennsylvania can lead the country in innovative and effective strategies to increase well-being and mental health access.

- **SECOND:** Increase and expand funding for healing-centered training: Allocate funds for comprehensive healing-centered and trauma-informed training for educators, school counselors, and support staff. This training will equip them with the tools to recognize and respond to trauma effectively and promote healing in neighborhoods and schools.

For example, California and other states are exploring how to expand access to Medicaid in order to increase healing opportunities and supports in the state. California is changing who is eligible and who can provide mental health interventions to expand access to Medicaid for community and peer-to-peer mental health interventions.

- **THIRD:** Invest and provide funding for Community Partnerships: Foster partnerships between schools, community organizations, and mental health providers to create a holistic system of support for students.

To conclude, Pennsylvania has the unique opportunity to become the nation's first healing-centered state. This simply means coordinating funding streams, supports, and opportunities for public systems to saturate young people with opportunities to heal and enjoy well-being, a type of well-being that most of us take for granted. By prioritizing healing-centered practices and investing in healing programs, we can forge new ground in supporting our students to reach their full potential and contribute positively to Pennsylvania's future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to make this critical investment in the well-being of our students.