

## Dr. Warren Morgan

2023 State of the Schools Address

As of 11/07/2023

### **Acknowledge the following:**

- I am grateful to have our educators, scholars, parents, and community members here. I do this work in service of and alongside each of you.
- The Honorable Mayor Justin Bibb
- City Council President Blaine Griffin
- County Executive Chris Ronayne
- Board Members: Chair Sara Elaquad, Vice Chair Leah Hudnall, Robert Heard (longest-serving board member and CMSD alum from John Adams), Denise Link, Diana Welch-Howell, Dr. Nigamanth Sridhar, and Robert Briggs
- State and City elected officials
- CTU and all CMSD bargaining units
- Our partners (including our host for today, the City Club/ Dan Moulthrop, who work in partnership with Idea Stream public media to livestream the address, also we're grateful for the consistent support of Cleveland and Gund Foundations)
- My 11<sup>th</sup> grade HS Physics teacher, Mrs. Martha Croll. Thank you for being an incredible teacher, mentor, and friend
- And last but not least, I am so blessed to have my dad, Warren Morgan Sr., in the house. And my mom and sisters are watching. I continue to be grateful for them as my prayer partners and rocks

### **ADDRESS STARTS HERE**

#### **Intensive Listening/Speech Introduction**

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- Today is my 108<sup>th</sup> day as the CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and I could not be more grateful!
- Whenever people ask me how the transition into my role is going, I always answer with three words. “Busy but rewarding.” And I mean it. This is my dream job.
- Since arriving in Cleveland, I have prioritized listening and learning in my first 100-plus days. And believe it or not, the vision for my CMSD listening tour started at a hotel in Indianapolis, and before I officially started.
- An incident took place on July 1, 2023. I had already accepted the CEO position with CMSD and just moved all my belongings out of my home in Indianapolis. It was too late to drive to Cleveland that evening, so I decided to stay at a hotel in Indianapolis for the evening.
- A late-night storm had partially knocked out power. The hotel’s computers were down, and the elevators and room keys were not working. The receptionist escorted each guest to their room and manually unlocked their doors.
- When I walked into the hotel lobby, I witnessed a highly agitated hotel guest. He was a black male from Nigeria. In his despondent state, he was somewhat difficult to understand. But his concern was clear.
- His luggage and wallet were missing from his room. He repeatedly attempted to explain this to the hotel receptionist, a white woman.
- Here’s what happened: when he checked in, the receptionist walked him up to his room. He dropped his luggage in the room. Then he left.

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When he returned to the hotel, the receptionist took him to what they both thought was his room, but everything was missing.

- That was his issue, the receptionist did not take his room complaint seriously.
- His loud insistence only hardened the receptionist's response. She accused him of lying. She called him a con man and eventually, she called the police.
- When the police arrived, two white male officers, it was quickly apparent that they didn't believe the man's story, either. They asked if he had been drinking.
- Knowing how these situations can sometimes escalate dangerously, I stopped being a passive listener and talked with the police and the fellow hotel guest. I shared with the police, "Perhaps this man was taken to the wrong room when he came back to the hotel?"
- But they were not hearing me out either. When I spoke with the man, he told me he was from Nigeria, and this visit was his first time in the United States and Indianapolis for a wedding.
- Finally, after a few minutes, I suggested that he go to the empty room that the receptionist had taken him to earlier and get some rest. He reluctantly took my advice and was escorted back to a room.
- Early the next morning, I asked the same receptionist what happened with the guest from a few hours earlier and her response still bothers me to this day.

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- She said while laughing, “Believe it or not, I had taken him to the wrong room, his luggage was in a different room. He has everything.”
- As I walked away, I shook my head and told the receptionist, “He was trying to tell you that last night and all he wanted was to be heard.”
- When I left Indianapolis for the drive back to Cleveland, a rhetorical question dominated my thoughts: How often do we fail to listen, and at what cost?
- Though the receptionist may have felt the situation ended jokingly, that man was very upset. Since she called the police, that situation could’ve ended badly. The entire situation could have been avoided with empathy and intensive listening.
- In that instant, I committed myself to starting my tenure in Cleveland by listening with deep intention.
- It became my mission to identify a broad range of community stakeholders served by CMSD, who would share their grievances, criticisms, and thoughtful suggestions for how the District can build on current successes.
- Today, I’m pleased to share some of what I’ve heard and learned. The information I gathered – and will continue to gather – will inform and direct the look, feel, operations, and instructional core of the District going forward.

### **LISTENING TOUR AT A GLANCE**

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- To date, I've hosted over 30 listening sessions across Cleveland. The sessions ranged from small, intimate coffee shop conversations to two major Town Hall sessions. Liberally sprinkled in, have been multiple gatherings with diverse groups of community stakeholder groups.
- These groups included representatives of the clergy, refugees, healthcare workers, community development groups, nonprofits, community centers, and representatives of Cleveland's banking, business, and sports. I also met with hundreds of parents, scholars, teachers, paraprofessionals, and CMSD staff.
- To date, I've had face-to-face conversations with nearly 1,000 committed stakeholders. That number does not include the scores of people who reached out to me as I move throughout the community, or the parents who contacted me at my office.
- These are engaged people looking to be heard – just like the man at the Indianapolis hotel.
- My Listening tour was NOT designed for passive listening. During the listening tour events, attendees were asked to respond to several questions that remain at the forefront of my mind:
  - **What is needed to improve the quality of education in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District for our scholars and families?**
  - **How can we partner to accomplish these goals?**
  - **If you were the CEO, what would be your first course of action?**
  - **What should the core values of CMSD be?**

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- To date, we have collected nearly 1,400 responses that we are repurposing into a report that we will soon share with the community on all the feedback received.

### **LISTENING TOUR FEEDBACK**

- I'll briefly share a couple examples of what I've learned from my focus on listening to some of CMSD's: scholars' parents, and educators.
- First, let's talk about parents.
- Safety and security issues are the most pressing concerns on the minds of parents and student caregivers.
- I've heard parents express frustration over what they frequently see as a failure to build effective lines of communication between the schools and CMSD homes.
- That failure in communication often bears responsibility for the security challenges our scholars face at school or on the journey to and from school.
- As one CMSD Parent Ambassador expressed – the solution must be a two-way street. Here's a bit of what that parent shared:

*To be truthful, active involvement can't just happen when our children are acting up. We must stay involved with the child's education when things are going well and when things are going off course.*

*Parents must get to know their teacher and stay active in their education.*

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- During my first 100 days, I met parents who were either ignored or have not been able to resolve their child's issues at a school. This must change. As the district, we need to see our families as partners in this work.
- If we continue to engage our parents and caregivers and provide them with support, we can have an army of committed adults fighting for the absolute best for Cleveland's young people.
- To that end, we are already planning an unprecedented event this spring where we intend to recruit 1,000 parents and community volunteers to street canvass and knock on doors. This will be a focused effort to reengage scholars and push back against chronic absenteeism.
- We will be recruiting community leaders in this effort, so be on the lookout to find out how you can support our district with this.

### **EDUCATOR CONCERNS**

- During my listening tour, I heard from our educators and staff who work tirelessly every day with our scholars. Our educators are proud of the progress the district has made but expressed that our work is not done.
- I heard teachers at my town hall at the Friendly Inn talk about how we need to ensure there are excellent and equitable programs for scholars to choose from no matter where they live in the city.

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- Other teachers expressed concerns about safety as well and need additional training and support in this area. Overall, I heard our educators calling for continued thought partnership and communication as we look to solve some of the challenges facing our District.
- **Educators, I hear you loud and clear.**

### **A brief glimpse of student feedback:**

- Finally, to share feedback from our most important stakeholder group, our scholars. As one young lady shared when I did the student listening tour,
- "Students are the district's most important customer and our voice should be heard 99.99% above all other voices."
- So, you can see, the scholars did not hold back their feedback. It will surprise no one in this convention hall to hear that scholars are still critiquing school lunches. But the lunch concerns I heard go beyond the expected complaints.
- There were thoughtful observations about the limited amount of fresh produce they are offered and the abundance of processed food they are served.



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- Last month, I joined the young men at Ginn Academy for lunch, an experience that gave me insight into the student dining experience and the CMSD nutrition department staff experience.
- Though this was the experience at one school, I learned that I must continue to get perspective on student lunches from more of our scholars.
- Our CMSD Department of Nutrition prioritizes increasing the volume of fresh farm to table produce that is served to our scholars daily. We're also exploring ways to make the student dining experiences fulfilling, culturally relative, and satisfying.

### **STUDENT VIEWS ON SAFETY**

- Now, let me also briefly address another issue that is top of mind for scholars. Safety and security, especially to and from school.
- I heard two statements from student leaders. One student said:

*"More safety to and from school is important. Lots of students are scared to go to school, they sometimes worry about being attacked. "*

Another student offered the following wise observation that came wrapped in a solution already underway:

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*"Start to develop closer relationships with other parts of the city of Cleveland, such as the RTA to help develop stronger bus routes for school areas."*

- Many efforts and partnerships are underway to ensure safe passage of scholars to and from school.
- In fact, CMSD partnered with the mayor's office, RTA, Cleveland Public Library, the Cleveland Police Department and other agencies to ensure we're working collaboratively on this effort.
- Based on the critically important feedback from students and CMSD bus drivers, I committed a day last week to taking my listening tour on the road – literally.
- I wanted to see, hear, and feel what they experience on a typical day traveling to and from school.
- Last Wednesday morning, I got on a yellow elementary school bus with veteran bus driver Grace Watkins. I observed her extraordinary ability to simultaneously greet, drive, and chaperon CMSD scholars starting shortly after 6 a.m.
- As the first representative of the District, our youngest scholars see each morning, committed drivers like Grace are essential to the safe delivery and retrieval of our scholars to and from school.
- I also had the opportunity to observe the routes our scholars take to school. Some travel considerable distances to get to their chosen school.

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- That afternoon I boarded an RTA bus with scholars from Garrett Morgan High School in order to observe the experiences of our scholars who use public transit to and from school.
- Three of the high school scholars I chatted with love attending Garrett Morgan. They shared that the commute to school sometimes takes an hour in the morning and in the evening.
- I asked them if there were schools in their neighborhood that offered the same programs that Garrett Morgan offered, would they take advantage of them? To a person, they all said yes.
- I provide these examples to illustrate how the power of listening and learning has and will continue to inform my leadership.

### **CHALLENGES WE WILL SOON FACE**

- Now, let's buckle up a bit and speak about the rapidly coming challenges we will soon face as a District:
- During the process of listening to diverse stakeholder groups, I heard from people already familiar with the difficult choices that will soon face the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.
- Our District weathered the Covid-19 pandemic with remarkable resilience. Like all public-school districts throughout the nation, Cleveland was a beneficiary of the Covid-relief funding, which enabled

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us to continue to educate our scholars during the worst of the pandemic.

- The funding helped provide the necessary technology that enabled our scholars to engage in remote and hybrid learning. The funding also provided tremendous wrap-around support services that benefit families and scholars.
- That funding will end abruptly at the end of the current fiscal year

### **Here is the CMSD Reality:**

- With our federal funding ending at the end of this school year, we have some tough challenges ahead of us as we look at our budget.
- Though the budget realities will prove challenging, there are strategies that my team and I have been closely studying; strategies that can help us navigate.
- Some strategies will include cuts at the central office, ensuring all of our central office staff are fully back in the office by next year, reviewing current grants and, where possible, repurposing them to support scholar learning, and having an external review of our budget to help us explore strategic solutions.
- I am firmly committed to protecting schools and classrooms, where possible, because the instructional core is the district's most important function.

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- Eventually, I, in conjunction with the CMSD Board of Education, will be held responsible for making necessary tough decisions that everyone will not always agree on.
- But what I can promise today is that I will continue to listen intensely to the concerns expressed by all stakeholders. We will have focus groups on the other side of winter break about our budget and will seek thought partnership on the best path forward. The listening tour will continue unabated.

### **CORE VALUES:**

- Now that I have shared some of the feedback and challenges, let's talk about the work we will do collectively to lead our wonderful school system forward.
- One of my initial discoveries after assuming the role of CEO was that our District did not have a formal set of articulated core values.
- We needed to create a more formalized expression of our fundamental beliefs – a structure on which CMSD's organizational behavior and thus its mission could be measured and held accountable to.
- I'm pleased to share today the Five Core Values that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District will publicly embrace and advance.
- These core values are represented on the paperweight you received this afternoon and a definition for each of them is included on the one-page document you received.

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1. **Equity & Inclusion**
2. **Student & Community Focused**
3. **Growth & Learning**
4. **Care & Well-Being**
5. **Excellence & Achievement**

- These core values will guide our decision-making process and heavily influence the strategic direction our district will follow moving into the future.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

- Now that we have a set of core values and beliefs as a CMSD community, let's discuss how we will prioritize the work of our district. Our core values are the root of our strategic priorities and how we bring those values to life!
- I am proud of the work my team has done to analyze thousands of pieces of community feedback to solidify five strategic priorities our district has adopted and will pursue going forward. These priorities and a working definition for each of them are also listed on the handout you received.

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1. **Safe and Supportive Culture**
2. **A Strong and Engaging Instructional Core**
3. **Educator Learning**
4. **Coherent Central System**
5. **Engaged Community**

### **BENCHMARKS OF PROGRESS:**

- Now that I have shared the values and priorities that our school system will embrace based on feedback and suggestions, here are the five-year core measures that we will benchmark towards our progress.
  
- **We will have College and Career Measures**
  - We have a 5-year goal of 90% of scholars enrolled in college, employed in a high-quality pathway field, or enlisted in the armed forces. (Discuss how this is not currently measured...)
  - And that our 4-year and 5-year HS graduation rates are at 90%.
  - (Discuss how our current rates are at 75% and So, our continued partnership with Say Yes, College Now, PACE, etc. Will be vital to support these targets.)
  
- **We will have Achievement Measures**

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- Setting a goal that 65% of our elementary scholars are achieving proficiency in ELA and Math as measured by the state assessments.
  
- AND 55% of our HS scholars are proficient in ELA and Math. (Discuss how many of our schools have made growth in academic measures but there are some schools that are below 10% proficiency).
  
- **We will have Culture and Climate Measures**
  - Measuring the % of scholars reporting social-emotional wellness
  - # of serious safety incidents reported in schools
  
- **Finally, we will have Equity Measures**
  - Measuring the % of schools exceeding state growth expectations in Math and ELA.
  - Demographic subgroups achieving proficiency targets designed to eliminate gaps.
  - Proportionality of discipline rates by race.



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- And the % of English Language Learners achieving English language growth/proficiency goals.
- These are ambitious goals, but I'm excited about fleshing out the strategic priorities to ensure we achieve our core measures.

### **INTRODUCTION OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP**

- I know that I've shared a lot in a short time about what I've learned, but you can label me a proud life-long learner. In that regard, one of the most important lessons I've internalized during my years in educational leadership is that you are only as good as your team.
  - Without leaders working in concert, student outcomes will falter. It brings me tremendous pleasure to now publicly introduce my executive leadership team.
  - This team will help guide the District on the incredible journey on which we've already embarked.
- 
- Chief of District Operations Karen Thompson
  - Chief Academic Officer Dr. Selena Florence

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- Chief of Equity and Culture Dr. Trent Mosley
- Chief External Affairs Officer Lisa Farmer Cole
- Communications Officer Candice Grose
- Chief Financial Officer Kevin Stockdale
- General Counsel Andrew Roman
- CMSD Board attorney Kevin Burtzlaff
- And our Chief of Staff will be announced soon.
- Let's give them a hand.

### **RECOGNITION OF INVITED GUESTS:**

- As I close this inaugural address, I want to introduce some of my invited guests, who give me hope for CMSD's present and its future:

#### **Bob Madison:**

- I am greatly honored that we are joined today by the famed architect Mr. Robert Madison.
- Mr. Madison was the first African American to graduate from Case Western University School of Architecture in 1948.
- Mr. Madison, who turned 100 years old this past July, opened the first African American owned architectural firm in Ohio in 1954. He also served as a member of the historic Buffalo Soldiers Army Regiment in Italy.

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- But what gives me particular pleasure in having Mr. Madison with us today is knowing that he is a proud CMSD graduate of THE East Technical High School class of 1940.
- Thank you for your service to the country Mr. Madison and for your continued service and support of CMSD!

### **Leah Hudnall:**

- Next, I want to recognize another guest who needs no introduction because she's one of my bosses. Mrs. Leah Hudnall, Vice Chair of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District Board.
- Since being appointed to the board in August of 2022, Vice Chair Hudnall, quickly distinguished herself as a tireless and highly vocal advocate for CMSD scholars.
- Leah is both a CMSD alum of the Cleveland School of the Arts and a CMSD parent. Recently she shared with me a report card that her grandmother, Mary Hobbs, received in 1950 while enrolled at Bolton Elementary school.
- In the teacher's comment portion of the report card, young Mary is described as outspoken. Who knew that a quality once deemed as an area of improvement for Leah's grandmother would impact future generations of outspoken black women leaders.
- Now, more than 70 years later, it is amazing to work alongside Leah and the rest of the CMSD board on behalf of Cleveland's children.

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- Vice-chair Hudnall, we're so blessed that you inherited your grandmother's outspoken nature and that you use that gift as an education leader in this town.

## STUDENTS

- Next, I want to recognize Makaree (MA-CAR-EE) Butler and Jamarcus Johnson, both are freshmen at MC2STEM High School.
- A Few weeks back, these scholars were given an assignment by their 9<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher to come up with a way to make Cleveland safer.
- After a bit of thought, they decided that traffic safety was an issue they wanted to tackle. They heard about a motorist killed when his car was struck head-on by someone driving in the wrong direction.
- Because there wasn't a way to alert drivers to impeding highway danger, they started brainstorming with their science teacher, Patrick Dugan. From that brainstorm, they came up with a way to create a traffic device that would light up and signal drivers when a car was approaching from the wrong direction.
- This past quarter, they created a conceptual prototype for their quarterly CMSD demonstrations of learning.
- Exactly 100 years to the month after Clevelander Garrett Morgan was awarded a patent for the stop light traffic signal device, two 14-year-old CMSD scholars have co-created a prototype for another potential lifesaving device. The innovation continues.

## **Khalil Anderson – Senior**

- Finally, I'll close with the story of Khalil Anderson, a senior who was recently elected Student Council President at East Technical High School.
- Khalil is someone to watch. His principal Dr. Temujin Taylor describes him as quiet and reserved, he said he sees him as a natural leader. I met Khalil when I visited East Tech in September. We had a brief, but meaningful conversation and I encouraged him to stay in touch with me.
- Khalil took me up on the offer and emailed me.
- There is something else that I recently heard about Khalil that touches my heart and reminds me of why I do the work I do.
- When a member of my staff reached out to Khalil and told him about this upcoming address and that I planned to mention him in it, Khalil responded in a way that would make any educator proud.
- He said he is giving serious thought about possibly going into the field of education and becoming a teacher or a principal after having met me. To which I say, come on Khalil. We need you!
- When I first met Khalil, he told me I inspired him. In response, I told him that he inspires me. One of the first things I said to the Cleveland

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community when I accepted this incredible role was that “I do this work for kids like me.”

- We have no idea the places our scholars will go. So, it is vital we sow seeds of excellence and encouragement that will help them grow into the future city and country leaders and innovators they were born to be. Cleveland, we owe this to our scholars.
- CMSD is growing momentum, and I am looking forward to continuing to listen to and work with each of you to deliver a world class educational experience for our city’s children.
- **Thank you.**

**(###)**