

State of the Schools 2013

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September 25, 2013

Achievement—F.
Progress—F.
Gap Closing—F.
Graduation Rate—F.

The report card is the same.

And that is why the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is different!

Good afternoon, and thank you for attending this year's *State of the Schools Address*.

Thank you, City Club for hosting this event, and special thanks to Dan Moulthrop and his staff for moving us from the usual City Club forum to this hall today, to make the *State of the Schools Address* more accessible to the students and families I serve.

Before I begin, I want to recognize a number of people present here, not the least of which is the man who stood arm-in-arm with me through an unparalleled year of change in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District—Mayor Frank G. Jackson.

The same can be said of the Cleveland Board of Education, along with our chiefs and senior leadership, who lead the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in our Academics, Operations, Finance and Portfolio work.



And there are many others, too numerous to mention by name, but worthy of recognition for the role they have played in shaping the state of our schools today.

Thank you to the entire CMSD staff who serve every day in many capacities, each of them playing their part as Educators in Cleveland's schools and in our support centers.

Thank you to our partners who were part of what has now become known as the Cleveland coalition—the Greater Cleveland Partnership, the Cleveland Teachers Union, The Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation and Breakthrough Charter Schools—thank you for all you've done for the Cleveland Schools in the last year.

And finally, thank you all for being here today and for listening to this important update on the state of Cleveland's public schools.

By now, I'm sure those present have noticed the large clock ticking down the seconds behind me.

This time clock, like the clock that turns continuously on the home page of the CMSD website, is ticking down the seconds remaining for Cleveland to fulfill its Issue 107 commitment to revolutionize education in our city.

One year ago, we, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, our Cleveland Plan partners, and our levy workers and supporters, made promises to the people of Cleveland and their children that, with the *Right Plan, Right Now*, we will deliver the quality education our students need and deserve.

There is no promise more pressing, no mission more noble, and no work more inspiring than that of a public's responsibility to educate its children. And for urban school children—for my kids at CMSD—it's not just a noble and inspiring act; it is a moral imperative to

leverage disadvantaged youth; an ethical civic responsibility to lift children of poverty through the one means that has, for more than a century, been called “the great equalizer”—*Education*.

The clock is ticking to make good on promises we have made to state legislators in Columbus, who gave us six years to meet the goals of *The Cleveland Plan*.

The clock is ticking on promises we made to the citizens of Cleveland when, last November, they showed their faith in *The Cleveland Plan* and passed Issue 107, giving CMSD the resources it needs to do the work that must be done in our schools, and giving us four years to deliver results.

Most importantly, the clock is ticking for the children of Cleveland, who face a world economy that has raced far ahead of them, leaving them behind and, in fact, forgotten.

There is no time to wait.

The future of Cleveland's children is in our hands, and I am here to share with you today the progress we have made in the mission that is my life's work and, for people throughout this room, our honorable charge.

It is ironic that a similar clock started ticking 30 years ago, after the now-historic document titled *A Nation at Risk*, was released. The report warned our nation in 1983 about the dangers inherent in the rising tide of mediocrity in America's schools. The authors likened the status quo in our nation's public schools to a threat analogous to an act of war on our country, if we, the people, did not immediately declare war on our own tolerance for mediocrity.

The failure of America's schools, especially schools that serve the urban poor children of our nation in the last 30 years, certainly hasn't been for a lack of ideas.

Cleveland, like other big city schools, has seen the best and the worst of the reform plans, wrapped in promises that, with more money, with higher standards, with more testing, with better technology, with more charter schools, with vouchers, with better teacher licensure, with more accountability or with more state and federal legislation—everything would change.

But it didn't.

The clock kept ticking in Cleveland for 30 years, as our district, like urban districts across the nation, struggled to prepare students for their future using rules created for the schools of the past. Cleveland and other districts failed to change with the times, holding on tightly to industrial era work rules and to a 'get back to basics' dogma, while school systems in the rest of the world raced ahead of us.

Today, a *Forbes* report shows American 15-year olds now rank 14th in reading, 17th in science and 25th in math—trailing their counterparts in a global economy, even as countries like Estonia and Poland pull ahead. In fact, one third of our nation's entering college students need remedial education. And, the statistics are even more alarming for the plight of minority youth, which comprise the majority of our school population.

The clock went on ticking for 30 years, and despite the calling of *A Nation at Risk* for immediate and dramatic change, in Cleveland and in urban education systems across America, it's as if time stood still.

We all know the Washington Irving story of Rip Van Winkle, the man who climbed up the mountainside to take a nap in the woods, only to wake up 20 years later to find the whole world had changed.

If Rip Van Winkle had taken his nap in 1993, he'd wake up today shocked to find the Internet,

cell phones, high definition TVs, Facebook and Twitter.

(By the way, I hope you're tweeting @ CleMetroSchools right now #cityclub).

Just about everything that would affect Rip Van Winkle's daily life would look unfamiliar to him—everything, that is, except for his school.

Despite decades of "reform," most of America's schools look very much like they did 30 years ago, and they look strikingly similar to schools 100 years ago when John Dewey, the father of American education, called for drastic reform.

Dewey called for school systems where teachers are knowledge *producers*, not simply implementers of knowledge created by others. One hundred years ago, he called for a system where school administrators *support* the work of teachers instead of simply monitoring and controlling them. The rhetoric sounds familiar today, but the reality is not much has changed in the nation's schools in *100 years*, while the world has changed dramatically.

What 30 years ago was *A Nation At Risk* is now a Nation in Crisis.

Thirty years ago, a Cleveland high school dropout could get a manufacturing job and make a good living; today those jobs are located in emerging nations.

Thirty years ago a Cleveland high school dropout could own a home; today, unfortunately, our city has been recognized as the nation's center for housing foreclosures.

Today, cities throughout the country are declaring bankruptcy after years of struggling to support the needs of residents whose school systems, 30 years ago, failed to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to advance or take care of themselves in a rapidly changing world.

In this new world, American schools look less like the 21st century learning centers they must be, and more like the schools of pioneer days when school calendars were formed around agrarian planting seasons, when administrators used “check list” evaluations and when teachers, placed by seniority, relied on textbooks to impart knowledge.

One year ago, when I stood before you, I envisioned a different CMSD.

This year, I am here to tell you: *CMSD is different.*

One year ago, when I delivered the 2012 State of the Schools Address, the ink was still drying on legislation signed by Governor John Kasich only two months before, passing into law *The Cleveland Plan*.

Issue 107 was on the November ballot, and I challenged my staff and the people of Cleveland that if we didn’t declare war on mediocrity and failure in Cleveland, no federal report, no government mandate and no state solution was going to save our schools and put the children of Cleveland on equal footing with their peers.

One year ago, I stood before you with a vision of:

- What we *could be*, now that *The Cleveland Plan* was law.
- What we *could be*, with the passage of Cleveland’s first levy in 16 years, and
- What we *could be*, with a collective bargaining agreement that would put what’s best for Cleveland’s children on the table as we make every decision about what we, the adults, do in their school system.

Last year, we had just cut \$40M dollars from our budget—again.

We had just laid off 400 teachers and employees—again.

We were increasing class sizes, many into the 40s—again.

And I stood before you after cutting electives like art, music, physical education, and library/media services—again.

In fact, last year I stood before you after having cut the student school day by 50 minutes, just so we could keep the lights on!

One year ago, our District was in Academic Distress and near fiscal bankruptcy.

Our collective bargaining agreement with the Cleveland Teacher’s Union was similar to those of school districts across the nation, built on work rules from 20, 30, in fact one hundred years before.

Today—one year later—*The Cleveland Plan* is law, Issue 107 has passed and is now providing the resources needed to enact *The Cleveland Plan*, and a new collective bargaining agreement with the Cleveland Teachers Union has been ratified, updating workforce rules in ways that are unparalleled in the history of Cleveland’s public schools.

An important milestone was CMSD’s successful petition to Ohio’s Superintendent of Public Instruction for a waiver from a state-led Academic Distress Commission. Essentially, Cleveland avoided a state takeover of its public schools, and did so by having three things in place:

- *The Cleveland Plan*—which State Superintendent Richard Ross called the “*Right Plan, Right Now*” for Cleveland,
- Taxpayer support of Issue 107, and
- A staff and community committed to delivering on that plan.

With *The Cleveland Plan* in place, with the levy dollars to deliver on the *Plan*, and with a new collective bargaining agreement that removes barriers to delivering on the *Plan*, CMSD looks and feels different in many ways.

What a difference a year makes!

This year, instead of laying off teachers and school leaders at the start of the school year, we recalled teachers from layoff and are hiring hundreds more!

This year, instead of increasing class sizes, we have reduced class sizes to averages of 25 to 30 students, so teachers can focus on engaging every student in learning, every day.

This year, after restoring art, music, physical education, and library/media services, we also added many more honors and advanced placement courses, including courses taught by teachers like Shari Obrenski, a social studies teacher at Jane Addams High School who is here today. For the first time in her career with Cleveland Schools, Ms. Obrenski has the opportunity to teach Advanced Placement American Government for her students.

This year, CMSD is making good on its *Cleveland Plan* goal to take specific corrective action in 13 failing schools, where teachers, custodians, secretaries, cleaners and other educators assigned to them have signed public commitments to do business differently.

In our 13 Investment Schools this year, staff work more closely than ever before with students and families on a common set of school expectations. These expectations include active engagement in a rigorous curriculum, zero tolerance for student disengagement and misbehavior and real time communication with parents on goals mutually agreed to by the school's faculty and parents.

Collinwood High School is a prime example of how quickly this kind of simple, straightforward action is changing culture in our Investment Schools. Collinwood was known far too long as the stereotypical urban high school, where students wander hallways and successfully avoided going to class and where, when in class, students often just put their heads on their desks while teachers supervised large classes and worked just to maintain control.

Today, at Collinwood High School, students are actively engaged in learning every day, and students in the hallway during class are sure to meet an adult who will escort them back to their classroom, where their teachers are insisting on engaged instruction including group work, science labs and meaningful activities where any distraction from learning is not just unacceptable, it is unlikely.

These early wins, implemented over the summer and in the first six weeks of school, are important, but insufficient. If we are to be truly successful this year, we must focus clearly on three key strategies:

- shaping our workforce
- effectively executing the technical elements of *The Cleveland Plan*, and
- inspiring an organizational culture that Puts Kids First!

One of the most noticeable changes is at the head of the classroom. With a commitment to shaping and developing our workforce at CMSD, we are mindful that Cleveland has one of the most veteran workforces in the field of urban education. In Cleveland, 92% of our teachers have eight or more years of experience compared to an average of about 51% among other urban districts we've studied. With a large number of our veteran teachers eligible to retire soon, we are proactively using the most effective tools

available to screen candidates, and to secure the most highly qualified and dedicated pools of teacher candidates for school-based hiring.

Unlike the centralized hiring process of the past, today, principals are working with teachers, parents and community members to select the right teachers from candidates whose qualifications and experience best meet the needs of students in their school. In fact, CMSD parent Aaron Knuckles, seated in our audience today, has seen and felt the difference at Harvey Rice School, where he helped select and hire his children's teachers this year.

CMSD is training and supporting school-based hiring teams so they are knowledgeable and prepared to make the right decisions when hiring educators to raise student achievement at their schools, and just last Monday evening, principals, teachers, parents and community leaders participated in a District-wide hiring fair at Lincoln-West High School!

We are improving our teacher orientation process so new educators are familiar with the tools and resources available to them, and can make the most effective use of those resources.

Our ongoing school-based professional development experiences are being strengthened to enable CMSD to more meaningfully and effectively evaluate educators using the District's new collaboratively developed Teacher Development and Evaluation System.

Unlike the evaluation and compensation systems of the past, CMSD can now reward its best educators, and those who demonstrate effective professional growth, with our newly agreed-to Differentiated Compensation System. And, when necessary, CMSD can and will exit educators who cannot, or will not, get the results we need for students.

It is surely a testament to the dedication of CMSD educators that 71% of the members of the Cleveland Teachers Union endorsed these very important workforce actions when they passed our new collective bargaining agreement last May.

Successful execution of *The Cleveland Plan* depends, only in part, on the hard work and dedication of the CMSD staff to meet its goals; success also depends on the continued support and engagement of the Cleveland community to ensure our staff has the resources and tools they need, and that principals have the school-based support necessary to execute the strategies needed to reach the goals of the *Plan*.

Last December and January, the District delivered a draft *Strategic Implementation Plan* to the community with a request for feedback, and feedback we got! In fact, when fully compiled, we received over 300 pages of written feedback from students, parents, grandparents, teachers and other educators, from community members, community activist organizations, business leaders, philanthropic leaders, elected officials and even national school leaders!

For the past several months, members of our Board of Education, my colleagues, and I have poured over that feedback, and this week, the Board formally adopted the revised *Strategic Implementation Plan*, which outlines in great detail the community feedback and the technical work ahead this year.

This newly revised Implementation Plan outlines a large number of concrete actions the District and our community must take in order to make the aspirational goals of *The Cleveland Plan* a reality. While there are too many to list here today, I do want to take a minute to share a few key examples of our work ahead.

CMSD is currently planning several new school models for the 2014 school year, and will also identify a second cohort of Investment Schools for corrective action in 2014.

- We are continuing to both sponsor and partner with high quality charter schools as part of our school portfolio strategy.
- We are implementing a student-based budgeting system that gives principals authority over nearly 75% of their budget costs, as opposed to the 1% that principals now control.
- We are redesigning our enrollment and recruiting systems so that families are able to more easily find and select the school of their choice.
- We are expanding early childhood, pre-school education to serve many more four-year-olds, yet this year.
- We are implementing rigorous new curriculum and instructional tools to better prepare middle school students for high school and high school students for college.
- We are improving the services and supports available for students with disabilities, English language learners and gifted students.

These are a few of the many tangible actions we are instituting in a constantly transforming Cleveland Metropolitan School District to ensure that our teachers and educators have the tools they need to get the results we have promised.

The *Strategic Implementation Plan* includes both outputs and outcomes, as well as specific timelines associated with each strategy, so the Cleveland community can anticipate public, transparent reporting of District progress at the end of each school quarter in much the same way that children and families receive their school report card.

Today, and in the coming weeks, I will encourage stakeholders to read this detailed implementation plan to know and understand the specific work that lies ahead, and to determine the role they can play in helping to produce the results we need. The 114-page *Strategic Implementation Plan* is available on the CMSD website, and a 16-page summary of the document is available as you exit today.

CMSD is working every day to reverse the culture of low expectations for our students and our schools, and to restore Cleveland's faith in its public schools. Surely, we have found that one of the best ways to do so is to every day, in every way, provide visible proof that we have the *Right Plan, Right Now*, and it is working!

Last week, I asked CMSD employees to share with me examples that demonstrate what it means to be a CMSD Educator, and I challenged them to tell me what Transformation looks like today. Each of the responses I received demonstrates a culture shift that is already evident in our schools this year.

Teacher Crystal Wiese wrote of Teresa Imm, a Willson School math teacher, who gives personal attention to every child, no matter how busy. "She sees and treats them as individuals, and gives each one of them the respect they deserve without babying them. They learn in her class and they love her for it," she wrote.

Principal Irene Javier described First Sgt. Robert Forbes, a Vietnam veteran who teaches Junior ROTC at Lincoln-West High School. Mr. Forbes ran an after-school Model United National program for two years that won State awards for educating students for global competency. This year, he asked Dr. Javier if he could turn it into a Model UN class. "That would mean you couldn't have a planning period or a lunch period," she told him. "I don't need a planning period and I don't need lunch," he said. "I've got my

curriculum ready, I have a number of students ready to learn, and we're all set. I'm reporting for duty, Dr. Javier. Permission to teach!"

Teacher Anthony Simeone described Justine Lance, an administrative assistant for our School of One program that serves at-risk students. Ms. Lance "gets stuff done," he said. "She approaches her work with everyone—whether a student, parent, guardian, staff or visitor—the same: with a smile on her face and a willingness to make sure that she has met that person's needs."

Teacher Maureen Kerwin described Kimberly Flagg, a paraprofessional at Daniel E. Morgan School, as more than an assistant, but one who acts as a colleague and partner in serving their students directly. "She comes up with interesting and creative ways to reach our scholars' academic and personal needs every day," she said. "I am blessed to learn from *her* every day."

Joyce McDonnold, in our Human Resources Department, wrote about Joseph Malburg, a security officer she considers indispensable in our Employee Services Center. "He handles all incoming and outgoing traffic professionally and in a caring way," she said. "His service-oriented work ethic makes all of our lives easier."

If you follow me on Twitter @EricGordon_CEO, you've seen many more examples in the 44 schools I've visited so far this year. Daily, I share visible examples of a transformed system at CMSD. In every department, and in one school after another, I see real examples of the efforts people are making to turn a culture of low expectations into one of high expectations, and to take personal responsibility to meet those expectations.

What I am also seeing in our schools is how students and their families are responding to the changes they see.

Students like Destiny Camp, my guest at the head table today, is a student at East Technical High School that I met when she was standing in the principal's office advocating for a change in the school's master schedule to protect her honors American Government class! Destiny is taking four honors classes at East Tech this year!

I see parents like "Cabbie" Bill Anderson, also my guest at the head table today, who called to tell me personally that he had been afraid to put his daughter in CMSD's McKinley School. "To my surprise," he said, "this school is EXCELLENT! I can't say enough about all of the time, attention and concern that the teachers are giving my daughter. Teachers have done nothing but go out of their way to get the best for her and I look forward to an excellent school year."

CMSD's schools are already different this year, and we must all—educators, families, caregivers and community members alike—continue to expect and insist upon these positive cultural changes in the year ahead!

We must all behave as Educators and we must all Put Students First!

Thirty years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* not much has changed in America's schools, but *a lot has changed in Cleveland*.

In my first State of the Schools Address two years ago, I warned that Cleveland had no time to wait for help to come from Columbus or Washington to turn around our failing schools:

I said:

"To ensure our schools are what they can and must be for the children of our community, the solutions to the academic and financial challenges we face in Cleveland must come from within our own school community."

While other cities *waited* for a new plan, a new law or more resources to come from their state or federal government, Cleveland created its own *Plan*, went to Columbus to pass its own law, catapulted our teacher contract into the 21st century and generated within our own community the resources to make them all work together.

That's why CMSD is different this year.

But it's still not enough.

Last year, I challenged the community to not become complacent, even if we are able to change law and change course. Even as we change culture, I must echo the message I delivered last year that still holds true now:

"If we truly want schools...

- where students use their entire community as their learning space,
- where mastery of rigorous content is the *constant*, and the time it takes to learn is the *variable*,
- where teachers and leaders have the autonomies to nimbly adjust their programming in order to meet their students' needs, and
- where the best and brightest staff are supported and rewarded for their quality work...

it will take an enduring commitment from all of us—in fact, from even *more* of us—to execute *The Cleveland Plan* for which we all fought so hard."

Today, I echo that call to action, and I applaud each and every person in this room and across this city who has played a part in transforming the Cleveland Metropolitan School District this year in ways that are tangible and visible every day in our schools, in our offices, on our buses,

our playgrounds, our school grounds and in our service to stakeholders.

The state of our schools is as strong as the commitment we make today, not just to applaud the changes and progress I described, but to commit even more directly to producing the tangible, visible, measurable results we can and must see this year and in the years to follow.

We did not embark on an education revolution in Cleveland to settle for incremental gains or to maintain steady movement on a flat line that is unacceptable for the children of Cleveland.

It isn't enough to change Ohio law to remove barriers to *The Cleveland Plan*.

It isn't enough to pass a four-year, 15 mill levy to provide the resources needed to carry out the *Plan*.

It isn't enough to bargain a revolutionary new teachers contract.

it's a lot....but it's not enough!

The word revolution comes from the Latin word *revolutio*, which means "a turn around" and is defined as a significant change that usually occurs in a relatively short period of time.

The clock is ticking on the opportunity the State of Ohio and the citizens of Cleveland have given us to turn around Cleveland's public schools.

The road ahead will be even more challenging than the road we have already traveled together.

Ohio's new school report card has set even higher standards for Ohio's schools, and CMSD is farther away than most from reaching the state's new ambitious goals.

Our goal to raise student achievement can be daunting, considering that Cleveland, today, ranks at the bottom of Ohio's districts; but is not

so overwhelming when one considers how far we've come in only one year.

As Ohio bases its new ratings on how well districts perform compared to other districts in the state, CMSD must raise its own bar.

We must, in the year ahead, *work together* to see dramatic jumps in our rankings on the State's measures, both in the number of CMSD schools that move up the ranking lists and where the

District ranks as a whole. That, and nothing less than that, will be our measure of success or failure in the year to come.

In the time I have delivered this address, 30 minutes have passed on our ticking clock.

We don't have a second to lose.

The children of Cleveland have waited long enough.

