

2019 STATE *of the* SCHOOLS ADDRESS

Eric S. Gordon, CEO
September 26, 2019

Good afternoon.

I am privileged today to deliver my ninth State of the Schools Address to this distinguished audience of educators, families, partners, stakeholders and supporters of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

I am grateful to Dan Moulthrop and his City Club staff who made it possible over the last six years to open and televise this event to a much larger audience. This enables me to share with the broader Cleveland community the progress and achievements of Cleveland's public schools.

Before I begin, I want to recognize a few people in attendance today.

Mayor Frank G. Jackson, in his fourth term as Mayor of Cleveland, has shared our vision since the inception of *The Cleveland Plan* eight years ago. He continues to play a pivotal role in the transformation of CMSD from what was a repeatedly failing school district to what today is a continuously improving one.

Instrumental in the progress we have seen the last nine years has been the consistency and outstanding leadership of the Cleveland Board of Education. Our Board is known, and has been recognized nationally, for its unparalleled service and dedication to public education.

Also with us today are community partners who helped to shape, and who continue to support, *The Cleveland Plan* and, more recently, to support our efforts to bring Say Yes to Education to Cleveland:

The Greater Cleveland Partnership, the Cleveland Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Council of Administrators and Supervisors, the Cleveland Teachers Union, Breakthrough Charter Schools, the City of Cleveland, County Executive Armond Budish and Cuyahoga County, the United Way of Greater Cleveland and College Now Greater Cleveland.

Thank you for your incomparable support of public education over the past nine years, and in particular for all you have done the last two years to secure game-changing services, supports and scholarships for students and families in Cleveland by making Cleveland a Say Yes to Education city.



And we all owe a debt of gratitude to the people of the Cleveland School District, whose support of Issue 107, Issue 4 and Issue 108, enabled us not only to implement and sustain reforms outlined in *The Cleveland Plan*, but also to modernize and revitalize schools across the city.

So, what is the state of our schools?

I would say that the state of our schools and the state of *The Cleveland Plan* can best be described by the words and teachings of Sir Isaac Newton.

Newton, as many of you know, is credited as one of the inventors of calculus and a significant contributor to the scientific field of physics. You may know him best for Newton's Cradle—a fun object found on many of our desks to satisfy our fascination with the physics concept of momentum.

In reflecting on CMSD's steady growth and progress under *The Cleveland Plan*, and particularly on the gains we've seen over the last year, I found myself thinking about Newton's three laws of motion.

Newton's first law, which explains inertia, states that "every object in a state of rest will remain in that state of rest, and any object in a state of uniform motion will remain in that state of motion unless an external force acts on it."

In 2011, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District was at rest. Ranked last out of Ohio's 609 school districts, we were financially bankrupt and had lost all public trust.

Civic and business leaders and citizens, residents and taxpayers across our district and community, had given up hope that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District could achieve anything higher than last place in the state. We were an F on every indicator of performance.

In a system clearly at rest, it was widely believed that, as Newton's first law states, Cleveland's public schools would remain at rest, and there was no force capable of changing that.

Newton's second law describes force and the force needed to move an object that is in a state of rest. Force, in Newton's terms, equals mass times acceleration.

In other words, mathematically speaking, acceleration equals force over mass, and to get positive acceleration one needs a force larger than the mass it is trying to move.

What acceleration would Cleveland need to move the enormous mass at rest that was the Cleveland Metropolitan School District? In Cleveland, that force was and still is today *The Cleveland Plan* and, with it, the hundreds of leaders across this city and state that created it and continue to support it!

And as Newton's first law predicts, once the force of *The Cleveland Plan* was applied to the mass of the District, CMSD began moving, continued to move and is continuously moving today.

*"every object in a state of rest will remain in that state of rest,
and any object in a state of uniform motion
will remain in that state of motion unless an external force acts on it."*



Isaac Newton used a combination of his first and second law to define Momentum—a physics concept that measures the quantity of an object’s motion as a product of its mass and velocity.

So what is the state of our schools today? Well, I would say that, in Newton’s terms, the mass that is the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is not only accelerating its progress, but it is gaining momentum!

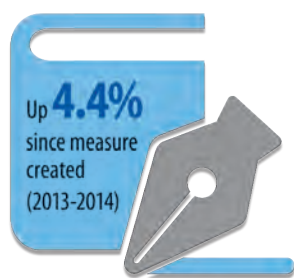
But if I’m going to talk in terms of math and science, then my scholars and educators in the audience are going to immediately ask to see the evidence to support my hypothesis that CMSD is gaining momentum.

Let’s take a look at the evidence.

In K-3 literacy improvement, CMSD improved another 2.6 percentage points last school year, with 85.3% of last year’s third grade students meeting the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

This K-3 literacy measure has increased 4.4 percentage points since the measure was created in 2014.

K-3 Literacy Improvement



Top 15% K-3 literacy improvement 2014-2019

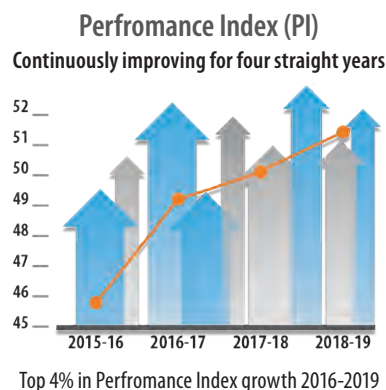
While 4.4 percentage points may not seem like much, that 4.4 increase makes CMSD the only urban district* in Ohio to see an increase of any kind on this measure in this period of time. It also puts CMSD in the top 15 percent for growth among Ohio’s 609 school districts.

Our 85.3% proficiency rate in third grade reading was earned by a class of students who, when

entering kindergarten, showed that only 33.2% were kindergarten-ready in literacy.

That’s momentum!

CMSD’s performance index, a score measuring reading and math in third through twelfth grade, has consistently increased for four consecutive years, up 5.4 percentage points since the new, more rigorous Ohio State Tests were put in place in 2016.



Top 4% in Performance Index growth 2016-2019

The growth we saw is the second largest gain among Ohio’s urban districts. It positions CMSD among the 25 fastest improving districts in Ohio, and puts us in the top 4 percent of districts showing improvement statewide.

That’s momentum!

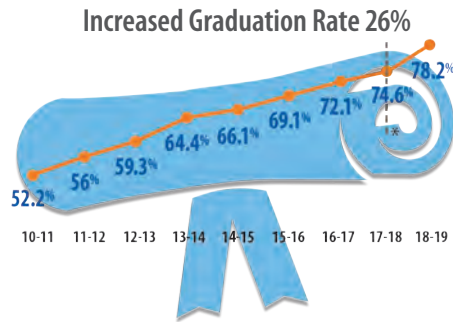
On Ohio’s gap closing measure, a measure added to the report card in 2016, CMSD moved from an F in both 2016 and 2017, to a D in 2018. With another 7-point gain last year, we moved up again to a C in gap closing on this year’s report card, meaning the performance gap for our minority students is closing compared to their white peers statewide.

That’s momentum!

And our 4-year on-time graduation rate, a measure that has seen consistent growth year after year, increased another 3.6 percentage points again this year, setting another district record high of 78.2%.

This marks the ninth straight year of improvement in our graduation rate, a 26-point gain from a

52.2% graduation rate in 2011 to 78.2% today. With the national average at 84%, CMSD is quickly closing the gap.



Fourth fastest improving among all Ohio districts
 Top 1% in graduation rate growth 2011-2019
 * Ohio changed graduation requirements

CMSD's 4-year graduation rate showed the fourth fastest growth in Ohio, ranking us in the top 1 percent for growth statewide. And our five-year graduation rate of 81.5 percent is the highest graduation rate of any urban district* in Ohio. For a district that not so long ago was dead last among these districts, that's momentum!

Together, the momentum we are seeing from kindergarten to third- grade literacy improvements, the momentum we are seeing on test scores from third grade through high school, and the momentum we are seeing with continuously increasing graduation rates, earned us an overall grade of D on this year's report card, up from the F we earned last year.

I want to make it clear that we are not celebrating that we earned a D. What moving from F to D tells us is that we continue to move upward and there is a lot more yet to achieve.

Even our harshest critics must acknowledge that while we have not yet arrived, we are certainly on our way.

Being among the fastest improving school districts in Ohio on K-3 literacy, performance index and graduation rates is momentum!

So, what does all of this mean?

What does a D school district really look like?

At John Marshall School of Information Technology, students just upgraded a website for the Federal Bar Association of Northern Ohio, and created an app for them to make their website mobile friendly. And they are building computers in this D-rated Cleveland public schools.

Special education students in 5th through 8th grades at Clara E. Westropp School run their own café that is open to staff and parents. The students apply, interview for jobs, use what they learn in life skills and math classes to take orders, prepare the food and manage cash registers in this D-rated school district.

Students at Davis Aerospace & Maritime High School, with access to flight simulators and a rescue boat, focus their studies in STEM education around these two vital industries in Cleveland. And this summer, junior Sydney-Marie Flowers flew her first solo flight, earning a federal flight certificate through this innovative high school in a D-rated school district.



Students at our School of One classrooms at The Foundry—Cleveland's community rowing and sailing center—attended a summer program at Case Western Reserve University to learn how to make a prosthetic hand for one of their classmates who could not row with his class because he had lost a hand as a child. For those of you who are wondering, The School of One is designed to serve scholars most school districts call "at risk of dropping out." In this D-rated school district we call them college bound!

Students at Artemus Ward used art and music to create a stop animation film that can be presented

on an array of TV sets that project the students’ work with a soundtrack written by their principal. Their class production will be showcased at the Ingenuity Fest.

At Max Hayes High School, students developed synthetic gasoline, put it in the gas tank of their teacher’s car and watched as he successfully drove the car home for the night and back to school in the morning. Students at this same school rebuilt a police car destroyed in the city’s celebration of the Cavs’ championship victory in 2016, returning the car like new to the Cleveland Police Department.



Middle school students at Daniel E. Morgan, as part of an afterschool program sponsored by Central State University, planted seeds in a tower garden to study how plants and vegetables grow without soil. The scholars research hydroponic and aeroponic technology, and apply math skills to create charts and graphs in plant growth over time and to compare vegetables grown in soil with those grown in the aeroponics system.

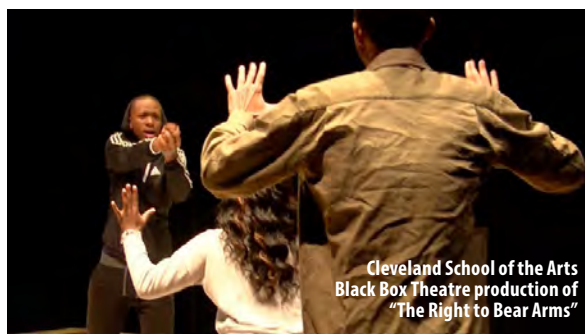


Residents and visitors to Cleveland have witnessed the success of students at Jane Addams Business Careers Center, who not only run a restaurant that

is open to the public, but last year took those skills on the road with their food truck that became one of the popular stations on Walnut Wednesdays.

Logan Williams, a sixth-grader at Wade Park school, created a program called “Blanket Blessings,” in which she collected over 300 blankets to personally hand out to homeless adults and children, along with care bags she keeps in her mother’s car. Logan’s “Blanket Blessings” project is featured in the Cleveland History Center’s Celebrate Those Who Give Black exhibit, as an exemplar of her extraordinary commitment to her community.

Students at Cleveland School of the Arts wrote and produced their own play about gun violence in America. Their production, “The Right to Bear Arms” was presented in the school’s Black Box Theatre and was followed by a discussion where the audience engaged in discussion with the performers about gun violence and the gun control efforts across the nation.



While it is difficult to know what “D” means on a state report card, one needs only to visit a classroom in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to see and feel the difference—to understand what momentum is, what it looks like in action and what impact these changes are having on the way Cleveland’s kids think, learn and act.

Each and every day, our scholars take on complex academic tasks not easily measured by test scores, as they find increasing opportunities to demonstrate their learning authentically. And our educators work hard to create joyful and

adventurous classrooms where this more complex learning can occur every day for our children.

And even as we have been gaining momentum over the past nine years, the people of Cleveland have continued to increase the force applied to our success.

Last January, we reached another significant milestone after hundreds of people from across our community worked tirelessly behind the scenes for over two years to position us to become a Say Yes to Education City.

Mayor Jackson called Say Yes to Education the “next logical step” in *The Cleveland Plan*.

And indeed, it is.

I’m pleased to share that the Say Yes Cleveland office is now open, a first round of Say Yes to Education scholarships are out the door and the first 16 Say Yes service and support schools are now in place!

Even those who were part of our two-year quest to become a Say Yes city admit to finding it difficult to explain to others all that Say Yes to Education can do for our kids and community.

I would describe it simply as creating for Cleveland’s children and families the capital and the social capital that middle and upper-middle income families already enjoy. I’ll explain using four quick examples.

A few years ago, a student from Mound School in Slavic Village missed large numbers of days because he needed to make frequent trips to the emergency room to treat his acute asthma. But when we established our partnership with MetroHealth to install a school-based health clinic at Mound, our school and hospital staff was able to provide him with primary care before he had acute asthmatic attacks.

His attendance increased dramatically and so did his grades. By providing health and mental health services in our schools, Say Yes will provide for our



scholars the access to primary health care that most of us in this room enjoy.

That’s the capital Say Yes brings to our schools!

Last year, I worked with another student who boarded the RTA Health Line but didn’t pay the \$2.25 honor system ticket for the ride. He got caught and arrested. He was released, but had to go to court to schedule a hearing where he would be sentenced for this crime. The student didn’t show for the case, and a \$5,000 warrant was issued for his arrest—for a \$2.25 bus ticket.

Fortunately, I was able to call a friend who is an attorney to intervene on this young man’s behalf. Had I not learned of the incident or took time to intervene, this young man, who had been in some trouble in the past, could have “sat 60,” meaning he could have spent up to 60 days in jail for a \$2.25 bus ticket.

Putting legal clinics in our schools is the capital Say Yes to Education creates. The relationships that allowed me to “phone a friend” on this young man’s behalf is the social capital that middle and upper-middle income families already enjoy.

What this kid did was wrong, without a doubt! It is just as wrong when it happens in a suburban community, too. What’s different in urban districts, however, is the consequence of the action and that fate is often driven by the social capital the offender has or doesn’t have.

With family support specialists as advocates in every school, Say Yes can create social capital for our kids and families where there is none.

Another student I know was a fourth-year student at Morehouse College. He was clearly successful—you don't get to your senior year of college at Morehouse any other way.

And yet, one Sunday morning I walked into the Landmark Diner on St. Clair Avenue and there he was, sitting in a booth. I was surprised to see him since colleges had already resumed classes, so I went over and asked him why he wasn't back at school.

He told me that he was \$800 short and couldn't pay his tuition. Eight hundred dollars! Fortunately, we were able to get him transferred into Cleveland State University where he finished his degree.

The point is—no child's college success should depend on where I happen to have breakfast! Say Yes to Education's last-dollar tuition scholarships creates the capital needed to ensure this story can't happen again to a CMSD graduate.

One of the young men I mentor is studying to be a professional actor. Knowing this, I brought him to a gala event at Karamu House so that he could interact with the country's oldest professional African-American acting troupe. Through those relationships and the student's talent, I later got to watch him in a Karamu production of "Aida." That access to the Karamu House gala is the social capital.

By adding a College Now mentor to every Say Yes scholarship, we are not only able to keep track of and support our scholars as they go through college, but our students will also have built relationships with a mentor in a similar profession that will have the social capital to help them enter their chosen field upon graduation.

With the added force of Say Yes to Education, we are certain to continue to gain momentum year after year toward our goal of ensuring that every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school,

*“For every action
there is an equal and
opposite reaction.”*

and that every neighborhood has a multitude of great schools from which families can choose.

I started this speech by talking about Newton's laws. But, up to now, I haven't mentioned Newton's third law.

“For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.”

That law implies that our momentum can be stopped if an equal and opposite reaction is applied.

So, why is that important?

For me, at least, it is an important reminder that we cannot rest.

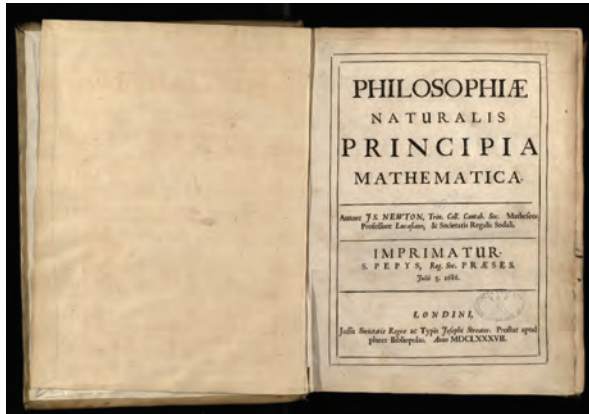
It's a reminder that we must maintain and build on our momentum, but at the same time, pay attention to every force that threatens to slow or even stop our progress.

We must, for example, keep in mind that the 15-mill levy supported by District taxpayers for the past seven years expires next year.

Without the continued trust and support of taxpayers, all the momentum we are gaining can be lost.

That also means that we must continue to examine not only the quality of our schools, but also the number of schools needed across all sectors of our community—whether they are district, charter or parochial schools—so that we can spend our precious resources more deeply in fewer schools, instead of spreading them thinly across more schools than we need.





It will also mean that we need to ensure every Clevelander, and especially every Cleveland kid, is counted in the critically important upcoming U.S. Census that will guide federal and state support for CMSD and other critical programming for the next 10 years!

We cannot let an equal and opposite reaction of any form disrupt our momentum.

Isaac Newton, whose three laws appear in *The Principia Mathematica*, was hailed by his fellow physicists for what they called the greatest scientific work ever written; and yet, his work was widely attacked on metaphysical grounds.

To differentiate the two, one writer described it this way: “physicists want to understand how a rock falls to the ground; metaphysicians want to know what it means to be a rock.”

His three laws help us to understand why the rock falls to the ground and why planets go around the sun.

To set a rock in motion, I must first reach for it and pick it up. I cannot simply will the rock to move or to fall.

Similarly, gravity sets a falling rock in motion, but it does so by imparting force from a distance.

But while Newton was adept at explaining the laws of gravity, he stayed away from trying to explain what gravity is.

“Gravity explains the motion of the planets,” he said. “But it cannot explain who set the planets in motion.”

“Gravity explains the motion of the planets, but it cannot explain who sets the planets in motion.”

Today, I used Newton’s three laws to explain the motion of the District. I also want to answer the metaphysical question:

“Who set the district in motion?”

In 2011, I challenged this audience to envision what it would look like if we truly invested in a transformational approach to education in Cleveland, and if we sustained that investment.

When the Cleveland Metropolitan School District faced fiscal and academic failure, the people of Cleveland invested in an extraordinary vision of the changes needed to move a failing school district. And the forward movement we are seeing in the District today shows these people did much more than invest in a vision.

They made it happen.

You made it happen!

The Cleveland Plan was set in motion at a time when struggling school districts across America were waiting for forces from a distance to come to their cities and move districts that were at rest.

But here, *The Cleveland Plan* was put into motion by courageous and visionary people in this city who refused to wait for change to happen to us.

We refused to let forces outside our city impose reforms on our failing school system. We created instead our own blueprint for radical change, and we set it in motion.

Many members of that Cleveland Plan Coalition are scattered throughout this room, throughout this city, throughout Cuyahoga County and the State of Ohio, including legislators on both sides of the aisle in Columbus who believed in the vision and passed the legislation to get us here.

These are the forces that set our educational universe in motion in Cleveland, and to each and every one of you, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude.

On behalf of the children of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and on behalf of the hard-working educators to whom our scholars' families have entrusted their future—thank you.

Thank you believing in them and in us.

Because of your vision, your investment, your ongoing commitment and support the last eight years, CMSD is in a vastly different place than we were.

And, now, as a Say Yes to Education City, with the scholarships and family support services it brings to our community, our momentum can accelerate.

How? By applying a strong countervailing force against the greatest threat to our children's success and future—poverty.

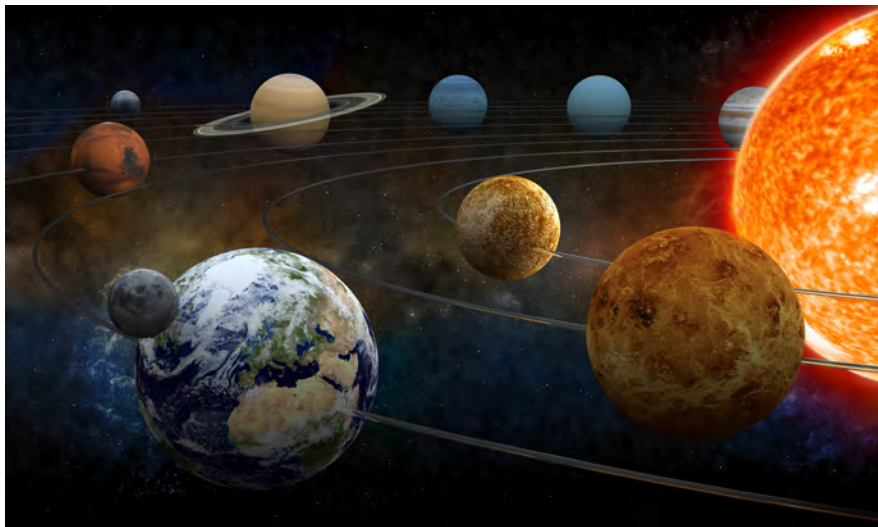
To the people in this room and across this community, whose vision and unwavering support brought us here, I am happy to report that the state of our schools is stronger and measurably better than at any time in recent history.

Each of you helped to put the District in motion.

So now, let's accelerate the gains we are seeing.

Let's build on that momentum!

Thank you!



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