

Report to the Community on the Impact of Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools



2020

MAYOR FRANK JACKSON, CITY OF CLEVELAND



Dear Residents of
Greater Cleveland,

In 2012, a broad coalition
of civic leaders created
Cleveland's Plan for
Transforming Schools.
We remain committed
to and engaged in our

work, despite working through local challenges and a
global pandemic.

This year, we have faced new challenges that have
put a nationwide spotlight on inequity and disparity,
specifically in basic needs such as access to food,
affordable childcare, and technology. The COVID-19
pandemic has created a moment for our community
to make positive changes in our education system,
and work to maintain them long after the immediate
crisis has passed. In the 2019-2020 school year, we
learned that it's crucial to implement technology into
our education system—it is the way in which young
people learn, retain information and demonstrate
comprehension. Interactive learning, virtual reality,
and new ways of measuring performance are needed.
A substantial portion of our population, however,
does not have access to high-speed Internet—and
those without access tend to be concentrated in
poorer communities and communities of color.
Expanding access is the best way forward in order to
create equity and opportunity in education for our
children. In the 2020-2021 school year, we are working
diligently to bring access to all of our students, and
make technology a sustainable method of learning
in the long-term.

Although Say Yes to Education Cleveland launched
just a few months prior to the end of the 2018-2019
school year, 49 percent of 2019 graduates enrolled in
a post-secondary program this year. This represents
an increase of five percentage points over the last
year and outpaces the projections developed during
the program's planning stages. This is an exciting
preliminary response to the Say Yes program,
and something we can all work to build upon. We
have also seen continued growth in the Cleveland
Metropolitan School District (CMSD) graduation rate,
as it is now over 80 percent.

These gains are especially poignant for the
Transformation Alliance as earlier this year, the
Board lost one of its original members. Deborah
Rutledge died on February 22, 2020. She had served
as the Finance Committee Chair, as a member of
the Executive Committee, and as Interim Executive
Director in 2019. We will continue to carry her passion
for our mission into the future.

Despite the unprecedented challenges we've
experienced this year, it has caused us to think
creatively to improve education for students
across the City of Cleveland. Although we've made
significant progress, there's much work to be done
to move Cleveland forward.

Sincerely,

Frank G. Jackson

*Mayor, City of Cleveland
Chair, Board of Directors, Cleveland Transformation Alliance*

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MEGHANN MARNECHECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As I reflect on my first year as the Cleveland Transformation Alliance executive director, I am struck by how far our community has come in eight years. This

year marks the first year that the CMSD's high school graduation rate is over 80 percent. That is a 28 percentage point increase in a decade. This progress equates to millions of dollars in earning potential for thousands of young Clevelanders.

The pandemic posed a problem that few in our nation were prepared to respond to quickly. Despite that, educators in Cleveland worked to provide enrichment for children while physical buildings were closed. As it became clear that schools would remain closed, educators pivoted to begin planning for a new school year that would be unlike any other. New light was shone on the digital divide and inequity in access to high-speed Internet and technology devices. Again, our educators responded in ways that some would argue is outside their responsibility. Laptops, hotspots, and reliable home service were provided to families throughout Cleveland at low or no cost. This community has come together again to quickly respond to a crisis.

Due to the global pandemic, less data are available than in previous years, but we can still share data on graduation and enrollment, and information from Say Yes Cleveland and from early childhood resources. There is much to be proud of, but we know there is more work to be done.

The Alliance has also progressed despite the pandemic. Our staff has grown to include Eli

Stacy as our program coordinator. Before joining us, Eli worked as a homeownership and financial counselor with CHN Housing Partners (formerly known as Cleveland Housing Network) Lease to Own Program. Prior to CHN, he served as a grant program coordinator with Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority's Jobs Plus Program.

This summer, staff researchers led efforts to gauge how the Alliance can better help families understand their school choice options. Navigators guided families through a sea of changing information as the 2020–2021 school year inched closer.

In the subsequent pages, you will learn more about the continued success of *The Cleveland Plan* the persistence of Cleveland's children to reach new heights, and our work that lies ahead.

Onward,

Meghann Marnecheck

Executive Director, Cleveland Transformation Alliance



No one needs reminding that 2020 has been a trying year for many Cleveland families. In March, the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced families to quickly change their daily routines and find safe childcare when parents/caregivers still had to report to work outside the home.

Because of the unconventional school year, the Ohio Department of Education determined that limited school data would be released. The Cleveland Transformation Alliance felt it was important to align with this. The information you will find in the following pages is reflective of data released by the State of Ohio, the Higher Education Compact, PRE4CLE and Starting Point, and Say Yes Cleveland.

We are also pleased to share information gathered from our Family School Choice Listening Campaign, launched in the summer of 2020. The Alliance worked to give added voice to parents and caregivers through this campaign, which included a survey, focus groups, and a family forum. Data from these conversations has been reviewed and reported here. The information collected from parents, caregivers, and students will help shape the Cleveland Transformation Alliance's future work and our role in supporting *The Cleveland Plan*.

The information in this report is presented through the lens of our nation's awakening to racial inequities and efforts to bring about change. Locally, efforts to bridge the digital divide and ensuring access to quality public education have become a priority. The digital divide has existed for a long time in our community, but the pandemic exposed the severity of the problem.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet and those who do not. A lack of Internet access is most pronounced among Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous youth, particularly in urban and rural areas. Between nine and eleven million students still do not have reliable Internet access to complete their virtual learning coursework. Considering some schools have decided to have all-virtual learning, reliable Internet access is an educational and civil right for students, not a luxury.¹

Despite this, in 2019 Cleveland had the highest percentage of households without broadband Internet accounts of any U.S. city with 100,000 or more households, making it the worst connected city in the country, not the fourth as previous data showed.²

In Cuyahoga County, 22.5 percent of households do not have Internet access of any kind primarily because they cannot afford it. Nearly half of low-income families do not have Internet access.³



¹ Michelle Burris, "Why We Must Center Antiracism, Humanity, and Equity When Returning to School," The Century Foundation, August 12, 2020, https://tcf.org/content/commentary/must-center-antiracism-humanity-equity-returning-school/?mc_cid=82304adc56&mc_eid=2445816dfb&agreed=1.

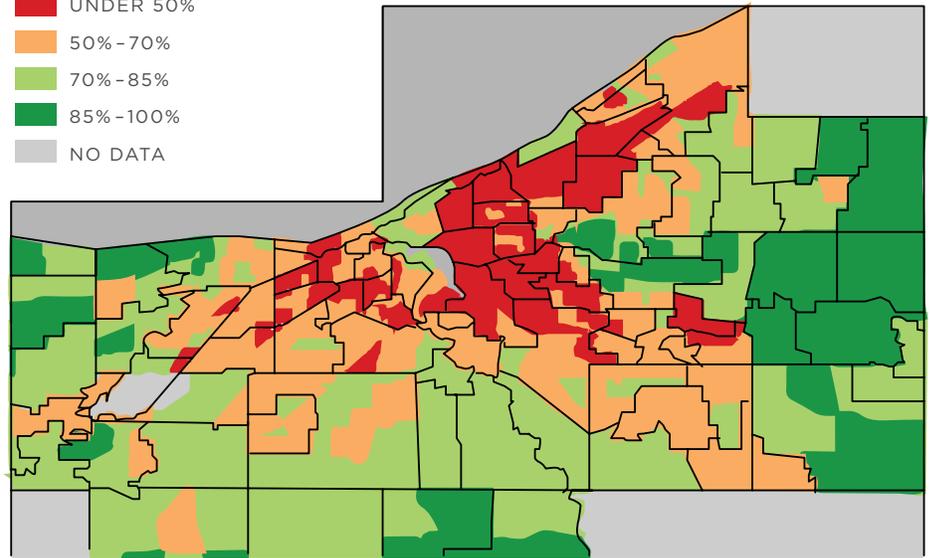
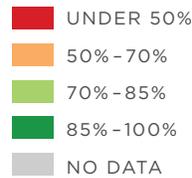
² "New Census Info: Cleveland the Worst Big U.S. City for Home Broadband Connections in 2019," CYC Blog, Connect Your Community, September 17, 2020, <http://connectyourcommunity.org/new-census-info-cleveland-the-worst-big-u-s-city-for-home-broadband-connections-in-2019/>.

³ Curt Williams, Digital Innovation Fellow, Cleveland Foundation

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH FIXED BROADBAND, CUYAHOGA COUNTY

LEGEND

Percent of Households with Fixed Broadband



As this map shows, the east side of Cleveland is in a broadband desert. CMSD and many charter schools committed to ensure that each student’s household was equipped with Internet access and necessary technology to continue learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, when online education is the only available option for many families.

For many schools, this effort began in March 2020 when the statewide closure of schools first began. CMSD’s digital equity program, empowerCMSD, was created to achieve the goal of a 1:1 ratio of students and computers and no-cost access to the Internet through a hotspot or residential connection to a service provider. CMSD partnered with DigitalC to help close the digital divide by providing no-cost Internet service to CMSD families within DigitalC’s service area.

CMSD families outside the service area were provided a hotspot for Internet access at no cost. CMSD distributed approximately 30,000 computers and 12,000 hotspots between last spring and this fall. These efforts have been generously supported by local philanthropy.

More broadly, EmpowerCLE+, one of two initiatives of the local non-profit DigitalC, offers low-dollar monthly access plans in some of the most under-connected and unconnected communities in Cleveland to ensure that everyone has access to technology and Internet connectivity.

The Cleveland Foundation is partnering with Cuyahoga County and PCs for People to deliver devices and hotspots to school-age children.⁴ Thousands of devices have been purchased, donated, and distributed to students, with more planned for the future. Statewide, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted have developed the Ohio Broadband Strategy. With input from business and community leaders, the Ohio Broadband Strategy explores ways to provide service to all communities by leveraging state assets and resources, encouraging public-private partnerships, and coordinating broadband expansion with economic development initiatives.⁵ The state also awarded 951 broadband education grants to districts across the state. The funds will help districts purchase additional mobile hotspots and Internet-enabled devices. These efforts will lead to greater exposure to, and use of, technology through training for families and through internships for students.

As the above map shows, there is much work to do to create equity, but the work has begun.

⁴ Curt Williams, Digital Innovation Fellow, Cleveland Foundation

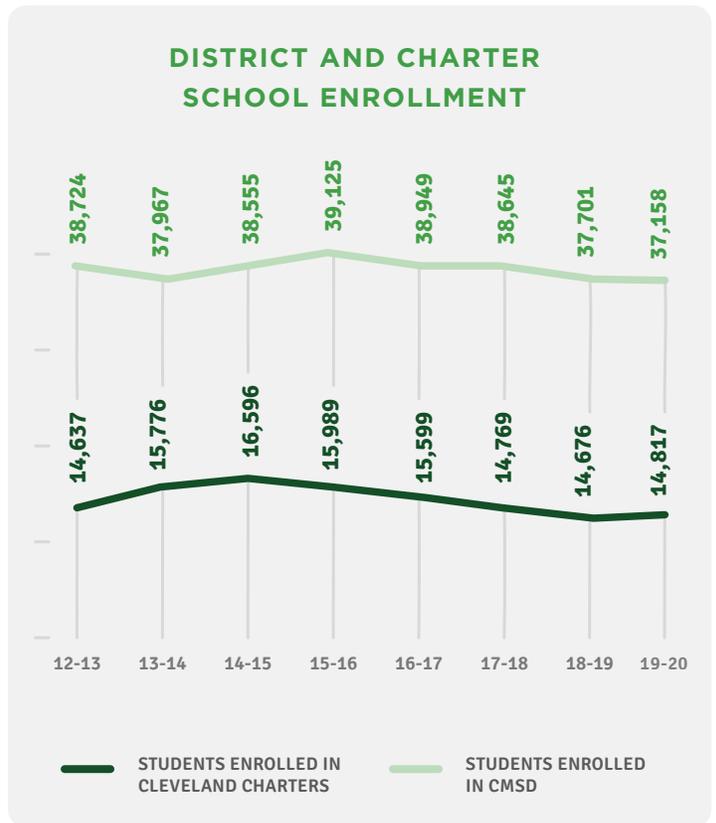
⁵ “Ohio Broadband Strategy,” InnovateOhio, last modified December 19, 2019, <https://innovateohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/innovate/priorities/resources/broadband/strategy>.

Enrollment in CMSD schools fell two percent during the 2019–2020 school year to 37,158 students, marking the continuation of a modest downward trend that began following the enrollment high of more than 39,000 students during the 2015–2016 school year.

In the 2019–2020 school year, enrollment in Cleveland charter schools increased by 141 students to 14,817. While noteworthy, the slight increase in charter school enrollment does not account for the total enrollment reduction at Cleveland Metropolitan School District schools.

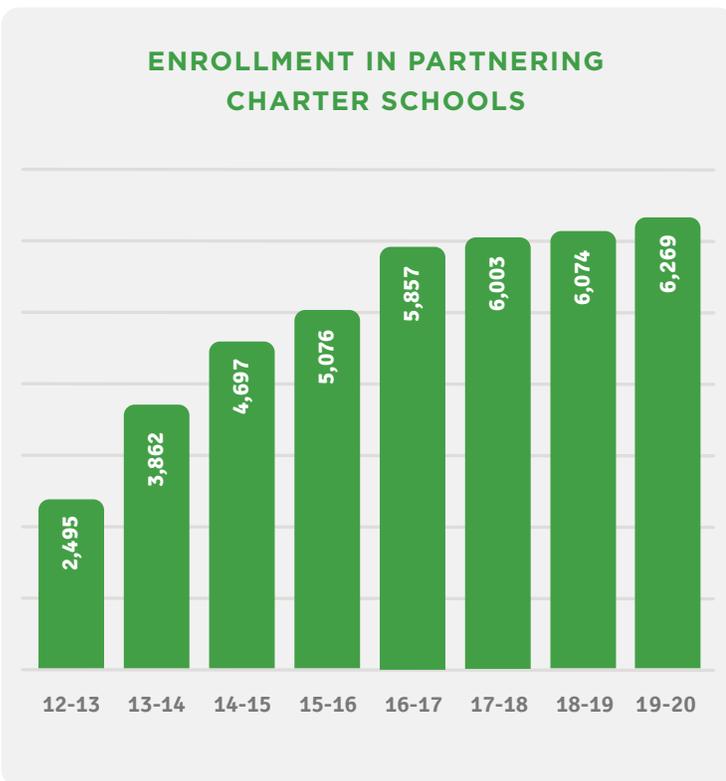
CMSD PARTNER CHARTER SCHOOLS

In 2018, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance proposed revised criteria for charter schools that have partnered with Cleveland Metropolitan



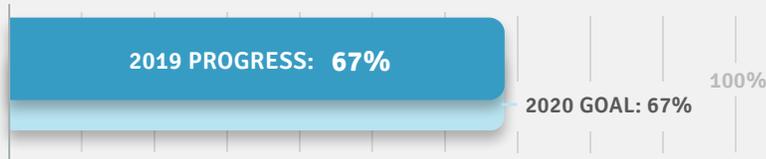
School District. These criteria are intended to hold partnering charter schools to higher standards of practice as outlined in *The Cleveland Plan*, and to better reflect the demographics of the public school system. The following is a list of partnering schools during the 2019–2020 school year: Citizens Academy, Citizens Academy East, Citizens Academy Southeast, Citizens Leadership Academy, Citizens Leadership Academy East, Cleveland College Preparatory School, Horizon Science Academy Cleveland, The Intergenerational School, Lakeshore Intergenerational School, Menlo Park Academy, Near West Intergenerational School, Northeast Ohio College Preparatory School, Stepstone Academy, Stonebrook Montessori, Village Preparatory School Cliffs, Village Preparatory School Willard, and Village Preparatory School Woodland Hills.⁶

Enrollment at these schools totaled 6,269 students in the 2019–2020 school year. These schools saw an overall enrollment increase of 195 students from the prior year.



⁶ This list includes charter schools sponsored by CMSD and schools that have signed formal partnership agreements with the district for the 2019–2020 school year.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS



PRE4CLE is Cleveland’s plan to expand high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds to increase kindergarten readiness. Since PRE4CLE launched in 2014, enrollment in high-quality preschool increased by 72 percent (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).

In the fall of 2019, children who experienced high-quality preschool at a PRE4CLE program continued to see gains in kindergarten readiness, with 67 percent of PRE4CLE students placing in the top two kindergarten readiness tiers, compared to 60 percent in the fall of 2015. This reflects Clevelanders achieving this benchmark a year early.

Of these students, 28 percent are demonstrating readiness, with the 2020 goal being 30 percent. Students in the “demonstrating” band of kindergarten readiness are able to demonstrate all of the foundational skills and behaviors that prepare them for instruction in kindergarten based on Ohio’s kindergarten standards. Children in the “approaching” band of readiness are able to demonstrate most but not all of these skills and behaviors. Among children who experienced a “high dose” or eight or more months in a PRE4CLE classroom, 70 percent of children reached the top two tiers of readiness, with 30 percent demonstrating.

PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE & LITERACY



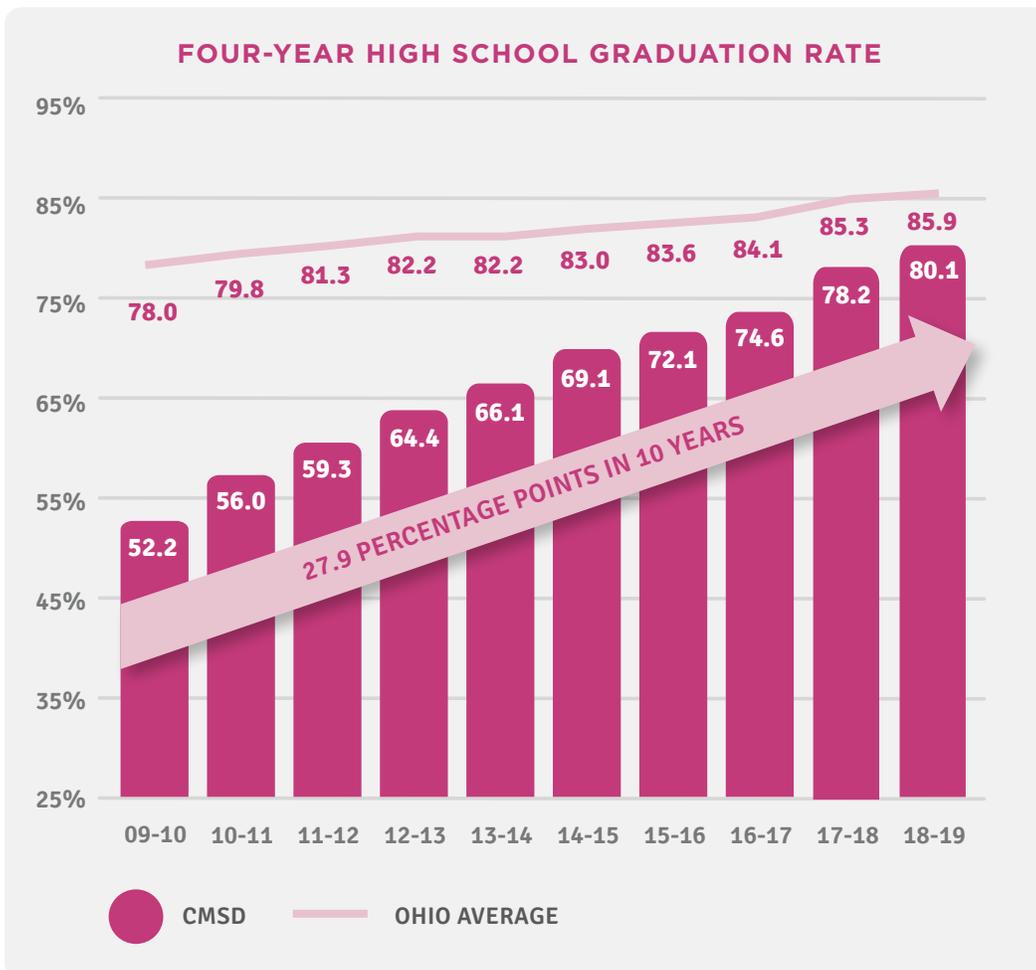
Scores for language and literacy readiness, designated as “on-track” or “off-track,” remained more stable over time, with 48 percent scoring as on-track in 2019. Children meeting the “on-track” designation for language and literacy are able to demonstrate the early literacy skills needed to meet Ohio’s literacy standards. Among children who attended eight or more months in a PRE4CLE classroom, 52 percent are on-track for language and literacy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on preschool enrollment due to state-required closures and class size limitations. Learn more about this at <https://pre4cle.org/>.



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

CMSD reached a four-year graduation rate of 80.1 percent. This is the District's highest graduation rate since *The Cleveland Plan* was implemented in 2012, and the highest in the district's history. The four-year graduation rate applies to students in the Class of 2019 who graduated within four years. These are the students who entered ninth grade in 2015 and graduated by the summer of 2019. The five-year graduation rate was 84.2 percent, which applies to students in the Class of 2018, who graduated within five years. These are the students who entered ninth grade in the fall of 2014 and graduated by the summer of 2019. There is a 53 percent total increase in the graduation rate since 2010. This reflects the fourth fastest-improving graduation rate in the state and exemplifies the effectiveness of *The Cleveland Plan*. The overall average state graduation rate in Ohio is 85.9 percent.



CMSD has narrowed the gap between its students and the state average by 78 percent since 2010.

CLOSING THE GRADUATION GAP



The graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students have been climbing and are above those for the whole District. According to state data, the graduation rate of African American students rose from 79.8 percent in 2017–2018 to 80.9 percent in 2018–2019, and is up 23.9 percentage points since 2011. The rate for Hispanic students increased from 77 percent to 82.6 percent during the same time period, and is up 28.9 percentage points since 2011.

CMSD graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students are outpacing the graduation rate for these students statewide.

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

Mayor Frank Jackson created the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland (Compact) in 2011 with the goal of increasing college readiness, access, and persistence rates among CMSD graduates. The data in this section is drawn from the Compact’s 2020 Report to the Community. Overall, this data shows positive gains.

READINESS

The percentage of students participating in Advanced Placement (AP) testing rose to 8.7 percent in 2018-2019 from 3.7 percent when the Compact began its work in 2011 and up slightly from last year. The percentage of high school graduates needing remediation in math or English at an Ohio public institution of higher education dropped to 53 percent from the Class of 2017’s 58 percent and is currently at the lowest rate since the Compact began measuring this indicator in 2011.

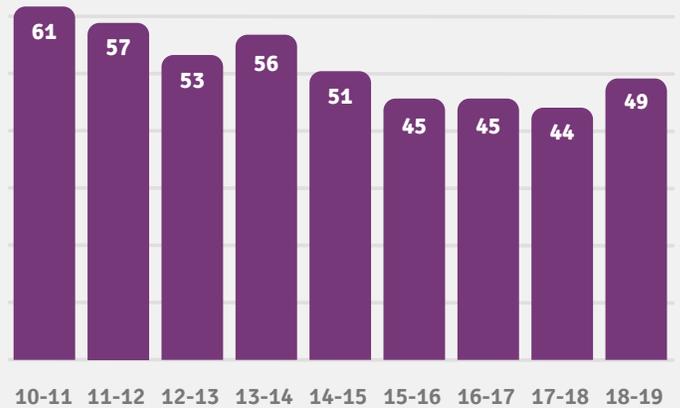
PERCENTAGE OF CMSD STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES



ACCESS

The number of students completing at least one college application jumped 10 percent from 58 in 2018 to 68 percent in 2019. Although Say Yes Cleveland launched just six-months before the Class of 2019's graduation, the availability of these scholarships proved to be an immediate incentive to pursue post-secondary education: 49 percent of 2019 graduates enrolled in a post-secondary program this year, representing an increase of five percentage points over the previous year. Furthermore, this increase outpaced the projections developed during the planning stages of Say Yes Cleveland, which anticipated a three percentage point enrollment increase for the first Say Yes eligible class. We believe that Say Yes Cleveland will drive future increases in college applications, FAFSA completion, and other access indicators.

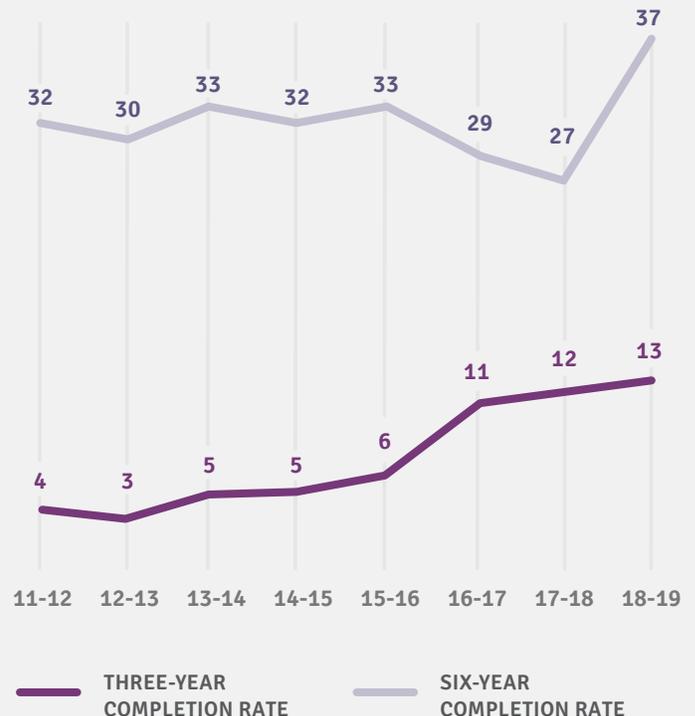
CMSD GRADUATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE WITHIN ONE YEAR



PERSISTENCE

This year's college graduation metrics measure the CMSD graduating Class of 2013 at four-year institutions and the Class of 2016 at two-year institutions. In both situations, we see an increase in college completion rates. The six-year college completion rate for CMSD graduates at Compact four-year institutions rose from 27 percent to 37 percent. Similarly, the three-year college completion rate for CMSD graduates from Compact two-year institutions rose from 12 to 13 percent. Both represent the highest college graduation rates since the formation of the Alliance.

PERCENTAGE OF CMSD STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM TWO-AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES²



2020 is a significant milestone in the history of educating Cleveland's children. For the first time, eligible CMSD graduates had access to Say Yes Cleveland scholarships to pay for their post-secondary tuition. Say Yes Cleveland tuition scholarships were awarded to students attending eligible institutions after a Pell Grant and Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) were applied to each student's balance. For the Class of 2019: 845 students were enrolled and eligible for a Say Yes Cleveland scholarship, and 391 scholarships were awarded totaling \$1,203,443. This positive start represents only the first class in a 25-year scholarship program and will serve as a solid foundation for growth. Each year, graduates will have the example of previous classes using Say Yes Cleveland scholarships, making post-secondary education a realistic option for more students and families.

Last year, Say Yes Cleveland began offering support services in 16 CMSD schools from pre-K through 12th grade. Services include afterschool and summer programming, free legal assistance, mental health services, and a family support specialist in each school, to connect students



and their families to needed resources. Services will expand to another 26 CMSD and partnering charter schools during the 2020–2021 school year and to every CMSD and partner charter school within four years.

These support services are the crucial aspect that sets Say Yes Cleveland apart from many promise scholarship programs. While tuition scholarships will help students overcome the barrier of college affordability, the personalized assistance provided through Say Yes Cleveland—from kindergarten through 12th grade—will help them stay on track to academic success and graduate ready to take advantage of post-secondary opportunities.

CTA: THE FOURTH PILLAR

In July 2012, state legislators approved the bipartisan bill that implemented *The Cleveland Plan*, and then-Governor John Kasich signed the bill into law allowing the reform work to begin. *The Cleveland Plan* had four pillars: grow the number of high-performing district and charter schools in Cleveland and close and replace failing schools, focus CMSD's

central office on key support and governance roles and transfer authority and resources to schools, invest and phase in high-leverage system reforms across all schools from preschool to college and career, and create the Cleveland Transformation Alliance to ensure accountability for all of Cleveland's public schools—both District and charter.

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance was established in December 2012, and also had four areas of focus. These are: assess the quality of all District and charter schools in Cleveland, communicate to families about quality school options in Cleveland, monitor the growth of the charter sector in Cleveland, and ensure fidelity to *The Cleveland Plan*.

During the summer of 2020, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance engaged parents, caregivers, and students in a Family School Choice Listening Campaign. The campaign included a survey, focus groups, and a Family Café Forum to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to ask families which information and resources would be most helpful as they consider school choice options.

The Alliance received 362 responses to a brief survey that was provided in English and Spanish and distributed with the help of several organizational partners. Through our research, we heard that safety, programs, location, and teacher quality are the top considerations for families during their school search. We also heard that families would like to find one location where they can be reminded about deadlines, ask questions, and quickly learn about school programs and partnerships.



This information will help the Alliance to be more responsive to families, and to better fulfill our charge to inform the community about quality school choice options. While the Alliance already provides these services for families, we can do better by raising community awareness of our organization and the resources we offer and by making them more understandable and user-friendly.

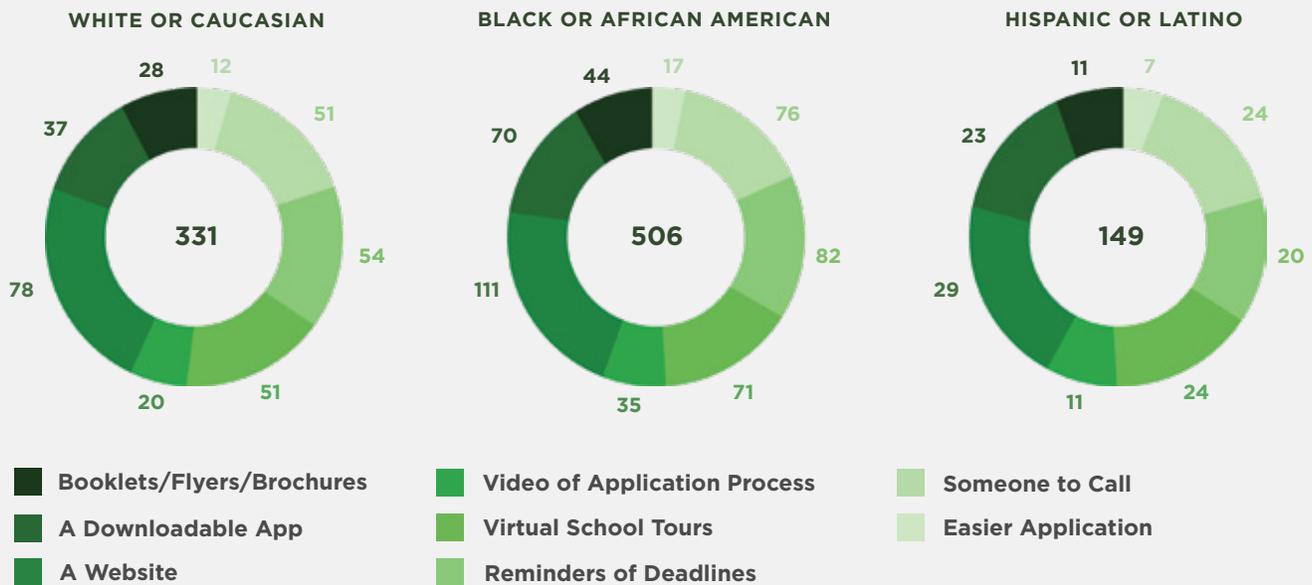
Aside from COVID-19, what are your 3 most important things about choosing a school for your child?

TOP 3 SELECTED	1ST	2ND	3RD
Most Common Response	Safety	Programs	Programs
Second Most Common Response	Location/Distance	Quality Teachers	Quality Teachers
Third Most Common Response	Programs	Safety	Safety

How do Cleveland Families want to Receive Information about School Quality?

TOP RESPONSES: A website that easily shows me all the schools and what programs they have (222); Reminders of important deadlines (161); Someone to call to ask questions (157)

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES BY RACE:



A majority of responders also indicated that the most challenging part of the school selection process is learning about various school programs and offerings. This finding will help to focus the Alliance’s work and guide us in making the process of finding the right fit school more straightforward and more navigable for families.

In an effort to broaden our reach to more families, the Alliance relaunched the Ambassador Program during the summer of 2020. Previously, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance had contracted with a small team of ambassadors who would attend events and staff tables to share information with families. The program’s new focus is to provide professional development training about school

choice to staff at partnering organizations that have trusted relationships with Cleveland families. Trained ambassadors will share information about the Cleveland Transformation Alliance and our school choice materials, including the annual School Quality Guide and our website, myCLEschool.org. In addition, Ambassadors will direct families who need extra assistance to our Navigator staff. Navigators can help connect families to needed resources in the community and help answer specific questions about school options. They also help families navigate the school enrollment process. The Alliance has engaged 14 organizations and trained 125 individuals on school choice resources as of October 31, 2020.

On August 15, 2020, the Alliance hosted its first Cleveland Family Café. The event was part of our participation in the Cleveland Foundation's Common Ground program. The virtual conversation gave parents and caregivers a safe space to talk about their hopes and concerns for the upcoming, unconventional school year. Participants also discussed how they can support one another and what resources may be available to help. It was an empowering conversation, and we plan to make the Family Café a regular event.

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance will continue to ensure fidelity to *The Cleveland Plan* by communicating the quality of all District and charter schools to Cleveland families. In the coming year, we plan to engage further with parents, caregivers, and students through more Family Café forums and opportunities to hear directly from families so that the Alliance can be the most responsive resource possible.

As parents, caregivers, and family members, how can we support each other during the upcoming school year?

Below are responses provided during the August 15 Cleveland Family Café conversation



Take advantage of resources and various social media platforms



Step up to help in your neighborhood if you can



Don't wait until the last moment to seek help



Check in and talk to each other — use virtual platforms



Make sure information is current with the school to ensure you are getting accurate information



And last but not least: Listen!

In Northeast Ohio, nothing is given. Everything is earned. You work for what you have.

— LeBron James

The *Cleveland Plan* is working. Students are reaching the highest achievement levels in recent history. As a community, we must work together to continue to build upon these gains so that our children can reach their highest potential. Much like we have come together to respond to the digital divide, we can continue to find ways to support students and their academic achievement.

Our community has already worked incredibly hard, resulting in CMSD generating the fourth fastest-improving graduation rate in the state. This improvement is despite living in the worst connected and most impoverished large city in the country. In fact, Cleveland is ranked seventh of 50 urban school communities for “beating the odds.” Cleveland’s score is based upon a combination of charter (20 percent) and District (11 percent) schools, both of which beat the odds.⁷

Enrollment at our public schools—District and charter—is remaining steady. Fluctuation has been minimal since peak enrollment highs during the 2014–2015 academic year for charter schools and 2015–2016 for District schools.

At least 40 million children worldwide have delayed early childhood education in their critical preschool year as COVID-19 shuttered childcare and early education facilities, and Cleveland is no different. Significant gains were achieved through fall 2019, including reaching the 2020 kindergarten readiness benchmark a year early. COVID-19 has further exposed the need for high-quality and accessible early childhood education to place children on the best track for future success.

Through an unexpected and challenging year, as a community we must take advantage of what we and others have learned about educating children today. The need for individualized learning, added supports, one-on-one time with teachers, and the focus on social and emotional learning should not be abandoned. Cleveland families are now better connected to the Internet and technology devices than ever before. We can capitalize on that momentum to better prepare students for their role in the global economy.

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance will work in the coming year to respond to our Family School Choice Listening Campaign by incorporating information into our website about the programs, partnerships, and offerings that make schools unique. We also plan to grow our family engagement through future Family Café forums, increase marketing efforts to raise awareness of the Alliance, and further engage interested parents and caregivers to be an ongoing resource for us and the families we serve. The Alliance will do this work to help realize our mission in *The Cleveland Plan*; ensuring every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school and every neighborhood has a multitude of great schools from which families can choose.

Cleveland’s children are reaching for their highest potential, and we all are here to help them reach even higher.

⁷ Jesse Margolis and Eli Groves, “Resilience: Will Urban Schools that Beat the Odds Continue to Do So During the COVID-19 Pandemic?” Mar-Grady Research, June 2020, <http://margrady.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Resilience-Beat-the-Odds-Full-Report.pdf>. 2020 Report to the Community.

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This report is submitted in memory of Director, Deborah Rutledge, who passed away on February 22, 2020. Director Rutledge had served as Finance Committee Chair, a member of the Executive Committee, and the Interim Executive Director. We will carry on her enduring passion for our mission.



Cleveland
Transformation
Alliance

Quality Schools for All Children

For more information on the Cleveland Transformation Alliance and Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools visit myCLEschool.org.

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