

CLEVELAND'S PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



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THEN AND NOW

Much has changed since 2012, when the original Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools laid new groundwork for improving PreK–12 public education. The Cleveland Plan, as it came to be known, was a response to a growing sense of urgency in the city that action was required to ensure every child in Cleveland attends a high quality school and every neighborhood has a multitude of great schools from which families can choose. It also stemmed from a belief that public education is fundamental to American democracy, bringing people together and promoting the common good. That is the power of public education.

The Cleveland Plan writers sought to bring the community together to set forth a vision and to create legislation addressing short- and long-term challenges. The vision was informed by the needs and context of a specific moment in time, but set the stage for the future.

Nearly a decade later, the Cleveland Plan's impact is apparent:

- Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) students made significant gains on important measures, including increasing high school graduation rates (nearly 30 percentage points in 10 years) and decreasing the need for remediation in post-secondary math and English. In fact, the CMSD is one of the fastest improving school districts in Ohio.
- The residents of Cleveland have shown confidence in the district's fiscal stewardship via unprecedented voter support for significant operating levies in 2012, 2016, and 2020.
- State policy changes elevated standards and accountability for all charter school sponsors and charter school buildings, resulting in more high-quality schools.
- The CMSD shifted to school-based budgeting, giving principals more control over specific aspects of governance and finance and providing more autonomy to principals to spend money in accordance with their school priorities.
- The district and charter community opted to close or redesign schools based on numerous factors including academic performance, enrollment demand, building condition, community need, and available teaching and learning models.



Student Achievement

From **2013 to 2019**, Cleveland **nearly doubled** the number of young children enrolled in high-quality preschool.

K–3 Literacy rates have grown **4.4 percentage points**, placing the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) in the Top 15 percent in Ohio for literacy improvement **from 2014 to 2019**.

From **2012–13 to 2019–20**, the CMSD's high school graduation rate increased from **64% to 80.1%**.

From **2012–13 to 2019–20**, the percentage of CMSD graduates who needed remediation in post-secondary math or English dropped from **76% to 53%**.



Enrollment

2012– **38,724** students in CMSD schools
2013 **14,637** students in charter schools

2019– **37,158** students in CMSD schools
2020 **14,817** students in charter schools



Number of Schools

2012–2013 **100** CMSD schools
49 charter schools

2019–2020 **97** CMSD schools on 91 campuses
59 charter schools on 56 campuses

2012–2020 **20** charter schools opened
10 closed

- District and charter schools came together with local nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropic organizations to implement exciting initiatives that support students throughout their educational experience, including [PRE4CLE](#), the [Higher Education Compact](#), and [Say Yes Cleveland](#).

Today, Cleveland is well positioned to continue this upward trend, and the urgency to keep improving education for our city's children continues. The COVID-19 pandemic only adds to that urgency, given the upheaval in education experienced in 2020 and 2021, which will present challenges and opportunities for students, families, and educators for years to come.

"The Cleveland Plan called for dramatic changes to the way schools in Cleveland operate. It ensured that every child in our city has access to high-quality public education. This type of education promotes the common good, brings together children and families across different cultures, and serves all students, regardless of means, ability or circumstances. The beginning of any journey is momentous, but it is particularly meaningful when the efforts taken have the potential to transform lives. We have made progress. Yet, it is essential for current and future leaders to sustain the work, continue creating environments that foster students' abilities, and provide hope and opportunity on behalf of our student scholars and their families."

— City of Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson

This refresh and recommitment to the Cleveland Plan takes into account all that has changed since 2012. For example, how we define high-quality teaching and learning environments has evolved, with greater emphasis on meeting students and families where they are and thinking outside the traditional four walls of a classroom. There has been a new focus on ensuring that students have the resources they need to thrive outside the school building and school day, while making sure student experiences in the classroom are rich, robust, and expansive. As a society, we have a deeper appreciation for the role of community in supporting students in their journey from birth through adulthood, and weaving that sense of community and social responsibility into PreK–12 education.

The health and socioeconomic inequities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial and social justice issues playing out in communities across the nation make clear that the Cleveland Plan must reflect a challenging present, a brighter future, and a continued commitment to change.

This refreshed Cleveland Plan digs deep into the practical realities of necessary change. The strategies and indicators that inform the updated five pillars, as detailed in the pages that follow, will help Cleveland deliver the best teaching and learning experience for our children as we look to the future.



Building Autonomy in CMSD

CMSD principals now control approximately **73%** of their own budgets, up nearly **25 percent from 2013**.

PLAN AUTHORS

The refresh of the Cleveland Plan was shepherded by the [Cleveland Transformation Alliance](#) (the Alliance), a public-private partnership conceived under by HB 525, the [2012 state legislation](#) implementing the original Cleveland Plan. The Alliance has four distinct roles: assess the quality of all district and charter schools in Cleveland, communicate to parents about quality school options, monitor charter sector growth in Cleveland, and ensure fidelity to the Cleveland Plan. As a community-based organization, the Alliance serves as a convener that helps move both policy and practice in public education.

The Alliance is guided by a [Board of Directors](#) made up of parents, educators, and business, philanthropic, and civic leaders from throughout Cleveland and across the state who contributed to the refresh of the Cleveland Plan. The Alliance also worked with community partners such as the Neighborhood Leadership Institute to get feedback from community members, families, and educators in public schools across the city.

While the Alliance drove the refresh process, it is critical to emphasize that the Alliance is the convening stakeholder, not the authority, for the Cleveland Plan.

Responsibility for implementation rests with the full community.



THE URGENCY OF EQUITY

Cleveland has a rich, diverse fabric of people, families, and neighborhoods who represent different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, national origins, religions, and abilities. This richness has the potential to power incredible educational experiences for our students, but only if systemic inequities are named and consciously addressed. That is why this refreshed Cleveland Plan addresses our city's² urgent educational needs with equity in mind. To that end, the Plan includes strategies in the first four pillars that address equity, and there is also a new fifth pillar focused explicitly on furthering educational equity.

Educational equity means that every student gets the services, resources, connections, and learning opportunities they need to realize their full potential, regardless of who they are or where they live. Educational equity must be intentionally co-created and continually revisited by students, families, teachers, school staff, and members of the larger Cleveland community.

Every partner must ensure that each strategy, idea, and practice is evaluated based on its alignment with this vision of educational equity. That effort already started, with two questions integrated into the Plan's creation:

1. Have representatives from stakeholder groups/communities who would be most affected been informed, meaningfully involved, and authentically represented in the development of this strategy? Is anyone missing? How can they be engaged?

ed-u-ca-tion-al eq-ui-ty (noun)

1. Every student gets the services, resources, connections, and learning opportunities they need to realize their full potential, regardless of who they are or where they live.
2. Intentionally co-created and continually revisited by students, families, teachers, school staff, and members of the larger Cleveland community.

2. What adverse impacts or unintended consequences could result from this strategy? (e.g., which racial/ethnic or other groups could be negatively affected?)

It is up to our entire community to hold ourselves and one another accountable to the spirit and the letter of our collective definition of educational equity.

NORTH STAR

With equity at the core, the Cleveland Plan is further guided by a North Star—a declaration of intent for the future. The refresh process was driven by the following North Star statement:

- All Cleveland public education students will have a high-quality, equitable education in schools that inspire joy in learning.
- All Cleveland students will have access to individualized opportunities that prepare them to participate in society and forge a meaningful path for themselves when they graduate.
- Families will actively participate in continuously improving and evolving their schools to fit their community's needs.

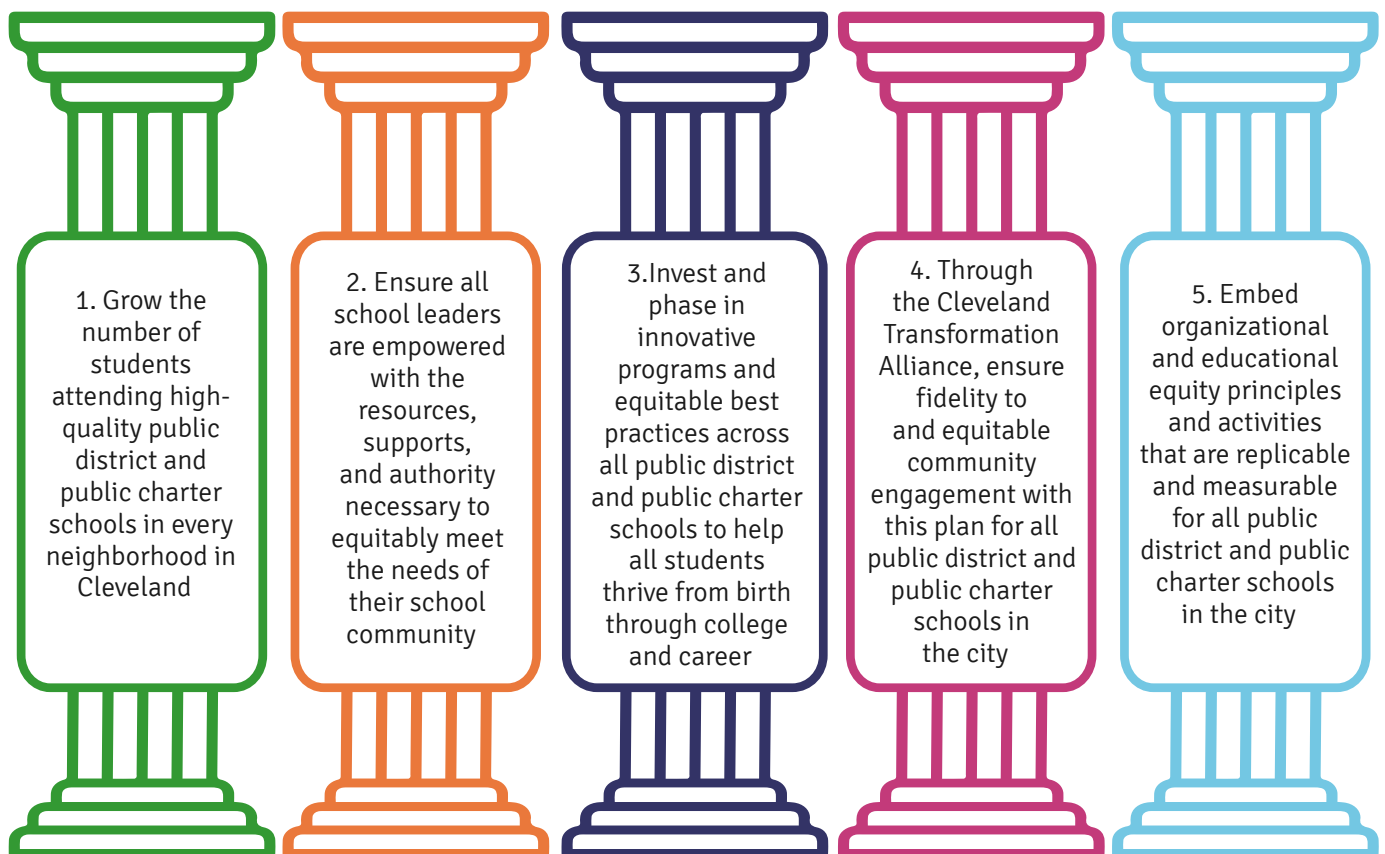


² In this Plan, the term “city” refers to Cleveland, Bratenahl, Newburgh Heights, Linndale, and portions of Garfield Heights and Brook Park, which are served by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

A foundation sets the stage for the rest of the house, including the frame and the roof. The foundation for the Cleveland Plan is high-quality public education. The frame of the house is the pillars—or goals—while the roof represents the North Star and commitment to equity. The graphic below shows how the house comes together.

All Cleveland public education students have a high-quality, equitable education in schools that inspire joy in learning.

There is educational equity: Every student gets the services, resources, connections, and learning opportunities they need to realize their full potential, regardless of who they are or where they live. Educational equity must be intentionally co-created and continually revisited by members of the larger Cleveland community, including students, families, teachers, and school staff.



Quality Education

Each pillar is composed of strategies for action (detailed in the following pages) that are adaptable to every neighborhood, every teaching and learning environment, and every student.

QUALITY INDICATORS

At the foundation of the Cleveland Plan is a shared definition of high quality that speaks to the specific needs of Cleveland families and students. This shared definition was created by the Alliance and multiple educational stakeholders including parents, teachers, community organizations, service providers, non-profits, businesses, and more. Together we arrived at the following set of indicators of a high-quality teaching and learning environment:



Student Achievement and Progress

- Kindergarten readiness
- PreK-8 literacy and math
- 9th-grade completion rate
- High school graduation rate
- Progress in four learning domains (foundational skills, content, reasoning skills, & social-emotional learning)
- Preparation for success in life after high school (work, school, military, etc.)
- Students acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent, engaged, and responsible citizens throughout their lives



Community Engagement

- Engagement staff, programs, and services are embedded (e.g., family engagement liaisons, multilingual engagement services, learning opportunities, social emotional supports, etc.)
- Availability of internships, mentorships, and volunteer opportunities for students, teachers, and families
- The meaningful number of quality engagements between educators and families
- The meaningful number of quality partnerships with community organizations



School Culture and Environment

- Student attendance
- Student engagement in arts, music, and extracurricular activities
- The degree of “joy” in the student learning experience
- Retention of students, families, and high-quality educators
- How welcome and safe students and families feel in and around their school



Instruction

- Access to high-quality early learning opportunities
- Availability of multiple ways for students to demonstrate knowledge/skills to advance from one grade to the next or achieve mastery of content
- Educators collaborate with one another and external partners to modify and build creative learning models that align with their students’ needs
- Educators relate, extend, and transfer knowledge (AKA deep instruction)
- Educators access and use comprehensive, high-quality data to inform instructional decision-making
- Capacity for effective literacy instruction among educators, students, and families across all grades, ages, and subjects



Educators

- The educator’s students’ academic achievement
- The educator’s relationships with students (according to the students)
- The educator’s full engagement and satisfaction with their position/work
- Peer, student, and parent feedback about a student’s education is gathered in a systematic manner



Technology

- Connected educators and educational settings (high-speed internet + devices + skill)
- Connected students (high-speed internet + devices + skill)
- Connected families and community (high-speed internet + skill)
- Students and educators have the technology and skillset to use various technological tools and platforms to support teaching and learning



Finance

- Per-pupil expenditure meets student academic and social-emotional needs
- School leadership has the authority to make appropriate programmatic spending decisions while meeting enterprise-wide program and quality requirements

Naming the indicators is the first step to achieving the goals of the Cleveland Plan; Determining how these indicators will be measured is a separate process led by the Alliance in 2021-2022. The following pages provide detailed strategies for supporting the five pillars—goals that, if achieved, will provide a strong future for all students, in school and in life.



Grow the number of students attending high-quality public district and public charter schools in every neighborhood in Cleveland.

Movement toward this goal first requires that everyone in the city understand and agree about what is meant by the term high-quality education—and that when those words are used, they refer to what children in Cleveland need specifically. Then, we need to identify teaching and learning models that fit our shared definition of high quality and make those models adaptable and available across the city. In addition, two reports examining enrollment, one by Case Western Reserve University looking at K-8 schools³, and another conducted by CMSD examining PreK-12⁴, concluded there are too many seats for the number of school-age children in Cleveland—an issue the entire community must address. As outlined in CMSD’s 2019 “Long Term School Plan” high numbers of open seats make it difficult “to maintain quality academic programs across the system without costly subsidies.” When schools are not fully enrolled, there must be an effort to fill these schools.⁵

Finally, evidence makes clear that students of color, who comprise most of Cleveland’s student body, are more likely to thrive if the people with whom they interact day in and day out—the principals, teachers, receptionists, cafeteria staff, librarians, and all other educators—can authentically relate to the students’ lived experiences. This requires a thoughtful and intentional approach to hiring, along with ensuring all educators have the information, training, curriculum, and support they need to maintain inclusive, affirming, culturally appropriate teaching and learning environments.

Five strategies will support progress toward this goal:

1. Create a shared definition and measures for quality.
2. Promote, expand, and replicate high-quality teaching and learning environments.
3. Use school quality data to inform families of the opportunity to enroll in unfilled seats at high-quality schools city-wide.
4. Develop a city-wide plan to address the mismatch between too few students and too many seats in order to ensure all schools have enrollment levels that support vibrant and viable school programs.
5. Recruit, train, and retain a diverse pool of high-quality educators who are best suited to promote the long-term development and success of all students.



³ Fischer, Salas Atwell, Henderson, & Chan. (2019). Needs Assessment for K-8 Schooling in Cleveland. Available online at https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/cms/lib/OH01915844/Centricity/domain/5454/ltp19/docs/K-8%20Report_August_2019.pdf

⁴ Cleveland Metropolitan School District. (2019). Citywide Analysis: K-8 and High School Fact Base: Citywide. Available online at <https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/cms/lib05/OH01915844/Centricity/domain/5454/ltp19/docs/CitywideAnalysisK-8andHSFactBase.pdf>

⁵ For more about school enrollment in Cleveland, visit [clevelandmetroschools.org/qualityschools](https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/qualityschools)



Ensure all school leaders are empowered with the resources, supports, and authority necessary to equitably meet the needs of their school community.

Achieving this goal will mean that governance structures balance school autonomy with the pursuit of organizational goals in order to meet the needs of students and families while maintaining consistently high standards city-wide. “School leader” may mean something different in a charter school and a district school, but ultimately educational decision-makers must have the resources they need to create and sustain the most appropriate teaching and learning environment for the students and families they serve. They also need to be encouraged and supported in finding new ways of educating students that can go beyond the traditional “four walls” of school—perhaps more now than ever, we need innovative approaches to PreK-12 education to thrive during and after the global disruption of the pandemic. For example, district and charter schools had to connect each student with a technology device during the pandemic and ensure all families had internet access—an unexpected challenge. This kind of investment must be expanded and maintained so that students and families can access and use devices, internet services, and software programs that support PreK-12 learning and are instrumental to achieving success after school.

Educational equity is only possible if everyone understands and has the skills to foster an inclusive community. School leaders benefit from the time and support it takes to review and update policies, procedures, and practices so that equity and inclusion are embedded throughout, from communications to operations to finance.

Lastly, it is very hard to solve a problem you cannot measure. This is where data comes into play: Decision-makers need to have a

Five strategies will support progress toward this goal:

1. Give school leaders the ability and financial resources to structure leadership, budgets, staffing, scheduling, and curriculum in support of their school’s specific model/program.
2. Support school leaders in identifying and implementing innovative models and programs that reflect the needs of their unique school community.
3. Support school leaders in using technology that facilitates high-quality teaching and learning.
4. Support school leaders in identifying, adapting, and implementing equity-focused management and organizational skills.
5. Support school leaders in collecting, analyzing, and using disaggregated data about student discipline, academic achievement, and social-emotional proficiency to address inequitable opportunities and outcomes.

full picture of what is going on in their schools in order to address weaknesses. Capturing and using data that is disaggregated by race, income, English Language status, and other relevant factors allows leaders to identify inequities and take action.





Invest and phase in innovative programs and equitable best practices across all public district and public charter schools to help all students thrive from birth through college and career.

Achieving this goal will mean that the Cleveland community and all of Cleveland's public schools are investing in and leveraging key programs and practices that support students' growth and development over time.

The strategies in this pillar reflect decades of research on high-quality education and equity. For example, high-quality early learning continues to reap benefits for the lifetime of an individual beyond the early years and remains a critical strategy in this refreshed plan. In addition, young people need tailored support to become the whole humans they are meant to be. Schools play a role at every step of the way, from helping students understand their academic and professional strengths and interests, to navigating and overcoming trauma, to setting them up for success as adults. This is particularly important from an equity lens, given the systemic racism and historical and modern discrimination experienced by many Cleveland children and families.

Six strategies will support progress toward this goal:

1. Expand the availability of and enrollment in affordable high-quality preschool and early education (birth through age 5) in every neighborhood.
2. Provide services, staff, and/or programs that support students' and educators' social-emotional development, mental health, and well-being.
3. Expand the availability of and enrollment in affordable high-quality before-school, afterschool, expanded learning, and summer programs.
4. Prepare students to be engaged and responsible global citizens throughout their lives.
5. Prepare students to embark on a meaningful journey to a career pathway after school, whether that entails higher education, military service, immediate employment, or a combination of these.
6. Provide students with opportunities to learn with employers and the wider community, including through internships, externships, capstones, exchange programs, service-learning projects, and public demonstrations of learning.





Through the Cleveland Transformation Alliance, ensure fidelity to and equitable community engagement with this Plan for all public district and public charter schools in the city.

Achieving this goal will mean the Alliance continues to be a credible convener of individuals and organizations dedicated to achieving high-quality public education in Cleveland. It will remain a trusted resource for information about high-quality education that promotes transparency and meaningful public engagement.

The original Cleveland Plan gave the Mayor of Cleveland the authority to create the Cleveland Transformation Alliance and ensure an ongoing, local, collaborative focus on PreK–12 education in our city. The Alliance will maintain its commitment to authentically engaging the community it serves and giving voice to those who have not always been heard. Additionally, the expanding number of engaged stakeholders charged with implementing the Cleveland Plan will continue to advocate on behalf of Cleveland students and families. The strategies in this pillar help operationalize principles of educational equity through inclusive and intentional data analysis, communication, policy advocacy, and community engagement.

Six strategies will support progress toward this goal:

1. Monitor and publish and widely distribute an annual report on the quality of all of Cleveland's schools (district and charter) that includes data that is disaggregated by race, income, English Language status, and other relevant factors.
2. Implement ongoing, consistent, and two-way communication and engagement with students, families, educators, and other stakeholders about high-quality education and the Cleveland Plan.
3. Raise awareness about available high-quality teaching and learning options in the city and how to access them.
4. Revisit and refine the Cleveland Plan periodically, with stakeholder input and innovative best practices, to reflect economic, technological, and political changes within the education field and the city of Cleveland.
5. Participate in local, state, and federal advocacy efforts that support the policy and funding needed to implement the Cleveland Plan.
6. Identify and actively engage a broad array of partners to support and successfully implement the Cleveland Plan.





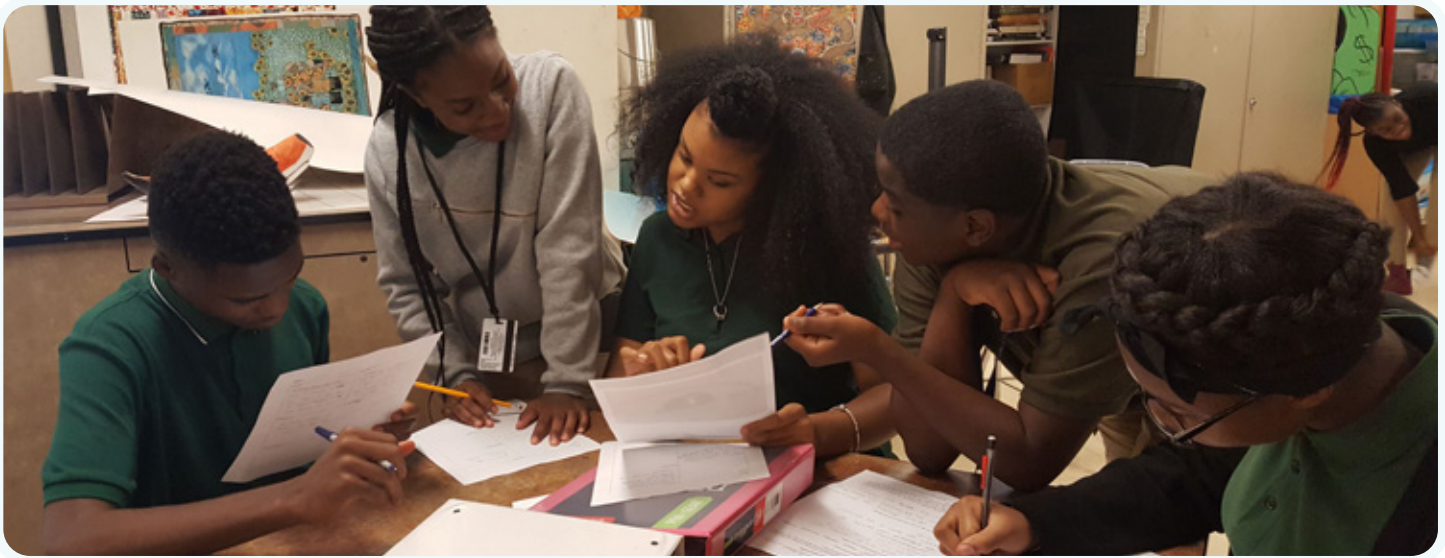
Embed organizational and educational equity principles and activities that are replicable and measurable for all public district and public charter schools in the city.

Achieving this goal means bringing to life the vision of educational equity laid out on page 7 of the Cleveland Plan: Ensuring that as a community, every student is getting the services, resources, connections, and learning opportunities they need to realize their full potential, regardless of who they are or where they live.

As a community, we must consistently assess the degree to which our educational practices and approaches align with this vision. This will not happen overnight—eliminating current inequities and preventing further harm is an ongoing process, informed by the voices and experiences of those most affected. This type of thoughtful evaluation process will identify opportunities for improvement as well as best practices that can be adapted and used elsewhere.

Four strategies will support progress toward this goal:

1. Measure the alignment of educational practices and approaches with the Plan's definition of educational equity.
2. Help advance, through technical assistance and professional development, principles of educational equity among school leaders.
3. Identify and expand community engagement programs that successfully reach the most at-risk or historically marginalized populations.
4. Identify and expand teaching and learning models that reduce, eliminate, and prevent discrimination and inequities.



LOOKING AHEAD

The Cleveland Plan is a living, breathing document that guides strategy and decision-making in multiple educational institutions in our community. Now and in the future, the focus is on doing what is best and right for ALL public-school students in our city.

Acknowledgements: The Cleveland Transformation Alliance is grateful for the support of its Board of Directors, as well as its contracted partners the Neighborhood Leadership Institute and Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC, in bringing this Plan together.

- **School:** In the Cleveland Plan, refers to a teaching and learning environment, which depending on curriculum, may or may not be in a physical school building.
- **Community school:** Community schools, which are often called charter schools nationally and in other states, are public schools created in Ohio law; are independent of any school district; and are part of the state's education program. Community schools are public schools of choice and are state and federally funded.
- **Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) school:** Cleveland's public school district. CMSD is supported by a combination of federal, state, and local public funds. In addition to the city of Cleveland, CMSD serves Bratenahl, Newburgh Heights, Linndale, and portions of Garfield Heights and Brook Park.
- **Teaching and learning environment:** This phrase refers to diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn.
(Source: Great Schools Partnership)
- **Educators:** Teachers, school administrators, and all staff who work in a school and in other education-related facilities (from the librarian to the cafeteria staff to the custodian and beyond).
- **Foundational skills:** For PreK–12 students, this includes students' understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.
(Source: Ohio Department of Education)
- **Social-emotional learning:** The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.
(Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)