

SEPTEMBER 2016

# Cleveland Transformation Alliance

2016 report to the community  
on the implementation and  
impact of *Cleveland's Plan for  
Transforming Schools*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Cleveland Transformation Alliance**

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**[www.ClevelandTA.org](http://www.ClevelandTA.org)**

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**Cleveland Transformation Alliance**

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## Dear Residents of Greater Cleveland:

A broad coalition of civic leaders came together in 2012 to create *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools* with the goal of reinventing public education in our city. The Cleveland Transformation Alliance, a public-private partnership, was created through the Cleveland Plan and works to create and support a better future for Cleveland's children. It is charged with:

1. Assessing all district and charter schools in Cleveland;
2. Communicating with families about quality public school options;
3. Ensuring fidelity to the Cleveland Plan; and
4. Monitoring charter sector quality and growth.

As you will read in this second report on the implementation and impact of the Cleveland Plan, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and its partnering charter schools are making steady progress toward our goals. There is much to celebrate. It is clear, however, that our schools are not improving quickly enough and we have a long way to go to achieve our goals.

Now is the time for all our stakeholders to deepen and accelerate our work to ensure that our children are prepared to engage in Cleveland's civic life and to compete in the 21st-century economy. I know that by working together to achieve the recommendations in this report, we will make progress toward the goal of ensuring a quality education for all Cleveland students.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank G. Jackson".

**HONORABLE FRANK G. JACKSON,**  
MAYOR, CITY OF CLEVELAND  
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
CLEVELAND TRANSFORMATION ALLIANCE

## Key Findings

This report assesses progress toward meeting the goals of *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools* in two ways: by tracking external measures of school performance and by evaluating implementation of recommendations from the 2015 Transformation Alliance report.

Progress on both measures has been promising. School performance data have trended mostly upward, and system changes in both the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and charter schools that are either sponsored by or have formal partnership agreements with CMSD are creating higher-quality learning environments for students.

But improvement has been slow and incremental. Many schools are still struggling to meet ever-increasing state and national standards of quality, leaving too many Cleveland students ill-prepared for college and career.

### Measures of School Performance: Slow, Steady Progress

For this report, the Alliance measured K-12 progress using several state-level indicators and one national assessment. Given changes over the last several years in state accountability measures, these K-12 indicators provided the most meaningful year-to-year comparisons. Additional data were provided by PRE4CLE (preschool education) and by the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland (college and career readiness).

#### ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE ALLIANCE FOUND THAT:

- The high school graduation rate of CMSD students continued to improve, with the four-year rate rising to 66 percent in 2014 from 56 percent in 2011;
- CMSD students held steady or made gains on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "Nation's Report Card," which compared their performance to that of peers in 20 other urban districts;
- The number of students attending CMSD and partner charter schools who met requirements for promotion to fourth grade under Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee increased to 86.3 percent in 2014-15, from 85.4 percent the previous year. During the same period, there was a four percentage point increase in the number of students in kindergarten through third grade who moved to "on track" toward reading proficiency from being "off track";
- The rank of CMSD, including its charter partners, on the state's Value Added measure of academic progress increased significantly, rising to 254 out of 609 Ohio districts in 2014-15, from 578 out of 611 the year before;
- CMSD students improved on indicators of college and career readiness, including an increase in ACT scores, an increasing percentage graduating with a GPA of at least 3.0, and a decreasing percentage needing remediation in math or English once they get to college. More CMSD students who enrolled in college were better prepared for college-level coursework, and were staying in college longer; and
- The number of high-quality preschool seats increased by more than 1,200 in 2014-15, through the rating of existing seats, the addition of seats at high-quality sites, or the opening of new sites at schools and community-based programs.

**AT THE SAME TIME, THE ALLIANCE FOUND A TROUBLING LACK OF PROGRESS IN SOME AREAS:**

- A declining number of schools, both district and charter, received an A or B on the state's Value Added measure in 2014-15 compared with 2013-14;
- Although CMSD experienced gains, it remained near the bottom of rankings of the 21 urban districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in terms of absolute scores;
- Even with preschool gains, in 2015 only one-third of preschool-aged children in Cleveland were enrolled in high-quality early education programs; and
- College enrollment among CMSD students declined to 56 percent in 2014 from 61 percent in 2011. While this reflects a national trend and is likely influenced by financial considerations and changes in the economy, it remains concerning.

**Revisiting the Alliance's 2015 Recommendations: Positive Movement**

The Alliance's 2015 recommendations called for differentiated support and intervention at all schools and a focus on priority areas to improve school quality. This year, the Alliance assessed progress on the recommendations through interviews with leaders representing both CMSD and its charter school partners, and with data gathered from both sources.

**HERE, THE FINDINGS WERE MORE UNIFORMLY POSITIVE. THE ALLIANCE FOUND:**

- Both the district and its charter partners were implementing differentiated support for schools based on academic performance and needs;
- In many schools, the use of computer-based teaching and learning tools increased, while data systems were being put in place to track student performance and assist with budgeting;
- Both CMSD and its charter partners have improved methods for assessing, developing and attracting effective teachers and school leaders while exiting poor performers;
- Promising new district and partnering charter schools have opened while failing and low-performing district schools and non-partnering charter schools have closed;
- Demand for a diverse set of school options has increased, demonstrated in part by an increasing number of schools, both district and charter, with students on enrollment wait lists; and
- CMSD and the charter sector – CMSD partners and non-partners – are making efforts to work together for the benefit of Cleveland children, although significant obstacles to collaboration remain.

# 2016 Recommendations

In this report, the Alliance has documented meaningful progress toward the goals of the Cleveland Plan. We expect the reforms being put in place will, in the coming years, boost academic performance and help prepare students for college and career. However, incremental growth on key benchmarks and effective implementation of systems reforms are not enough to fully meet the goals of the Cleveland Plan.

The Alliance, CMSD and the charter sector must therefore work together as follows to accelerate the pace of improvement.

## **1. Develop and refine strategies to address low-performing and failing schools.**

Both CMSD and charter schools are putting systems in place to differentiate support for all schools. However, CMSD and charter sponsors must move more decisively to improve, replace or close schools that are not able to meet quality standards. The Alliance must develop a communications strategy to more proactively disseminate information to the public about low-performing and failing schools, both district and charter, with the goal of increasing demand for quality schools.

**2. Strengthen classroom instruction.** Without great instruction in every classroom, Cleveland's schools will fall short of the goal of preparing all children for college and career. Therefore, over the course of the next year, school leaders, both district and charter, must ensure that evidence-based instructional practices are in place to accelerate student learning. School leaders must also provide teachers with the support they need to deliver the best possible instruction on a daily basis.

**3. Attract and retain effective high-level leadership.** CMSD and charter schools have made progress in recruiting and retaining strong teachers and leaders at the school level, but turnover in district and charter management organizations' leadership positions could limit progress. Therefore, CMSD and charter schools must develop recruitment and grow-our-own strategies to attract new and develop potential administrative talent. In addition, the district and the charter sector must ensure conditions are in place to retain administrative talent by:

- Removing barriers to innovative work;
- Paying attention to workplace culture;
- Finding the appropriate balance of autonomy and oversight; and
- Providing support to help staff adjust to change.

**4. Deepen collaboration between the district and the charter sector, and collaboration within the charter sector itself.** The Alliance sees limited progress in this area, even though structures are in place to facilitate collaboration. One possible reason is competition for students and teaching talent. Stakeholders must work to address and resolve tension when it inevitably arises and continue to build relationships that keep the interests of students at the forefront. Priority areas for collaboration include:

- Strategic discussion of use of facilities and location of new schools;
- Participation in a common, citywide enrollment system;
- Improvement of special education distribution, delivery and training;
- Sharing of professional development opportunities; and
- Improvement of record sharing.

**5. Develop consistent benchmarks to gauge progress.** Changing state standards and assessments have made it difficult to measure progress toward Cleveland Plan goals as initially envisioned. In order to ensure future progress reports are based on consistent, meaningful data, the Alliance must prioritize the development of new actionable benchmarks. To avoid reliance solely on publicly available data, the Alliance will develop consistent protocols and a process to gather information from both the district and charter schools.

**6. Share charter school data and information important to the Cleveland community.**

CMSD and its partnering charter schools have proven willing to share information requested as part of the process of creating this report and our School Quality Guide. In order to fulfill its state mandate to inform the community about citywide progress toward Cleveland Plan goals, the Alliance will call on and work with all non-partnering charter schools to provide information needed to assess that progress.

**7. Advocate for supportive state policy.** To ensure continued implementation of the Cleveland Plan, the Alliance, CMSD, partnering charter schools and other stakeholders must work to protect the language of House Bill 525, which supports the Cleveland Plan. Areas of policy advocacy include:

- Supportive and smart implementation of the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act in Ohio and, particularly, in Cleveland;
- Adherence to high-quality and rigorous evaluation processes and aligned compensation systems for teachers and principals; and
- Stable and appropriate levels of state funding to support the significant investments being made by Cleveland residents, taxpayers and institutional stakeholders.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Cleveland Plan, supported by the 2012 levy approved by Cleveland voters, has provided a vision and resources for both CMSD and participating charter schools to begin the difficult, long-term work of reinventing our city's public education system.

Voters will have another opportunity to sustain and accelerate the progress documented in this report with the levy renewal on the November 2016 ballot. The work of the Cleveland Plan and our shared goals cannot continue without ongoing revenue from the levy. This means that all stakeholders must work to support and pass the levy, and Cleveland voters must go to the polls and vote yes in November.

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