

SEPTEMBER 2016

Cleveland Transformation Alliance

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



Cleveland Transformation Alliance
1240 Huron Road E., Suite 400
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
www.ClevelandTA.org
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Cleveland Transformation Alliance

REPORT COMMITTEE:

Shana Marbury, Chair
General Counsel and Vice President, Strategic
Initiatives and Research
Greater Cleveland Partnership

Eric Gordon
Chief Executive Officer
Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Monyka Price
Chief of Education
City of Cleveland

Victor Ruiz
Executive Director
Esperanza, Inc.

Deborah Rutledge
Chief Operating Officer
The Rutledge Group, Inc.

Helen Williams
Program Director for Education
The Cleveland Foundation

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS:

Mark Baumgartner
Director of Professional Issues
Cleveland Teachers Union

Nicholas D'Amico
Executive Director of School Performance
Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Justin Glanville
Text and Editing

Steven Lake
School Quality Project Manager
Cleveland Transformation Alliance

Ann Mullin
Senior Program Officer
The George Gund Foundation

Erin Randel
Parent
Tremont Montessori School

Alan Rosskamm
Chief Executive Officer
Breakthrough Schools

Paul Sobota
Phototgraphy

Piet van Lier
Executive Director
Cleveland Transformation Alliance

Lee Zelenak
Design

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Board of Directors and Staff

The goal of the Cleveland Plan is to ensure every child in Cleveland attends a quality school and that every neighborhood has great schools from which families can choose.

SEPTEMBER 2016

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 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.

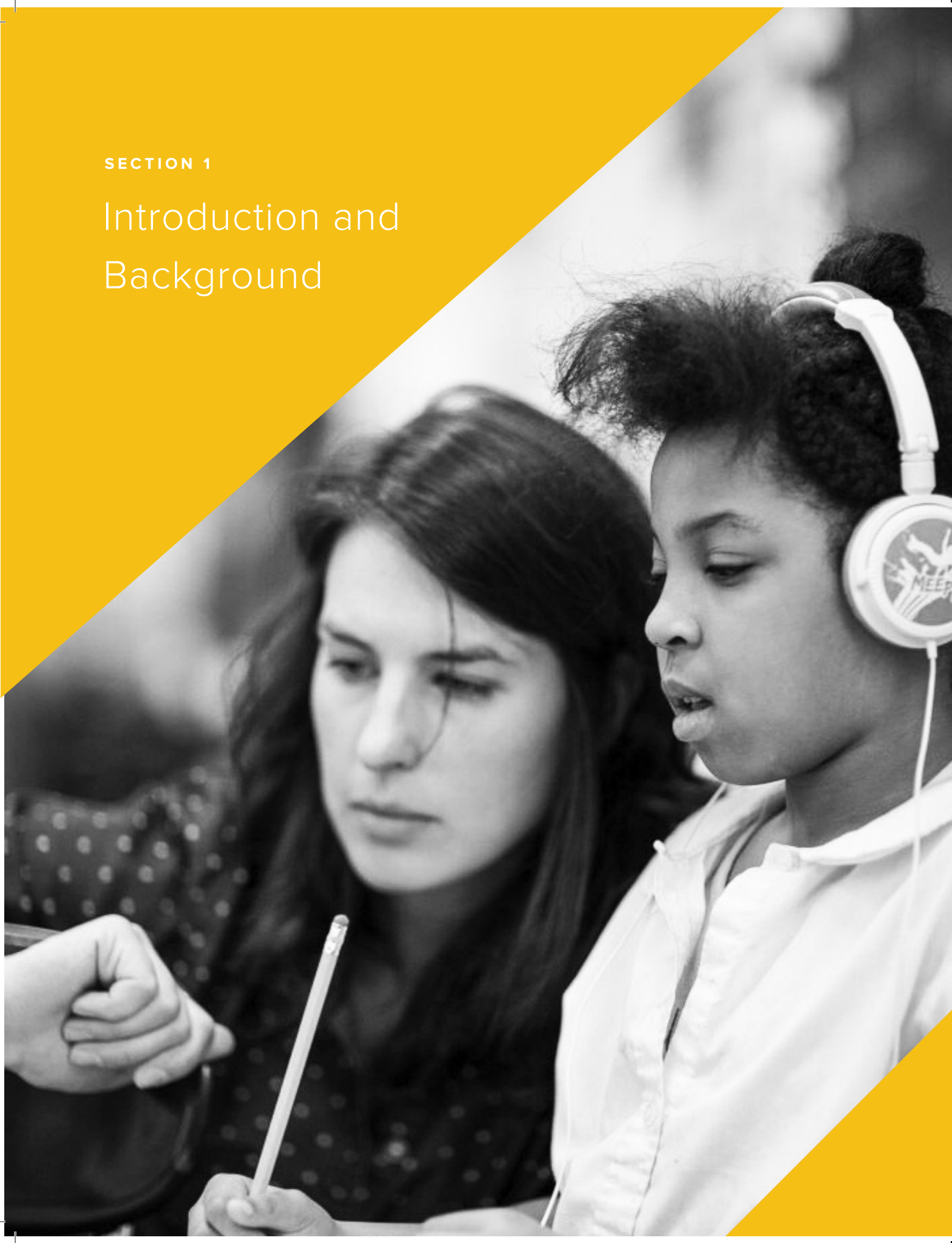
7. Advocate for supportive state policy. To ensure continued implementation of the Cleveland Plan, the Alliance, CMSD, partnering charter schools and other stakeholders must work to protect the language of House Bill 525, which supports the Cleveland Plan. Areas of policy advocacy include:

- 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.



SECTION 1

Introduction and Background

In 2012, a group of civic, education, philanthropic and business leaders developed *Cleveland’s Plan for Transforming Schools*, a citywide school improvement initiative designed to reinvent public education in the city. That same year, Gov. John Kasich signed into law House Bill 525, which enabled the Cleveland Plan to take effect. The Cleveland Plan’s overarching goals are to ensure every child attends a quality school and that there are great schools in every Cleveland neighborhood. It calls for the creation of a portfolio of quality schools operated by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) and partnering charter schools.

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.
THE CLEVELAND PLAN	
Invest in and phase in high-leverage system reforms across all schools from preschool to college and career.	Create the Cleveland Transformation Alliance to ensure accountability for all public schools in the city.

Cleveland Plan legislation created the Cleveland Transformation Alliance, a public-private partnership charged with: assessing the city’s district and charter schools; communicating with families about quality school options; ensuring fidelity to the Cleveland Plan; and monitoring the growth and quality of the charter sector.

Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson chairs the Alliance Board of Directors, which includes representatives from CMSD (i.e., teachers, principals, district leaders), charter schools, the philanthropic and business sectors, and the broader community, including parents.

In 2015, the Alliance released its first report to the community on the implementation and impact of the Cleveland Plan. The report highlighted a number of positive developments, but found that improvement was not happening quickly enough.

Specifically, the Alliance recommended that:

1. CMSD and charter school operators develop differentiated school support and intervention strategies based on school performance;
2. All stakeholders intensify efforts to build capacity to:
 - Recruit and retain strong teachers and leaders;
 - Use data and technology to drive school improvement;
 - Increase parent and community demand for quality schools; and
- Strengthen partnerships between CMSD and charter schools.

This 2016 report to the community:

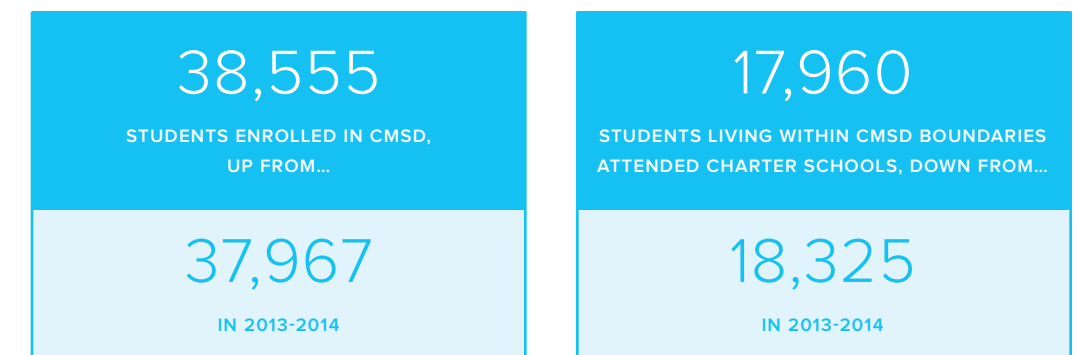
- Uses available data to measure overall progress on school quality;
- Examines progress made on the 2015 recommendations; and
- Makes recommendations for the coming year.

SECTION 2

Current Status of School Quality in Cleveland

During the 2014-15 school year, approximately 56,500 children living in Cleveland attended public schools, both district and charter. The majority — 38,555 students — attended the 106 schools operated by CMSD. This increase from 37,967 students in 2013-14 marked the district's first enrollment gain in decades.

FIGURE 1: 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: Ohio Department of Education

Approximately 17,960 children living within CMSD boundaries attended charter schools in 2014-15. Sixty-seven schools were located within district boundaries and another 44 were located outside the district. This number decreased from 2013-14, when 18,325 students living in the district attended charter schools.

Cleveland's public schools had a sizeable percentage of students with special needs. In 2014-15, 23 percent of students enrolled in CMSD schools and 13 percent of students in charter schools were children with disabilities.

Poverty also affects our public schools. Nearly 54 percent of Cleveland children lived in poverty in 2014, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Most district and charter schools in Cleveland enroll significantly higher percentages of low-income children than Census poverty numbers suggest.

CMSD’s Value-Added ranking statewide, which includes scores from its charter partners, moved up considerably, to 254 out of Ohio’s 609 school districts in 2014-15. This is a substantial increase from its rank of 578 out of 611 the year before.

Charter schools, legally known as community schools in Ohio, receive public funding but operate independently of school districts. Ten sponsors — the legal entities to which the state has delegated authority to oversee and approve charter schools — oversee Cleveland charter schools. Nine management firms operate the majority of charter schools in the city – working closely with school administrators on a daily basis – while a handful of charter schools are run independently.

In 2015-16, CMSD sponsored 10 charter schools and had formal partnership agreements with seven others. Those 17 schools were eligible to receive public funding from CMSD’s 2012 operating levy. CMSD sponsored one new charter school for the 2016-17 school year, bringing the total number of CMSD-sponsored or partner charter schools to 18.

Changing State Context

The Alliance’s 2015 report measured progress toward the Cleveland Plan goal of tripling the number of students enrolled in quality schools by the end of the 2018-19 school year. New state tests aligned to tougher academic standards, however, have made it difficult to make meaningful comparisons to earlier years. More rigorous tests given to students at the end of the 2014-15 school year have lowered state ratings for schools across Ohio, and the Ohio Department of Education has advised against comparing results from new tests to those from previous years.

The Alliance supports higher standards as essential to its mission to ensure every child in Cleveland can attend a quality school. As a result of the state’s changes, progress toward the goal of tripling the number of students enrolled in quality schools can no longer be tracked from the Cleveland Plan’s baseline 2010-11 school year. Once the state has adopted a permanent and stable accountability system, the Alliance will once again report on the goal of increasing the number of seats in quality schools in Cleveland.

Methodology

Despite changes to state ratings and tests, quantitative data remain essential to evaluating Cleveland’s schools. The K-12 measures used in this report have remained at least somewhat consistent over time, and include: Ohio’s Third Grade Reading Guarantee; the state’s measure of academic progress, known as Value-Added; the National Assessment of Educational Progress; and four- and five-year graduation rates.

Although the Alliance mission is dedicated to K-12 education reform, the Cleveland Plan includes a focus on early education and college and career readiness. Assessment of those areas in this report comes from two Alliance partners: PRE4CLE, a plan to ensure all Cleveland children have access to high-quality preschool; and the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland, a partnership to improve rates of college readiness, access and persistence among CMSD students and alumni.

Findings: Early Childhood Education

Because preschool is fundamental to ensuring academic success, the Cleveland Plan calls for an increase in the number of students enrolled in high-quality preschools – defined as those that achieve a rating of at least three stars on Ohio’s five-star Step Up to Quality rating system.

For the 2014-15 school year, the number of high-quality preschool seats expanded by more than 1,200 compared with the year before, according to PRE4CLE, Cleveland’s plan to offer a high-quality preschool experience to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the city. This expansion occurred in three ways: by rating high-quality preschool programs that had previously been unrated; by expanding seats in existing high-quality programs; and by helping preschool programs open or improve to meet the required Step Up to Quality rating.

Progress remains slow given the need, however: In 2015, only one-third of preschool-aged children in Cleveland were enrolled in high-quality early education programs.

Findings: K-12 Academic Progress

The measures selected to report on academic progress in 2016 show slow but steady improvement in most areas.

Third Grade Reading Guarantee

The Third Grade Reading Guarantee is a statewide program to identify students from kindergarten through grade three who are behind in reading. The state requires schools to assess the ability of students to meet basic levels of literacy before they are promoted to fourth grade, and reports both district- and school-level data for this measure.

At the district level, the percentage of CMSD students meeting the threshold for promotion

to fourth grade under the state’s Third Grade Reading Guarantee is trending upward. In 2014-15, 86.3 percent of CMSD third graders met the threshold, an increase from 85.4 percent the previous year.

During the same period, the number of CMSD students in kindergarten through third grade who were moved to “on track” in reading proficiency from being “off track” increased to 27 percent in 2014-15 from 23 percent in 2013-14. Both percentages earned CMSD an F grade from the state for this measure, which looks at the number of students who were not on track in reading in each year and how many were on track by the beginning of the following year. For third graders, on track status is measured by results on the state’s third-grade English language arts test.

Academic Progress/Value-Added

The state’s Value-Added indicator measures the impact of schools and teachers on student academic progress from year to year. At the district level, CMSD and its charter partners moved up considerably, with a Value-Added score that ranked it 254 out of Ohio’s 609 school districts in 2014-15. This is a substantial increase from its rank of 578 out of 611 the year before.

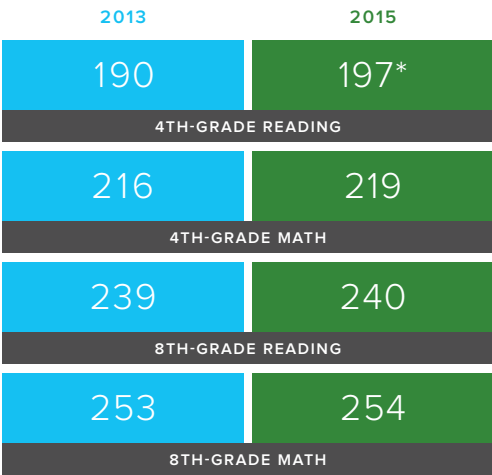
At the school level, Cleveland’s district and charter schools have dropped, as have many public schools statewide, largely because of new state standards and assessments. In 2014-15, 33 percent of district and charter schools earned an A or B, down from 36 percent in 2013-14.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” provides a snapshot of how a sample of CMSD students performed on a national test in comparison to students in a representative cohort of 21 urban districts. The test is given every two years; the most recent test results are from 2015. Charter schools do not participate.

As Figure 2 shows, CMSD posted slight improvements in 2015 compared with 2013 and showed a statistically significant increase in fourth-grade reading performance. The district also showed increases in fourth-grade math, and eighth-grade math and reading, although these increases were not statistically significant. Of the 20 urban districts participating in both 2013 and 2015, Cleveland was one of only three to post gains in all four tested areas. Both nationally and statewide, average scores for all students dropped in three of the four tested areas.

FIGURE 2: CMSD results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Trial Urban District Snapshot Report. *Denotes statistically significant increase.

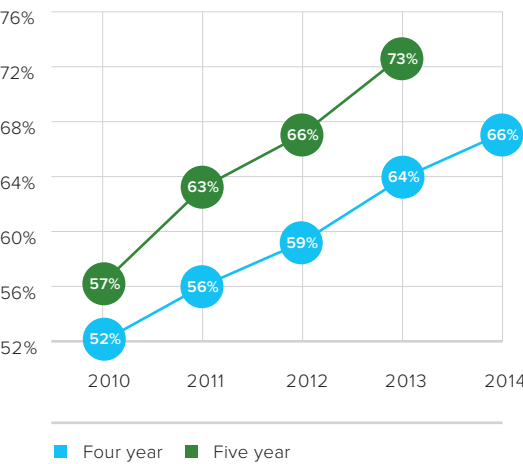
Even as CMSD students posted stronger gains than most of their urban counterparts, however, their scores remained well behind those of their peers. Only Baltimore, Fresno and Detroit consistently ranked about the same as, or lower than, Cleveland.

High School Graduation Rates

As Figure 3 shows, CMSD’s four-year graduation rate has continued to improve, rising to 66 percent for the class of 2014, from 56 percent for the class of 2011. CMSD’s five-year rate increased to 73 percent in 2013, up from 66 percent the year before.

This steady increase is one of the most encouraging signs of progress for the district, although it remains troubling that so many CMSD students still do not graduate from high school.

FIGURE 3: Four- and five-year graduation rates



Findings: College and Career Readiness

In addition to graduation rates, other measures provided by the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland give a sense of how well CMSD students are prepared for college and career.

CMSD students graduating with a GPA of 3.0 or higher rose to 30 percent in 2014, from 23 percent in 2011. The average top score for CMSD students who took the ACT college entrance exam has trended upward, to 16.5 in 2015 from 16.3 in 2012. This is still lower than the score of 21 that is generally accepted as the threshold for college success. Only 15 percent of 2015 graduates received a score of 21 or higher, an increase from 12 percent among 2012 graduates.

The post-high school picture is mixed. CMSD students who enrolled in college arrived better prepared and stayed enrolled longer, but fewer enrolled in the first place. For the 2014 CMSD graduating class, 56 percent enrolled in college within one year of graduating. This was up slightly from the year before, but lower than the baseline of 61 percent in 2011. This reflects a national trend, perhaps explained in part by increases in college costs, declining student aid, and an improving economy where students may be more inclined to begin working when they finish high school.

The proportion of CMSD students needing remediation in math or English in 2015 was at its lowest point since assessments began — 66 percent, compared to 76 percent three years earlier. Students completing at least 24 college-level credits within one year of enrollment at four-year institutions rose to 52 percent in 2015, from 36 percent in 2012.

Finally, the percentage of CMSD graduates staying enrolled in four-year institutions from the first to second year rose to 57 percent in 2015 from 49 percent in 2011, and the graduation rate from four-year institutions more than doubled — to 22 percent in 2015 from 10 percent in 2011.

Conclusions

Progress since 2015 has been uneven. CMSD’s improving graduation rate stands out as a particular bright spot, as do improvements in college and career readiness indicators. Students who are making it to college are better prepared today than five years ago.

Progress at the K-8 level has been more incremental. This discrepancy is perhaps explained by early investments in new high schools and efforts to identify and assist students at risk of not graduating.

In early childhood, the availability of high-quality preschool is rising, but it remains to be seen how this will translate into sustained academic success.

The Alliance will continue tracking progress of the Cleveland Plan, using these and other measures to keep the community informed through future reports.

SECTION 3

Findings and Discussion: 2015 Recommendations

While school quality data provide an overall picture of progress, an understanding of changes on the ground is also required to determine where and how learning environments are improving for Cleveland's students. The Alliance's 2015 recommendations serve as a useful starting point for such an analysis, because they provided school leaders with actionable steps to improve the quality of education at individual schools.

The 2015 report's two main recommendations focused on accelerating the pace of change across all schools. Overall, this 2016 report finds positive movement on the recommendations in both CMSD and its charter partners, although much work remains to effectively serve students and meet the goals of the Cleveland Plan.*

Recommendation 1

CMSD and charter school operators should develop differentiated school support and intervention strategies based on the current performance of their schools — high-performing, mid-performing, low-performing or failing.

The 2015 report recommended strategies for schools in each performance category, based on the Alliance School Quality Framework, including:

- High-performing schools: Maintain current levels of investment and ensure all seats are filled;
- Mid-performing schools: Provide support to help schools transition from "good to great," with emphasis placed on increasing student engagement and differentiating instruction;
- Low-performing schools: Prioritize schools with the greatest potential to improve — particularly in neighborhoods with few or no quality schools; and
- Failing schools: Adopt time-limited intervention plans, and close or replace those not showing significant gains.

Finally, the report called for CMSD and the charter sector to develop new schools together — a key part of the Cleveland Plan's portfolio strategy to improve and diversify options in the city.

*NOTE: Information in this section comes from interviews with administrators, principals and other stakeholders representing CMSD, charter schools and community partners. It must be noted that decisions at charter schools apply only to individual schools or small networks, unlike system-wide decisions made at CMSD. Therefore, it is easier to reach overall conclusions about CMSD schools than about charter schools.

Findings

- CMSD has adopted its new **Decision Making Framework**, which aligns with the Alliance’s 2015 recommendations. Finalized and put in place during the 2015-16 school year, the framework is used to determine appropriate action or intervention for each school, ranging from expanding access to the district’s highest-performing schools to closing schools that consistently fail to meet goals.
- CMSD has targeted 23 **investment schools** for “immediate and dramatic action” including improvements in safety, discipline and teaching quality. These schools receive additional “wraparound” services through a collaborative effort with the United Way of Greater Cleveland and 18 community partner agencies. From 2011 to 2014, graduation rates increased at all five investment schools serving grades 9 through 12, while only half of the district’s six other comprehensive high schools posted gains. From 2011 to 2015, Value-Added scores, which measure academic progress from year to year, increased at 11 of the 18 K-8 investment schools.
- Charter schools determined intervention and support at the level of **individual schools or networks**. For example, Breakthrough’s Prep Schools centralized curriculum and lesson plans for English Language Arts and math. Stepstone Academy focused resources on students needing foundational skills in reading, and I CAN Schools provided literacy instruction for students in the lowest 20 percent of academic performance.
- **Promising district and charter schools opened** in 2015 and 2016. CMSD’s John Marshall High School — rated low-performing in 2015 — was reconfigured into three new specialized schools, while two new specialized schools opened in August 2016 on the campus of Lincoln-West, rated failing in 2015. In close partnership with the business community, CMSD is redesigning five low-performing traditional vocational high schools into 21st-century career academies aligned with high-wage, high-demand jobs available in the Cleveland area. Two new partnering charter schools opened in August 2015: Stonebrook Montessori (PreK-8) and Citizens Academy Southeast (K-8), and another, Village Prep Willard (K-8), opened in August 2016; all started serving early grades with plans to expand through eighth grade over time.
- In 2016, the **Alliance began using its new state mandate** to weigh in on whether charter schools should be granted direct sponsorship by the Ohio Department of Education. The Alliance recommended that one charter school, Virtual Schoolhouse, be denied state sponsorship; it closed at the end of 2015-16 because of poor academic performance.
- **Low-performing or failing schools**, both district and charter, have continued to close. As noted above, struggling comprehensive high schools are being phased out and replaced by new, smaller schools. The district is also phasing out SuccessTech Academy, replacing it with the new High School for Digital Arts. Two failing K-8 CMSD schools, McKinley and Watterson-Lake, will merge with nearby schools at the end of 2016-17. Charter sponsors declined to renew their contracts with Virtual Schoolhouse, Pearl Academy and Oak Leadership Institute, three low-performing or failing charter schools that closed at the end of 2015-16.

Discussion

Both CMSD and charter operators are implementing strategies to support and improve higher performing schools while intervening in struggling schools. The more rigorous state standards and tests are prompting all stakeholders to consider new ways to focus improvement efforts.

CMSD’s decision-making framework provides a method to determine intervention, but the framework has not been in place long enough to measure its effectiveness. Charter operators and individual charter schools reported adopting new strategies based on school performance as well.

The efforts by both the district and the charter sector to create new schools and replicate successful models is encouraging. The focus on the closure of struggling schools in both sectors is also positive.

The work described in this section — targeted support based on academic performance, the creation of new schools, and the closure of struggling schools — is crucial if the Cleveland Plan is to reach its goal of ensuring a quality education for all Cleveland children. As with any reform, it will take time to see the impact of this work, and future reports will continue to monitor these efforts.

An independent analysis of gains at CMSD’s investment schools is underway to determine how effective this effort has been. Wraparound services are to continue as funding allows, with the goal of expanding them district-wide.

Finally, the state’s increasing focus on charter school quality is having an impact, mostly on the closure of struggling schools and expectations for the quality of new schools.



Recommendation 2

All stakeholders invested in the Cleveland Plan should intensify efforts and build capacity in several areas that directly affect school quality, including:

- Strong leaders and teachers for all public schools;
- Use of data and technology;
- Parent and community demand for quality schools; and
- Partnerships between district and charter schools.

STRONG LEADERS AND TEACHERS

The 2015 report called for district and charter schools to expand on initiatives aimed at recruiting, hiring and developing quality teachers and principals. The report recommended that schools build relationships with proven sources of teacher talent, including programs such as Teach for America, and work with local colleges of education to create exemplary urban teacher preparation programs.

The report called for CMSD to:

- Deepen implementation of the Teacher Development and Evaluation System to develop teacher talent, reward excellent teachers and dismiss poorly performing teachers; and
- Continue to grow its leadership pipeline by expanding the Aspiring Principals Program and recruiting experienced leaders from outside Cleveland.

The report also called for all schools, district and charter, to continue to expand autonomy for principals and teachers — one of the goals of the Cleveland Plan.

Findings

- CMSD has averaged about **300 new teacher hires per year** over the past three years. The district staffed 99 percent of classrooms at the start of 2015-16, leaving just 33 open spots, an improvement from the 110 openings (96 percent of classrooms) still vacant at the start of 2013-14. According to CMSD, 50 percent of teachers rated ineffective left the district — some as a result of dismissals, others voluntarily — between 2014-15 and 2015-16, while only 5 percent of teachers rated accomplished left.

- **Charter school teachers** were being dismissed or retained on the basis of evaluations using either in-school standards, the Ohio Teacher Performance Evaluation Rubric*, or both. For example, Breakthrough Schools, which operated 11 schools, dismissed six of its 243 teachers for poor performance after the 2015-16 school year. Stepstone Academy dismissed one of its 32 teachers in 2015-16.
- CMSD has hired an average of about **25 new principals per year** from 2013 to 2015. The district’s Aspiring Principals Program, a one-year program that trains and supports leaders, has enrolled 10 candidates per year, with 80 percent of its first two cohorts completing the program and placed in the district. The program began its third cohort in the summer of 2016. On the charter side, Breakthrough has taken a similar approach as new principals generally serve as fellows for a year before moving into school-leader roles.
- CMSD principals and administrators at the school level were exercising **greater autonomy in curriculum and budget decisions**. During the 2015-16 school year, CMSD principals directly managed approximately 43 percent of the district’s net operating budget, compared with approximately 1 percent in 2012-13.

Discussion

The focus on teacher quality appeared to be having an impact, with teachers being moved out of district and charter schools based on ratings and evaluations. At the district, these trends suggest that CMSD’s Teacher Development and Evaluation System is boosting teacher quality. One issue, however, merits discussion: The number of CMSD teachers rated accomplished grew to 28% in 2015-16 from 14% in 2013-14 and the number rated ineffective decreased to 0.4% from 4% over the same period. While the district reports not renewing many teachers rated ineffective, much of the increase in teachers rated accomplished and the decrease in those rated ineffective likely stem from how the Ohio Department of Education calculates effectiveness ratings.

The dispersed nature of the charter sector limited the ability of the Alliance to paint an overall picture, but interviews with CMSD’s charter partners suggested charter leaders were engaged in this work as well.

High principal turnover remained a concern for both CMSD and some of its charter partners. Supporting new principals as they learn their roles sometimes clashes with the need to remove low performers — a challenge reported by both CMSD and charter schools. Encouragingly, this challenge is being addressed through initiatives such as CMSD’s Aspiring Principals Program, which prepares effective school leaders and prepares them on the job, and Breakthrough Schools’ year-long fellowship program for new principals.

* The Ohio Teacher Performance Evaluation Rubric is based on the standards developed by the Ohio Department of Education. Ratings are based on evaluations of a teacher’s professional growth plan, observations, walkthroughs and conferences.

Challenges remain. CMSD principals, for example, reported continued limitations on their decision-making authority, citing union rules, federal regulations, and central office directives. These limitations, both real and perceived, must be addressed, as principals today are most likely to succeed if they are able to approach their jobs as leaders, and if they are adequately supported.

Finally, high teacher turnover, particularly at charter schools, is cause for concern. Experience in a given setting can increase teacher effectiveness over time. A grant from the federal Teacher Incentive Fund is being used by Breakthrough to increase salaries and help retain quality teachers, but charter advocates invariably point to disparities in state funding that can make retention difficult.

USE OF DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

The 2015 report recommended expanding the use of data and technology. In the classroom, use of technology, including blended-learning models that combine computer-assisted instruction with classroom instruction, can help individualize instruction. System-wide advances can improve communication and data sharing among teachers and administrators, and between schools and families.

Findings

- Many district schools have **computer labs** or share computers among classrooms. Earlier grades use computers in **small, monitored groups**, while at higher grade levels, schools are moving toward one-to-one technology and students can take **online classes** to make up credits they need to graduate. This latter effort has likely contributed to the district’s rising graduation rate, according to CMSD.
- Charter schools report increasing use of technology in the classroom, such as small-group projects-oriented work and the rotation of students through learning centers, including **blended learning approaches**, most specifically at Stepstone Academy.
- CMSD launched an internal **online data dashboard** in March 2016 that allows district schools to view their overall performance and compare it with similar schools. Charter schools have similar systems to track student performance. Some allow families access to online reporting of student progress.



Discussion

The levels of technology used in Cleveland classrooms varied. In general, both district and charter schools have continued incorporating technology in the classroom as appropriate to their missions and educational philosophies. Monitoring the effectiveness of these programs in building student success will be an important part of future reports as sufficient data become available.

Both the district and the charter sector use technology to track student data. Efforts to make these data available to all staff — and in some cases families — are in keeping with the Cleveland Plan’s call for greater accountability.

DEMAND FOR QUALITY SCHOOLS

The 2015 report called for quality district and charter schools to be fully enrolled. Crucial to this was developing a citywide enrollment system to provide parents with a “one-stop shop” for enrolling their children in any district or charter school. The report called for the Alliance to develop family advocacy programs to empower parents to participate in or lead efforts to improve struggling schools.

Findings

- During CMSD’s 2016 open enrollment period, 3,644 applications were submitted through the district’s new **online enrollment portal**, launched in January 2016. This represents a doubling of the number of applications submitted through CMSD’s enrollment system over a three-year period.

- An increasing number of schools, representing a diverse set of options, reported **full enrollment or wait lists**. For 2016-17, three CMSD schools had wait lists: Campus International School (K-8), MC2STEM (9-12), and Max S. Hayes (9-12). In 2015, only Campus International had a wait list. Three others were fully enrolled: Ginn Academy (9-12), Buhrer Dual Language Academy (K-8) and John Marshall’s School of Information Technology (9-12). Among charter schools, Breakthrough Schools’ three Intergenerational schools reported school-wide wait lists, while other charter schools reported wait lists at some grade levels.
- Since 2014, the Alliance has distributed 30,000 copies of its two annual **School Quality Guides**, featuring ratings, contact information, demographic data and school profiles to help families make informed choices. A third guide is planned for fall 2016.
- The Alliance’s network of 30 **School Quality Ambassadors**, including grassroots leaders across the city, informed families about school options at community events and through one-on-one dialogues.
- As of July 2016, more than 5,000 **community ratings and reviews** of district and charter schools— written by families, educators, students and others — had been posted on the Alliance’s website.
- In March 2016, the Alliance and PRE4CLE hosted Cleveland’s first **School Quality Fair**. Approximately 250 people attended, meeting staff from more than 50 K-8 schools and preschools that were invited based on quality criteria. The second fair is scheduled for April 2017.
- In June 2016, **the Alliance mailed out more than 17,000 postcards** to let families know that school information and quality ratings were available on the Alliance’s website. In addition, mailings were sent to families affected by the closure of three charter schools.

Discussion

Findings in this section suggest that awareness of school choice is on the rise, an important step toward building a stronger portfolio of public schools. Families that make informed choices can increase demand for quality schools.

CMSD’s new online enrollment portal is a critical step forward. For the system to be a true “one-stop shop,” however, CMSD and its charter partners must continue to discuss extending the system to charter schools.

Many families continue to choose schools that do not meet quality benchmarks. They may prefer that their children attend school within their own neighborhood or may be unable to arrange transportation to other parts of the city. The Alliance must therefore continue developing strategies to help families advocate for quality education at schools their children attend.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DISTRICT AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

The 2015 report recognized that district-charter partnerships were strengthening, but called for deeper dialogue and collaboration. Recommended areas of focus included talent recruitment, special education, professional development, addressing struggling schools, and sharing buildings. The report called for an expansion of the number of charter schools that see themselves as partners in the work of the Cleveland Plan.

Findings

- The **Cleveland Education Compact**, created to foster collaboration among district and charter schools, now organizes regular meetings to discuss issues such as record-sharing, professional development, special education, policy and advocacy.
- CMSD has designated funds to hire two new staff and additional consulting capacity in its charter school office, essential to ensuring quality in its work as a **sponsor and partner with charter schools**.
- Collaboration occurs on a **school-by-school basis**. For example, Stonebrook Montessori (charter) and nearby Michael R. White K-8 (CMSD) jointly participated in an after-school reading program for 2nd graders in 2015-16.
- Schools are **sharing space**. Citizens Academy Southeast, a Breakthrough charter school that opened for 2015-16, is co-located with CMSD’s Whitney Young. Breakthrough’s Near West Intergenerational School continues to lease a CMSD-owned building.

Discussion

The Cleveland Education Compact, despite internal conflict and membership turnover, is improving chances that new collaborative efforts will be implemented. These discussions must continue, and dig deeper, over the coming year.

CMSD’s willingness to sponsor and partner with charter schools, rather than just view them as competitors, serves as a model of cross-sector collaboration. Attention should be focused on continuing to forge meaningful and productive partnerships. Examples include coordinated planning to ensure new schools serve Cleveland neighborhoods with the highest need for quality schools, sharing educational services, and collaborative turnaround efforts, whereby a charter partner assumes the role of operator of a failing district school, retaining all its students.

Competition among schools to recruit both students and teachers remains a barrier to greater collaboration. The Alliance, CMSD, charter schools and the Education Compact must strive to encourage deeper discussion on these issues, to find a healthier balance between competition and collaboration.

Conclusion

Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools called for a complete reinvention of our public schools. Since 2012, many partners have been working toward the goal of the Cleveland Plan: 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.

In this report, the Transformation Alliance has documented meaningful progress toward that goal. Among our findings:

- CMSD's graduation rate has continued its steady rise;
- CMSD and its charter partners are opening promising new schools;
- Schools that do not meet academic performance criteria are being closed or replaced;
- Key academic indicators are trending slowly upward;
- More high-quality preschool seats are available in Cleveland;
- CMSD graduates are better prepared for college and career; and
- Both the district and partnering charters are putting in place key systems reforms that are helping to create higher-quality learning environments.

Progress on academic indicators, however, remains too slow and incremental. That is why the Transformation Alliance has made seven recommendations to accelerate the pace of change. (See page 8.)

No one involved in this work expects change to come easily or quickly. The timeline of the Cleveland Plan runs through the 2018-19 school year, and the Alliance expects that the work being done now will lead to progress in the years to come. The next report from the Transformation Alliance, based in part on academic performance data to be released by the Ohio Department of Education in September 2016, will be published in the spring of 2017.

In the meantime, stakeholders must deepen their work together. This includes efforts to support and pass the November 2016 renewal of CMSD's operating levy, which sets aside one mill for partnering charter schools. Cleveland voters must vote yes in order to maintain and accelerate the important work discussed in this report. Funds from the levy have made possible many of the gains made to date, and are key to ensuring the work of the Cleveland Plan can continue.

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