

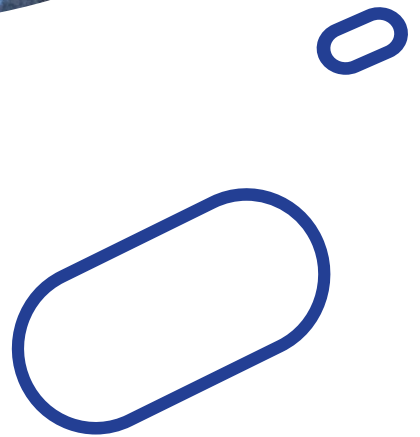


CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Justin M. Bibb



CLEVELAND'S KIDS CAN'T WAIT:
**ACCELERATING
PROGRESS FOR
CLEVELAND'S
YOUTH**

**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
TOUR
SUMMARY**



Letter from the **Mayor**



Fellow Clevelanders,

As I have shared over the last eight months, I am committed to ensuring that every child in every neighborhood in Cleveland has access to a high-quality education that opens the door to opportunities and sets them on a path to prosperity. With one out of every two Cleveland children living in poverty, the quality of our educational system and community supports are imperative to their lifelong success and the economic competitiveness of our city.

We are building on a decade of collective commitment to improving educational outcomes. And though we have seen important improvements in early education and high school graduation rates, we must do more to support every child. With the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our youth, we must now act with urgency to help a generation of Cleveland students get back on track.

I pledged to partner with the community and listen to concerns, challenges, and ideas for the future. Over the last three months, we followed through on that commitment by engaging with students, families, educators, and community members from across the city to learn about their experiences and perceptions of Cleveland's education system and community supports. This report shares the takeaways from more than 30 listening sessions and points us toward a bold vision for improving outcomes for Cleveland's youth. Moving forward, we have much work to do.

I look forward to continued dialogue and partnership as we work to bring our vision for youth success to life!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Bibb".

Mayor Justin Bibb



Acknowledgements

Mayor Bibb’s office would like to recognize the following groups and individuals who contributed to this report:

City of Cleveland Community Engagement Tour Advisory Committee

Brooke King, *Executive Director, Intergenerational Schools*
 Dale Anglin, *Vice President of Programs, Cleveland Foundation*
 Derrick Holifield, *Principal, Kenneth Clement Boys Leadership Academy*
 Eric Gordon, *CEO, Cleveland Metropolitan School District*
 Helen Williams, *Education Program Officer, Cleveland Foundation*
 Jamie Woodson, *Advisor, Haslam 3 Foundation*

Jocelyn Smith, *Principal of Charles Dickens K-8*
 John Zitzner, *President, Friends of Breakthrough*
 Shari Obrenski, *President, Cleveland Teachers Union*
 Ted Ginn, *Founder, Ginn Academy*
 Victor Ruiz, *Executive Director, Esperanza*

Mayor’s Office & City Council

Angela Shute-Woodson	Kay Jones-Williams
Brad Davy	Ryan Puente
Chia Min-Chen	Sarah Johnson
Christopher Martinez	Sonya Pryor Jones
Holly Trifiro	Taylor DiPlacido
Kaniece Williams	

United Way of Greater Cleveland

August Napoli	Ken Surratt
Deborah Enty	

Thirdspace Action Lab

Brandon Wafford	Leah Hudnall
Donte Gibbs	Martha Potts
Evelyn Burnett	Trevor Pollack

Most Importantly,

We would like to thank the hundreds of community members, parents, educators, and students who provided feedback and shared their personal experiences honestly and openly with the goal of improving opportunities for generations of young Clevelanders.

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Executive Summary

In July 2022, Mayor Bibb’s administration in collaboration with city leaders and community partners launched a community listening tour to hear directly from parents, families, educators, students, and community members about the needs and opportunities for supporting Cleveland’s youth.

The community listening tour included more than 30 feedback sessions with students, families, educators, and community members located in neighborhoods across the city and representing all 17 wards. Out of the robust feedback, key themes and trends emerged that will ensure our education system continues to meet the needs of Cleveland students:

- Additional focus is needed to ensure that students are academically prepared for grade level work—with greater urgency as students recover learning lost due to the pandemic.
- Resources are needed to address the wide range of student academic needs and improve equitable access to school-based programs.
- Services and supports for students with disabilities, the city’s newcomers, and English Learners can be strengthened to better meet the needs of all students.
- A continued focus on building relationships and understanding student and family backgrounds is needed.
- Families are supportive of Cleveland’s choice system and want the ability to make school decisions based on individual student needs.

- Families desire additional high-quality and accessible school options.
- More innovative and career-oriented learning opportunities are needed to support students’ postsecondary and career readiness.
- Additional mental health and wellbeing supports are critical to adequately address student needs.
- There are opportunities to improve students’ access to programs outside of the school day.
- Solutions are needed to address community and school-based safety concerns.
- Parents are eager for engagement and an ongoing dialogue.
- Improvements are needed to address inequities in facility quality.

Over the summer, we have learned more about what is driving this feedback and have begun identifying solutions for how to address it. Ultimately, five priorities were identified that we can collectively focus on to accelerate progress for Cleveland youth:

- 1. Provide all students the safe and welcoming school and community environment they need to thrive.**
- 2. Develop a plan to ensure all students have access to a best-in-class school facility.**
- 3. Strengthen learning so that all students are academically prepared for college or career.**
- 4. Build on what’s working.**
- 5. Elevate parent voices to drive progress.**



Introduction

“We have to **actively accelerate the pace of change**...with one out of two of our children living in poverty, having **high-quality public education is critical** to our long-term economic competitiveness as a city.”

Mayor Justin M. Bibb

The success of Cleveland’s youth is essential to the success of our city’s future. We know that ensuring an excellent education opens doors for individual opportunity and is also integral for the city’s future success. With half of our city’s children living in poverty, a high-quality public education is critical for every student having the opportunity to find success and meaningfully contribute to Cleveland’s future. Students throughout this listening tour shared their aspirations and goals, and it’s our duty to ensure they have the skills and opportunities to make those dreams a reality. At the same time, parents and families deserve to send their children to schools that are safe, accessible, welcoming, and set them on a pathway to success.

This report is the result of Mayor Bibb’s commitment to engaging the community to learn about their current experiences and ideas in pursuit of improving the quality of educational opportunities for Cleveland’s youth. Throughout the summer of 2022, Clevelanders engaged in conversations about the city’s education system through a community listening tour. Twelve themes emerged from this engagement, and these themes have informed the creation of five key priorities that will guide the mayor’s work ahead for accelerating progress for Cleveland’s youth.





Cleveland has a history of prioritizing education. Prior to 2012, public education in Cleveland was facing numerous challenges from pre-Kindergarten to career readiness. In response to these challenges, state, city, and community leaders came together to develop and pass the Cleveland Plan, a vision for improving educational outcomes, and Clevelanders passed a historic \$15 mill tax levy to invest in Cleveland public schools.

Since this historic investment, notable gains have been made. The number of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preschool has grown by more than 2,000 students through the PRE4CLE program. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District's (CMSD) graduation rate increased from 56 percent in 2011 to 80 percent in 2019. This growth is important progress for the community and the more than 67,000 students that live in Cleveland.

While we celebrate the progress made and the collaborative commitment to improving the lives of Cleveland's youth, we also know that there are still critical challenges to address, and the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a tremendous impact on our community and children.

Building on a decade of **commitment to Cleveland's Youth**

Preschool Enrollment is Declining

In September of 2020, just 5 in 10 preschool-aged children were enrolled in preschool as compared to 8 in 10 children in December of 2019.

Fewer Students on Track to Read

The percentage of students reaching grade-level expectations in reading and math fell from 40 percent in 2019 to 20 percent in 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted postsecondary enrollment

Impacts were similar at the postsecondary level, with only 4 in 10 CMSD graduates from the class of 2020 enrolling in college within a year, compared with 50 percent of the graduating class from 2019.



These setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic are compounded by pre-existing challenges to improving educational outcomes:



Minimal advances have been made in student learning:
 Since 2003, outcomes for students in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math have shown limited progress despite gains in other large cities and the nation.



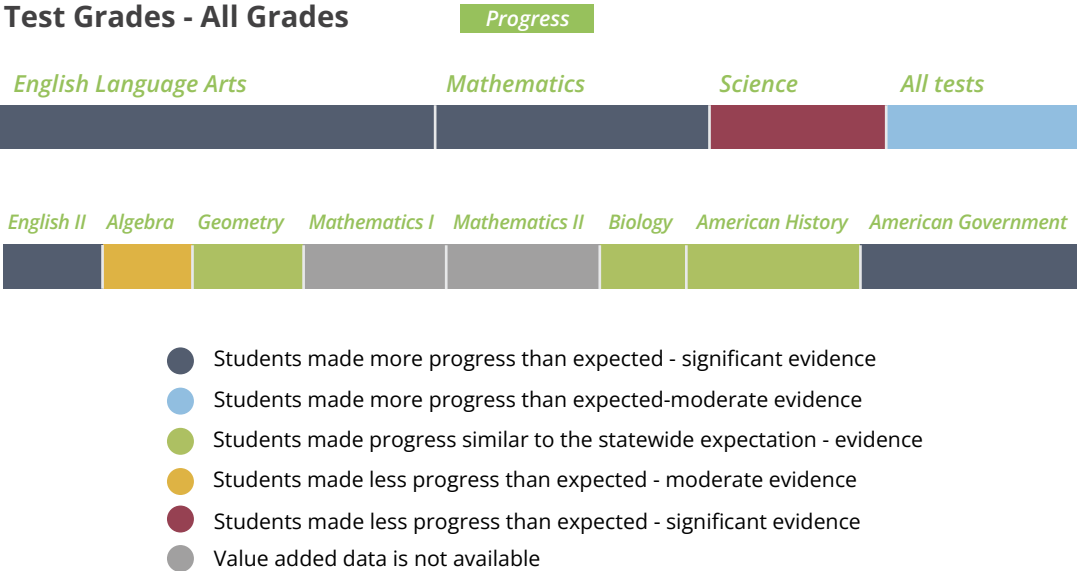
Achievement gaps persist:
 Hispanic students are scoring on average more than 10 points lower in reading and math than their White peers, while Black students are scoring more than 15 points lower.¹



Barriers to college-readiness remain:
 Despite community-wide efforts to remove financial barriers to college, only 13 percent of 2020 CMSD graduates are college ready as measured by the ACT or SAT, just one percentage point higher than in 2012.

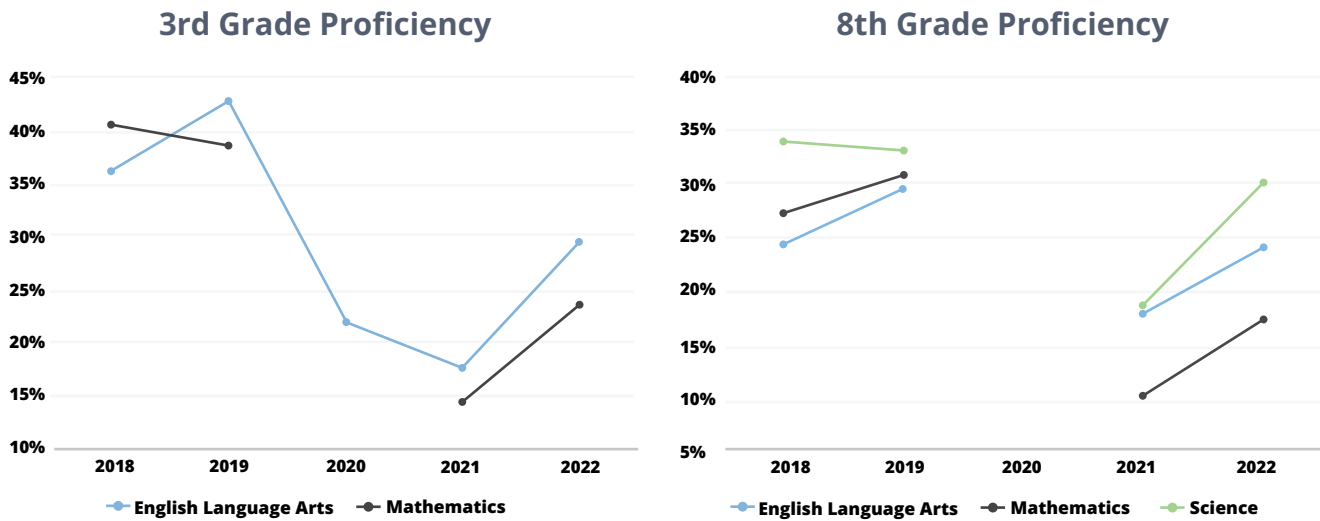
Recently released school report card grades show that students and schools are making progress toward recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Cleveland students made more academic progress than the state expectation in both English language arts and math, and CMSD received a 4-star (out of 5 star) rating for closing achievement gaps and student progress.²

Figure 1: 2021-22 data on student progress exceeds expectations in several grade levels and subjects.



Additionally, achievement levels for 3rd and 8th grade students rebounded from the 2020-21 school year.

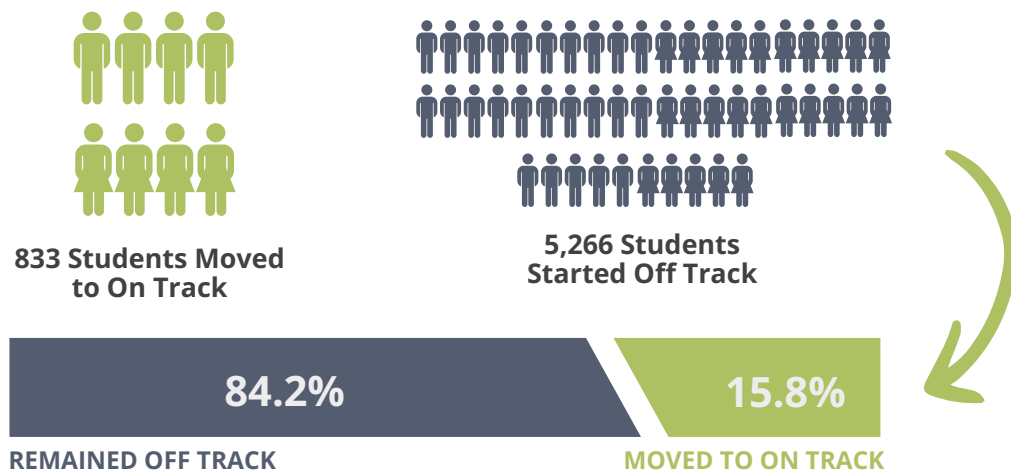
Figure 2: Proficiency in math, ELA, and science increases but remains below pre-pandemic levels.



There is much to celebrate in this progress, and our educators deserve our gratitude for their work with students to attain this progress. And yet, achievement levels for Cleveland students remain stubbornly low. 2021-22 scores are still below pre-pandemic levels with over half (51%) of all students in CMSD scoring “Limited”, the lowest category of achievement on state assessments, and only 25% of students scored proficient and above.³

A deeper look into the data reveals that Cleveland students are specifically lacking critical early literacy skills. Only 30% of 3rd graders are proficient on the state English language arts test, and 84% (4,400 students) of the kindergarten through 3rd graders who began the 2021-22 school year off track in reading were still off track at the end of the school year.

Figure 3: Less than 16% of K-3 students moved to on track in reading.⁴



These latest data show that while we are taking steps in the right direction, we must continue to accelerate progress so that all of Cleveland’s students are reading, writing, and engaging in math and science on grade level.



Uniting behind a **bold** vision for the future

Our shared history of addressing education challenges shows that we can improve outcomes for Cleveland's youth when we work together. We must once again leverage that collective commitment to confront our ongoing challenges and the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and unite around a renewed vision for accelerating outcomes for Cleveland's youth.

This report is a first step towards that vision as it realizes the mayor's commitment to work in partnership with the Cleveland community to systematically listen to and act on the needs of Cleveland students, families, and educators. The feedback gathered through the community listening tour and outlined in this report helps to set forth five bold priorities for the continuation of the Cleveland Plan and acceleration of progress for Cleveland's youth.



Who & How We Engaged

Throughout summer 2022, the community listening tour consisted of 6 sessions with Cleveland teachers and principals, 14 sessions with students and families, and more than 15 sessions with community and city leaders. In total, more than 250 stakeholders across the city participated. Listening sessions focused on gathering feedback on three questions:

1. Are all students receiving rigorous instruction and coursework?
2. Are high-quality public school options available for all students?
3. Are the conditions both in school and outside of school supporting student success?

The Community Listening Tour aimed to engage diverse perspectives that represent the Cleveland community as well as the range of school options in Cleveland.

Figure 4: Race and Ethnicity of Student and Family Participants

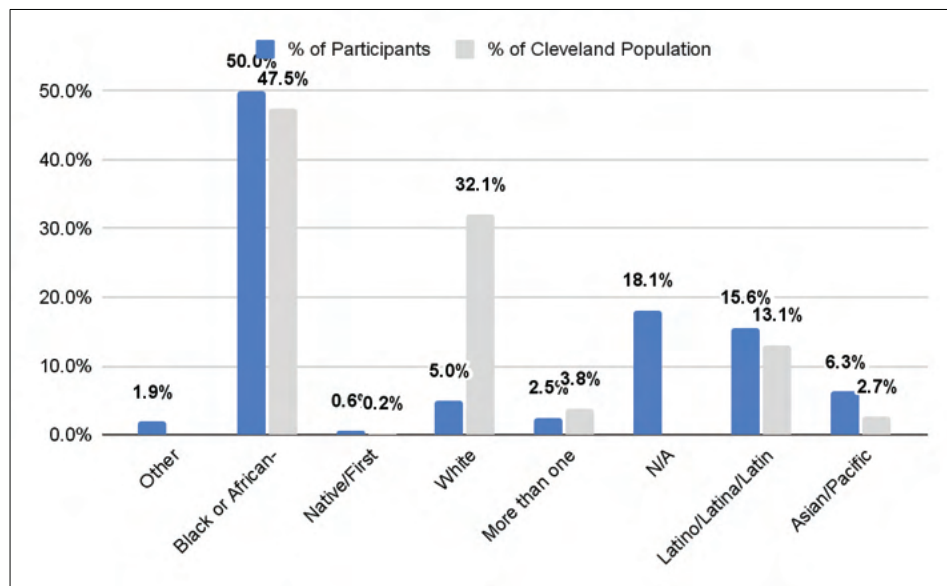
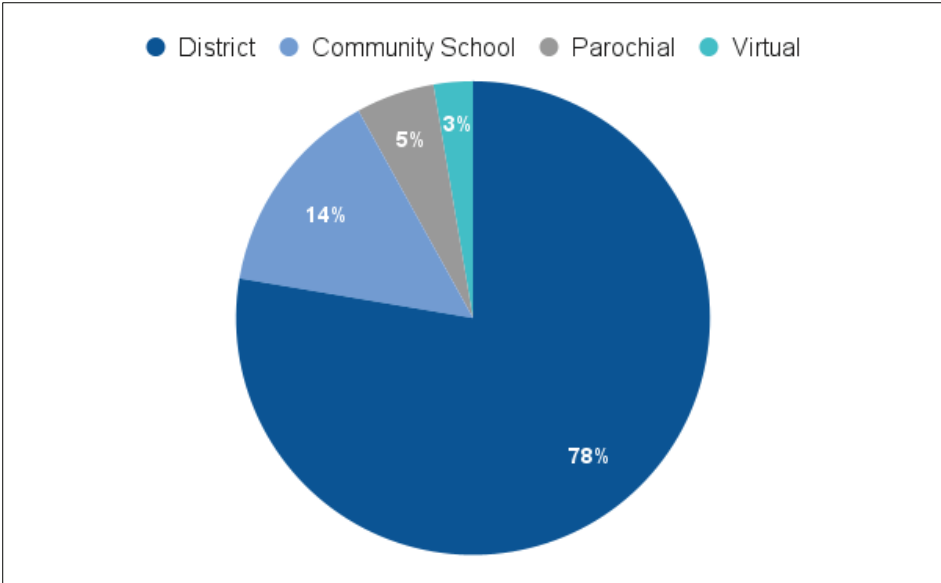


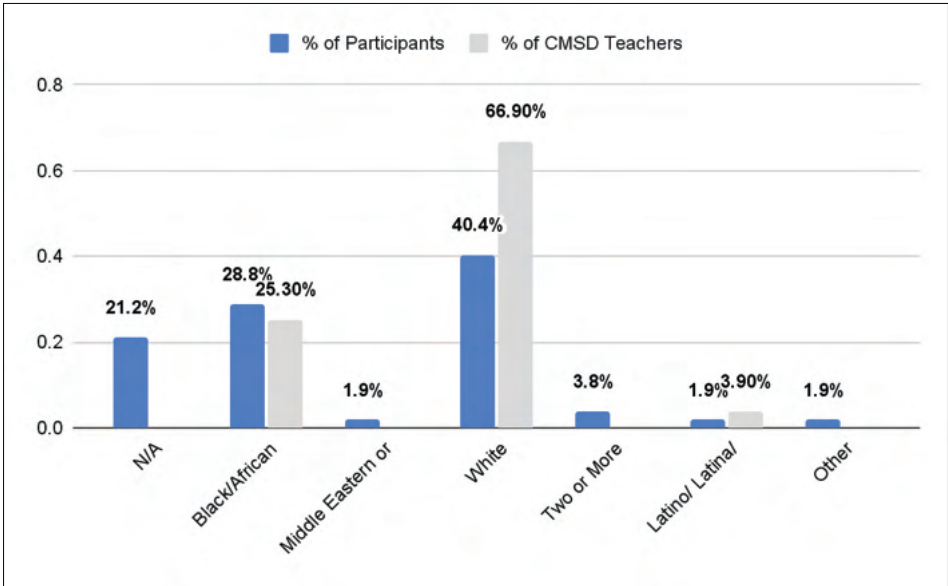
Figure 5: School Types Reported by Participants



Community members participated from all of the city’s 17 wards, and participants were affiliated with schools in 14 wards. 91 percent of participants who provided information on both their school affiliation and their home neighborhood were affiliated with a school that is located outside of their neighborhood, representing the large numbers of families and students participating in the city’s choice system.

Educator participants represented schools in 23 different neighborhoods.

Figure 6: Race and Ethnicity of Educator Participants



WHAT WE HEARD: COMMUNITY LISTENING TOUR THEMES

Focus Areas



Focus Area 1: Are all students receiving rigorous instructions and coursework?



Focus Area 2: Are high-quality public school options available for all students?



Focus Area 3: Are the conditions both in school and outside of school supporting student success?

FOCUS AREA ONE

Are all students receiving rigorous instruction and coursework?

The first focus area was designed to understand student, family, and educator perceptions and feedback on the current quality of academic opportunities for Cleveland's youth.

Community Theme

Additional focus is needed to ensure that students are academically prepared for grade level work—with greater urgency as students recover learning lost due to the pandemic.

When asked about access to rigorous coursework and the quality of education received by the city's youth, stakeholders cited challenges with students routinely missing key skills and knowledge needed to access grade level work. One teacher noted "[with] my experience in CMSD, I think it's just a given...that kids are going to be coming in a few years behind." One parent shared that she realized there was a gap in the rigor of the content her daughter was experiencing when she tested for a private school, "They're learning what she's learning in the eighth grade in the fifth grade. Is it [the] standard for inner city children?"

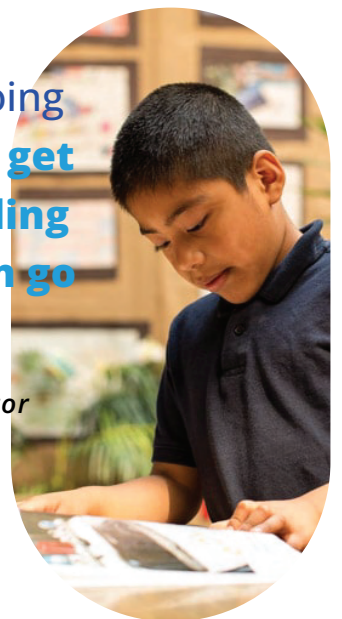
The challenge of supporting students to access grade level work is shared by both elementary and secondary educators. Elementary educators routinely named missing foundational skills in literacy and math as a key obstacle for students. One early grades teacher expressed that her students were "significantly behind - not knowing the alphabet, not knowing number recognition," while another teacher shared her incoming first graders had about "50 percent recognition of the alphabet." Educators shared that these foundational skills are essential for building literacy and reading skills, and they worried that despite the state's Third Grade Reading Guarantee, students would continue to be pushed into upper grade levels with significant deficits in literacy. Educators pointed to gaps in training and curriculum as challenges for addressing literacy and math gaps. One educator

expressed, "We need systemic change.... different curriculums are being used across the district. Some are using Haggerty and some are using components of Foundations or piecemealing it together. We need a uniform curriculum."

Secondary teachers voiced that these gaps in student knowledge and skills are magnified as students reach upper grade levels. One educator summarized the immense challenge of catching up students in later grades, "Incoming freshmen and transfer students [in] later grades...they're coming to us with, on average, at about a fifth grade reading level...and so even if we... grow them two years at a time, they're still barely going to be where they should be by the end of [high school]."

"What are we doing systemically to get these kids reading so that they can go and thrive?"

Elementary Educator



“The gap continues to widen so big that...it’s almost like it’s impossible to close it for a lot of our kids.”

Secondary Educator

Another teacher expressed that students “seem to get pushed without any intervention at all” and that the consequences in high school are amplified with “credit classes that count.” Secondary educators also noted the tension between the goal of ensuring that students earn the needed credits to graduate versus strong academic preparation for a career.

Families, students, and educators also shared that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges with students’ gaps in academic preparation. Parents noted that while a small number of students thrived in a more flexible, independent remote learning environment, most students struggled tremendously with engagement in virtual learning and were re-entering the school year even further behind academically. Once students returned to school, parents and educators noted

that social and developmental challenges made it more difficult to accelerate learning in the classroom. One parent shared, “Our children went from being in... the seventh grade... never been into a high school, and now they’re in the ninth grade.”

Families and educators were clear in their desire to see students better prepared academically, so that they can access options and opportunities. Determining strategies to support students with grade level work was identified as a key need. As one teacher explained this challenge, “The most upsetting part about it [is] that [students want] to learn and they were really trying their best... but there were just some of those fundamental skills that were still lacking.”

“Our children went from being in... the seventh grade... never been into a high school, and now they’re in the ninth grade.”

Parent



Community Theme

Resources are needed to address the wide range of student academic needs and improve equitable access to school-based programs.

Listening tour participants reflected on equitable access to school-based programming and resources within CMSD. One parent shared that: "Schools on the west side versus schools on the east side – that's such a difference, in my opinion... It's just like night and day." Educators also expressed concerns about the availability of some of the career-focused opportunities that they were fortunate to have in their buildings while acknowledging that "I also know on the other hand that, it is a specialty school, [and] the other schools don't have the same opportunities."

"Schools on the West side versus schools on the East side - that's such a difference, in my opinion...it's just like night and day."

Parent

Educators shared that one of their key concerns is the ability to support individual student needs. With many students across the city struggling to engage in grade level work, educators and families expressed that more resources were needed to support those students below grade level. A middle school principal noted the complexity of trying to provide additional

support to students, "We're trying to play catch-up...to make sure that we have the response to intervention... [while also not sacrificing] the on-grade level content." Some expressed challenges with effectively differentiating support for large classes that include learners at a wide range of skills. High school teachers, in particular, hoped that new alternatives to credit recovery could be explored to help high school students who had fallen behind and were missing course credits. In addition to desiring more support for struggling students, parents and educators also wondered whether gifted students and those students who are on or above grade level are receiving the right supports and instruction to address their needs and push them further. One educator noted, "We find that the students that do come in at a higher level... they get lost... because we spend so much time working with the students that are so far behind."

One frequently named challenge to addressing the academic needs of individual students was the transient nature of the student population. Educators shared that students frequently transferring schools mid-year or even between years often had larger academic gaps and that due to differences in curriculum the supports to address these gaps were not sufficient. "When we look at our data each year, there always is a huge gap with the transient students," shared one teacher.

“These are regular education kids who need **more resources...** who need **more practice** to get caught up.”

Educator

Teachers also shared that frequent student transitions also contribute to challenges with discipline that distract from academics: “It’s a huge disruption at the high school level...we’ve had a bunch of [problems] discipline wise [that] doesn’t give us a chance to orient the student or like get to know them.”

Educators also pointed to inconsistencies in curriculum as a contributing factor to the issue of equitable access to high-quality instruction within the district. One teacher shared, “Well, it’s more like a luck of the draw than it really should be for our scholars...You may or may not be getting a research-based education, and that keeps me up at night.” Another educator reinforced this notion in a plea to “Please get someone to do something district-wide that is research based [and] is enforced and supported and nurtured.”

One program that was positively identified across stakeholder groups as a key resource that should be continued was the Say Yes program, a community-based program that helps to provide access to college and postsecondary education by eliminating financial barriers and providing advising and other supports. The positive impacts of the postsecondary planning, Family Support Specialists, and the summer and afterschool resources were mentioned as key opportunities that were needed in all schools across the city.



Community Theme

Services and supports for students with disabilities, the city's newcomers, and English Learners can be strengthened to better meet the needs of all students.

Parents and educators reflected on how important it is to have the services needed to meet individual student needs. In several sessions accessing resources to support English Learners was cited as a challenge. One educator mentioned that she was learning Spanish to support the students and families in her school, because "I can't get a translator because there's only two ...and as a result, I believe our Latino [students] do not get what they need." Another educator shared that it was difficult "to find the support services or to have someone come out" to meet with Spanish-speaking parents about students' quarterly progress reports. Ensuring the availability of a high-quality curriculum to support language acquisition in newcomer students was also a challenge noted by several educators. They felt "the curriculum that they give us is not appropriate for our [newcomer] students."

"I can't get a translator because there's only two ...and as a result, I believe our Latino [students] do not get what they need."

Educator

Like the needs expressed for additional resources for English Learners, families and educators also conveyed that more supports were needed for students with disabilities. One common trend in feedback was the need for more trained and licensed staff and paraprofessionals. One teacher shared "I teach special education kids, and I work with a lot of adults in the building that aren't [trained and licensed teachers or paraprofessionals] and as a result, "they have no social emotional learning training, along with special education training." Others expressed that the district could do more to ensure that special education students are provided with the necessary resources and supports to participate in the general education setting whenever possible. One educator cited the need for more principal and teacher knowledge about special education best practices.

Another shared that sometimes students need additional assistance in the form of a paraprofessional, "but the district fights us so hard on giving them an extra person to make them inclusive in the classroom, so they always end up back in a single class." Additionally, several families noted that access to special education testing services was a significant barrier. One grandparent shared, that she requested testing for her grandson in September but "when it was finally addressed, it was the middle of May."

Community Theme

A continued focus on building relationships and understanding student and family backgrounds is needed.

Another theme that emerged through community feedback conversations was a desire for greater diversity in the teaching staff. Several participants noted the importance of having educators that represent the demographics of their students. They shared that this supports relationship building with students. As an example, one teacher shared that her students had the opportunity to participate in the Black and Brown Male Summit that was organized as part of an afterschool activity by a black male teacher in her building. Conversely, another teacher specifically noted that teacher diversity is a challenge in her

“I work in a school with 98% black boys and think of their experience of [not having] a black male teacher.”

Educator

school, “I work in a school with 98 percent black boys and think of their experience of [not having] a black male teacher.”

In several sessions, both students and parents expressed the importance of connecting with students and building relationships with families. One parent shared his wish that all students have someone who can “sit down, talk to them, see where [they come] from.” The value of caring adults who serve in a specific school over the long-term was cited by participants. One educator noted that, “It makes a huge, monumental difference in the lives of our kids when they have people that they can continue to consistently count on.” Other educators noted that there is a lack of training for new teachers to understand the impacts of poverty. “How many of us have had training on dealing with poverty and traumatic experiences?” asked one educator.



FOCUS AREA TWO

Are high-quality public school options available for all students?

The second focus area was designed to understand the community's perceptions of Cleveland's choice system.

Community Theme

Families are supportive of Cleveland's choice system and want the ability to make school decisions based on individual student needs.

Students and families said they appreciate having options to make school decisions within Cleveland's school choice system. As shared by one parent, "I think choice is great for CMSD ...we can reevaluate as a family each year and decide what school is the best fit." One middle school educator also explained how she sees the choice system as motivating for her students, "It puts them in a different frame of mind...I have definitely seen their awareness that they have all these high school choices and that they need to take be proactive to make themselves more attractive for schools that may be more selective high schools." Another parent explained why the choice system was so important to him, **"I just felt like, I didn't have a choice when I was growing up going to school... I just wanted a better learning opportunity for my children."**

Families indicated that they made school choice decisions based on their child's unique needs. One parent reflected, "I think my decision on what I'm looking for in a school changes as my kids change." Parents frequently praised school options that focused on the arts, architecture, and entrepreneurship. One parent summarized the appeal of these specific programs when discussing her daughter's experience, "I based [my decision] off of the skill set and the desire of the child. She was into theater, she was into

dancing, she was into music... so I looked at the schools that would offer that for her." A student specifically pointed to the ability to participate in the Say Yes program as a key reason for choosing a CMSD school.

Navigating the choice system was often mentioned as a time-consuming endeavor. Parents noted conducting research into schools, attending multiple school tours, and setting up shadowing opportunities for their children. One parent shared, "It's just a matter of finding what's best for your child – shopping around no matter how many schools you have to visit." Additionally, some families cited information on school options as overwhelming. "I get ads in my mailbox trying to get my kids to go to different schools," voiced one parent. While some parents positively noted the work of the Cleveland Transformation Alliance's Quality Guide in helping select schools for their children, other parents felt there was a lack of information. Educators also expressed some concern that students don't always know what options are available to them. One teacher who was advising a student interested in nursing shared, "There were many students that didn't know that we have high schools that actually concentrate on health careers...**somehow the ball is being dropped by not telling the kids the pathways."**

Community Theme

Families desire additional high-quality and accessible school options.

While parents and students appreciated the choices made available to them for various school options across Cleveland, they also acknowledged limitations in the choice system. Specifically, some parents expressed frustration that “there are only so many seats available at some of your highest performing schools.” Another shared that, “If you go to a specific school, you get all the opportunities, but if you don't happen to make it to that school, there's not the same opportunities.” These perceptions of limitations in the choice system also create a lack of trust in the choice system, and a parent noted this by sharing, “You can trust the CMSD if you have the ability to get your kids to a high performing school, and you've got to understand how to look for those schools.”

Transportation was cited as a barrier to accessing choices by parents and students. One student specifically noted her narrowed options due to transportation, “I know this is the school I can go to because I live right here, but I'm stuck here.” Parents shared that the location of the schools and need for transportation was driven by inequities in the system, “It's not equitable, because there are not the same number of high performing schools equitably spread across the city's neighborhoods.” Teachers also revealed that this results in students spending extended time traveling to get to school. One teacher shared, “We have open enrollment, that's great. I've got students sometimes who travel upwards of two hours to get to school every day, and on the one hand, that's dedication, on the other hand, they miss first period, and often second period, basically every day because of it.”

“We have open enrollment, that's great. I've got students who travel **upwards of two hours to get to school every day**, and on the one hand, that's dedication. On the other hand, they miss first period and often second period, basically everyday because of it, right? **They want to learn. They want to be there.**”

Educator



Community Theme

More innovative and career-oriented learning opportunities are needed to support students' postsecondary and career readiness.

Stakeholders noted that they also want more options within existing schools, particularly to support career-oriented learning opportunities. Families and students were drawn to the college prep options and career-focused programs at certain high schools. They desired to continue to see these existing offerings expanded with more Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and earlier exposure to career opportunities. Several parents made note of the importance of these programs being aligned with available jobs. A parent noted about her daughter's need for CTE class options: "I don't think that there are a lot of programs that have targeted women into taking vocational training classes ... so I'd like to see some programs targeted to young women in terms of maybe carpentry or construction or things like that." Notably, several students requested earlier information about college and career options. A sophomore noted wanting, "more intel about college because they have that for like 11th grade and seniors, but... I kind of want to prepare myself now." Educators mentioned the promise of a new career-focused program in CMSD called PACE (Planning And Career Exploration, noting that, "It's unbelievable... the opportunities that its

providing students... [connections with] local career partners, and it does resume building workshops."

Another trend was the request, from both students and parents, for programming that focuses on key life and financial management skills. One parent noted that life skills were critical for college or career readiness, "A major thing is having the set of life skills ... those skills to go apply for a job, go through an interview." Another recently graduating student shared a similar request for more financial literacy classes, stating that he "didn't have any finances, financing classes, or electives or anything, so I didn't know how to do any of that my myself."

Many participants expressed a desire, particularly after the previous two years of the pandemic, for schools to think more about innovation. One parent shared, "I feel like my biggest frustration just being in Cleveland [is that]... there's options, but they're all pretty much doing the same thing. There might be slight differences and... they might have certain like specializations, but I still feel like it's all traditional school."

"There's options, they're all pretty much doing the same thing. There might be slight differences and...they might have certain specializations but I still feel like it's all traditional school."

Educator

An educator shared a similar sentiment: “I think we need to be much more innovative. We worked so hard post-COVID to get back to where we were before COVID, and before COVID, we weren't doing too well, so I was under the impression that when we got back to school, we were going to try to make things a little bit different.”

Specifically, parents wanted to see a greater emphasis on critical thinking, hands on learning,

and entrepreneurship. “We need thinkers, we need innovative thinkers, and the way to do that is having more project-based learning, more collaboration amongst kids... having really creative makerspaces with supplies and things that they can access to be able to create,” shared another parent. A few parents also mentioned their children’s positive experience in summer school programs that were very hands-on and promoted collaboration and creative thinking as possible models to consider.



FOCUS AREA THREE

Are there conditions both in school and outside of school supporting student success?

The final focus area was designed to understand the community's perspective on the conditions that support student success.

Community Theme

Additional mental health and wellbeing supports are critical to adequately address student needs.

A common trend across stakeholder groups was the belief that preexisting mental health concerns, often brought on by trauma and generational poverty, were exacerbated by COVID-19. Parents, educators, and students noted that a loss of connection and socialization made learning difficult for students. A parent commented, "I'm used to a straight A, outgoing, extroverted child...and it was disheartening to me as a parent to watch the change in my child and I didn't know how to parent that."

In response to the growing need to support students with mental health, many parents and educators cited that there were strong mental health resources in schools. They pointed to partnerships with organizations like OhioGuidestone and Families First Health Services that were providing in-school resources like counseling. A key challenge has been securing enough mental health services. "We were able to get some services, we just didn't have enough...by not having enough, that does manifest as there are some kids who need servicing and can't get it," shared one educator. Another noted that the

community service providers, like many organizations and businesses, struggled with staffing during the last year. Meanwhile, some educators reported that specific school-based initiatives, like social emotional programs or student counseling groups, are having an impact, but these initiatives were not common across all schools.

Educators noted the need for more district staff as well. School psychologists shared that in order to meet requirements for testing and supporting students with disabilities, they are not able to spend enough time on mental health concerns. The hiring of additional social workers in CMSD was seen as a positive, but educators noted that not all these new hires were trained in mental health and therapy needs. Finally, educators also called for additional school counselors, noting that the current counselors were often immersed in scheduling and college advising at the secondary level.

Community Theme

There are opportunities to improve students' access to programs outside of the school day.

During the listening tour, students, parents, and educators were asked about the opportunities for afterschool and other community resources available to them/their students and whether they believed those opportunities were equitable across the city and within the Greater Cleveland region. Opinions on the equity of access to youth-related programs varied largely depending on the participant's specific school choice. Several parents and students expressed an appreciation for robust offerings like summer programs, arts programming, and afterschool opportunities. One parent mentioned, "We have a lot of afterschool activities for the kids: soccer, poetry slam, just all different kinds to keep them busy."

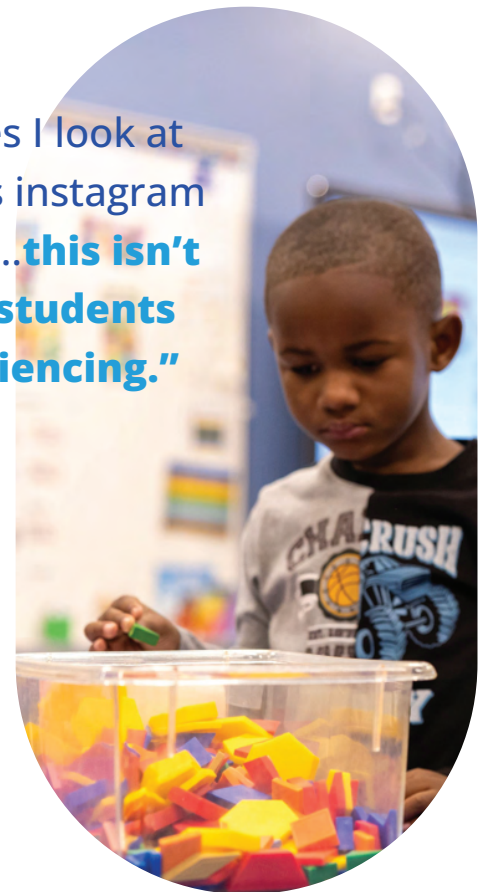
However, some parents had different experiences. One parent shared, "I think we find ourselves having to go outside of the city for extracurricular activities... but it would be nice to have my kids do extracurricular activities with their classmates." Teachers also noted that the availability of afterschool programming often depended on the school leadership. One teacher shared, "Some of my middle school students, they don't get an opportunity to participate in social activities because we don't have the people there to actually help with those activities." Another mentioned, "Kids that don't go to Cleveland schools, they are staying after school to be in the band in second grade, they're learning or they're doing choir, or they're doing an art club or they're doing dance, and we have very limited opportunities for that for our kids in Cleveland."

Student participants also frequently mentioned a desire to see sports programs expanded and continued in schools across the city.

An educator summed up her perceptions of inequitable opportunities and programs in the following way, "sometimes I look at the district's Instagram [and know] ...this isn't what my students are experiencing."

"Sometimes I look at the district's Instagram [and know]...**this isn't what my students are experiencing.**"

Teacher



Community Theme

Solutions are needed to address community and school-based safety concerns.

Safety was one of the most frequently expressed concerns by participants in the community feedback sessions. Several students and families reported feeling safe at school but not in the surrounding neighborhood. "I've never thought that children were safe walking to school in the city of Cleveland," shared one grandparent. Another parent noted the citywide nature of the safety concerns, "I think that issue is present across the entire city...You go to a library, there is a problem. You go to the recreation centers like the Boys and Girls Club, there's a problem. You go to the regular recreation centers, there's a problem." The impact of these safety concerns on student learning was noted, "It's hard to focus on getting a really good education when you [have] got to really figure out whether you're going to get jumped at the mall, or you're going to get shot, or your brother's [been] killed," shared one teacher.

Meanwhile, several students expressed direct concerns about the safety in their school buildings. One student remarked "There were fights every other day" and noted that once, "there [were] seven fights in one day." While another student shared, "They tell you, 'It's [school] a safe place to go. You will be safe there. You won't have to worry about any troubles,' but once you get there, I see a lot of issues...because of the issues in school, I switched over to an online program."

Parents and educators also expressed concerns about the safety of the school facilities and buildings. For example, the number and consistency of security guards was noted as an area of concern. One educator shared, "CMSD is facing a lack of

"You go to a library, there is a problem. You go to the recreation centers like the boys and girls club, there's a problem. You go to the regular recreation centers, there's a problem. [Safety] is a problem across the entire city that needs to be addressed."

Parent

security guards. The transient rate is very high for security guards." While another educator mentioned, "Numerous times actually, last school year, we were lucky if we had one security maybe two days a week." Other concerns mentioned that large buildings with multiple entrances and exits were covered by too few security guards.



Community Theme

Parents are eager for engagement and an ongoing dialogue.

Both families and educators expressed a desire to strengthen parental engagement opportunities. Families said that they wanted more frequent updates and ongoing dialogue on important issues like their students' progress and safety. One parent shared her frustration over a lack of communication regarding safety issues, "You send me emails about the fundraiser, but you didn't send me an email about gun situations." They also requested streamlined communication and contact information for navigating needs. Families expressed frustration at being sent to multiple different contacts to try to find someone to help with a specific issue. They requested "someone that can actually direct parents when they have a question."

Several programs that support families were highlighted as positives, such as family liaisons and parental academies that were helpful with parent engagement. One teacher explained the role of the liaison in her building: "She's that little bridge between reaching out to parents...I wish every school had one...She does a great job of linking teachers with resources as well as students and families with resources." Parents and educators specifically noted the Family Support Specialists provided to some schools through the Say Yes program as a key asset; however, these types of programs and resources were not yet available at all schools last year.



Community Theme

Improvements are needed to address inequities in facility quality.

Many listening tour participants noted that facilities needed attention. They commented on the poor condition of and lack of cleanliness in school buildings. "I'm looking at my school and just being honest. When I first walked in there, it looked like a prison," shared one educator. "Our building in August gets up to 90 degrees... we're working on keeping these kids cool and comfortable...how hard can somebody work in 90-degree temperatures," shared one teacher. The cleanliness of school buildings was another concern, "There's never soap in the bathrooms. There's never paper towels in the staff bathrooms or the student bathrooms, which is just absolutely disgusting." The shortage of custodial staff was mentioned as contributing factors to this challenge. Educators also cited water fountains and water bottle fillers that were inoperable or never installed correctly and hallways and classrooms in desperate need of a fresh coat of paint.

"It's almost heartbreaking sometimes when you walk into schools located in certain parts of town where it just looks **unloved."**

Parent

An overarching concern regarding facilities was the inequity in facility quality across the city. One parent shared, "It's almost heartbreaking sometimes when you walk into schools located in certain parts of town where it just it looks unloved... then you walk in another school and it's like, 'I want to go here'... I feel like every child deserves that and not every child gets that. And if they don't feel that in the physical environment, then it's almost clear that they're not going to feel that you know, in tangible ways," shared one parent.



PRIORITIES FOR ACCELERATING PROGRESS FOR CLEVELAND'S YOUTH

The 12 themes highlighted by community members, parents, students, and educators in the previous section represent the hopes, dreams, concerns, and challenges of Cleveland's education system. Collectively, these themes have informed and influenced our priorities for accelerating progress for Cleveland's youth. If successfully advanced, these priorities will continue the impact of the Cleveland Plan and dramatically improve outcomes for Cleveland's current and future students.

OUTCOMES FOR CLEVELAND'S CURRENT & FUTURE STUDENTS

1. Provide all students the safe and welcoming school and community environment they need to thrive.
2. Develop a plan to ensure all students have access to a best-in-class school facility.
3. Strengthen learning so that all students are academically prepared for college and career.
4. Build on what's working.
5. Elevate parent voices to drive progress.



Outcome One

Provide all students the safe and welcoming school and community environment they need to thrive.

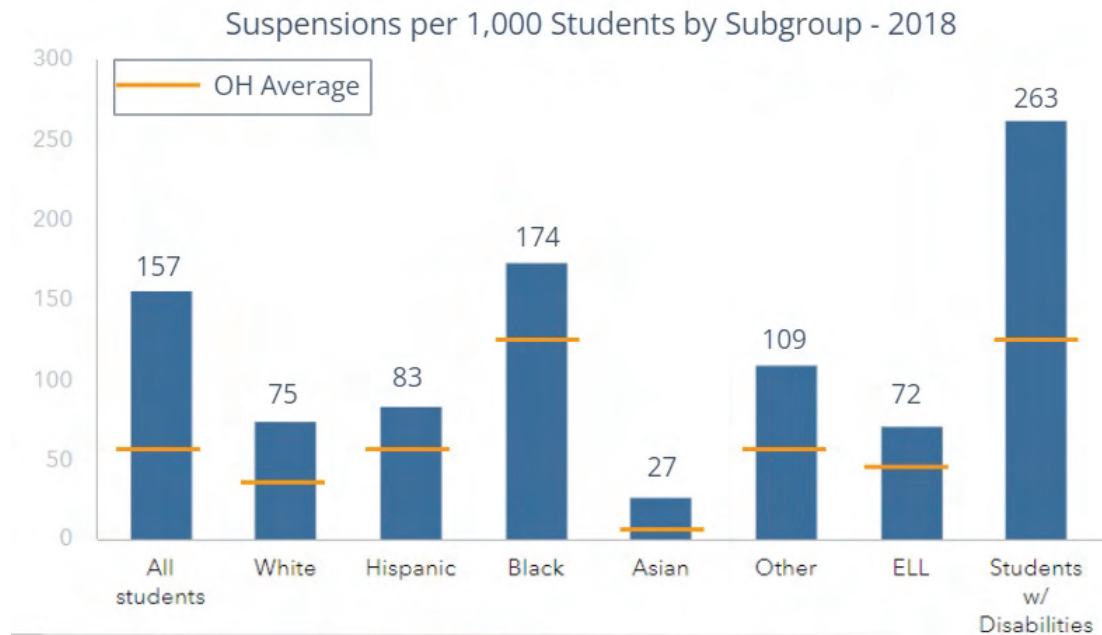
A safe and welcoming learning environment is essential for students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, and all students deserve to feel both physically and psychologically safe in their schools and their communities. We know that we will never be successful in creating the type of city and future we want if our kids do not feel safe walking to school, at school, and in their neighborhoods and homes.

Improving community safety is key to improving school safety in Cleveland. News stories have highlighted Cleveland's rankings in violent crime—2nd in the number of murders over the last decade and 6th in violent crime in 2020.^{5,6} Families and students in feedback sessions underscored these concerns citing that they do not feel that it is safe for students to walk to school or take the city buses. Student feedback

on the Conditions for Learning Survey administered by CMSD also supports these fears. Only 50 percent of elementary school student respondents said they feel safe “outside around the school.”⁷ This percentage increases slightly with middle school and high school respondents, but overall, nearly 40 percent of students did not report feeling safe outside of school.

We also know that community safety issues impact school safety as students encounter safety issues in school that originate in the community. In 2018-19, the most recent year of data available, there were more than 1,300 safety incidents in CMSD schools, a 4 percent increase from the previous year.⁸ Many of these safety incidents result in referrals to law enforcement and suspensions which disproportionately impact Black students and students with disabilities.

Figure 7: Black students and students with disabilities account for a disproportionately high number of suspensions.



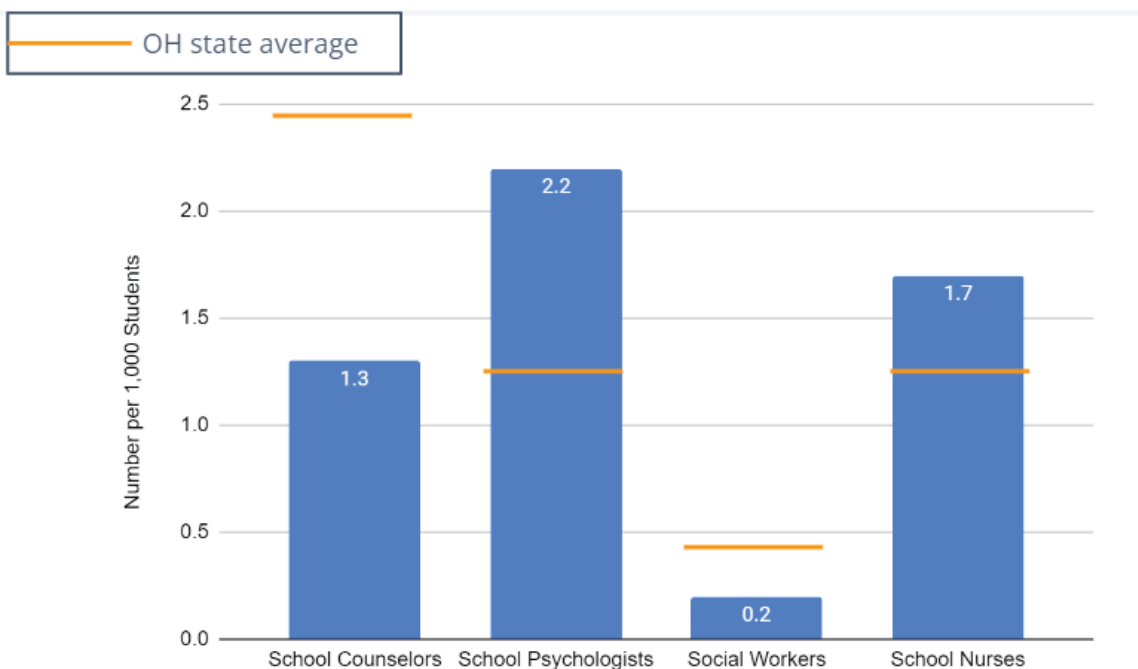
Addressing violence and safety concerns requires preventative as well as enforcement strategies. The city's recently developed Violence Prevention Framework will be a key tool in this effort.⁹ Through this effort, we will partner with community organizations, law enforcement, clergy, and parents to ensure that every student has a safe route to get to and from school. We'll also engage in school-based strategies like conflict resolution skills and positive interventions to disrupt the cycle of suspensions that takes students further off-track.

Expanding afterschool and summer programming will keep students productively engaged outside of school. Our partnership with the Say Yes program will support this effort and is on-track to expand afterschool programming to all CMSD schools and partner charters during the 2022-23 school year. Our Violence Prevention Framework will also expand employment and internship opportunities and establish more free, seasonal recreational programs for students. We will also invest in learning innovation efforts to

identify new and creative opportunities – in partnership with parents, educators, and out-of-school time providers – to keep students engaged in safe and educational activities both in and outside of school.

In addition to the physical safety of students, supporting the psychological and mental health of our students is critically important. We heard overwhelmingly from educators, students, and families during the listening tour about the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues with student mental health. While stakeholders frequently cited strong community partners who provided mental health services, they noted an inability to access the number of services to support all student needs. This challenge of securing adequate mental health services is further compounded considering CMSD has significantly fewer school counselors and social workers per 1,000 students than the state average, as illustrated by the figure on the next page.

Figure 8: Cleveland has fewer school counselors and social workers than the Ohio state average.



Moving forward, all schools need to be resourced to address the mental health challenges our students and educators face coming out of the pandemic. We will seek to expand access to mental health supports and better coordinate resources in partnership with local providers like OhioGuidestone and Families First Health Services and coalitions like the Integrated Health Initiative. We must consider both how to bolster the mental health workforce and how to provide access to Tier 1 supports for all young people. Working with the state to improve the Medicaid reimbursement policies for school-based health will be vital to the sustainability of these efforts to expand healthcare access to our young people.

To create a positive, welcoming culture for all students and staff members, it is essential to have an educator workforce that reflects the diversity of the students and communities they serve. We know that the majority of our students are Black and Latino, and research shows that there is an additional benefit to these students

when they have a teacher who shares their racial identity.¹⁰ To ensure more of our students of color have the opportunity to learn from teachers of color who look like them and share their experiences, we plan to explore and support recruitment efforts to increase teacher diversity. When all students feel safe, secure, and welcome in their school, they are best equipped to fully engage in the classroom and focus on learning.



Outcome Two

Develop a plan to ensure all students have access to a best-in-class school facility.

All students deserve to attend school in a clean, safe building. Throughout the listening tour, we heard concerns about the quality of our school buildings, and we know that it is difficult for students to feel safe and focus on learning when many attend school in buildings with broken doors, leaking plumbing, or cleanliness issues.

Educators noted that they frequently cleaned classrooms themselves due to a shortage of custodial staff, and on the 2022 Image Assessment Survey only 39 percent of respondents felt that school buildings and equipment were 'Excellent' or 'Good' at meeting today's teaching needs.¹¹ We will prioritize immediate improvements to maintenance and custodial services so that all educators and students can work and learn in a clean, well-maintained environment.

The last master plan for facilities management was created in 2019, and this has created inequities in facilities quality across the city –

we heard often from listening tour participants about the drastically different experiences for students attending aging campuses in comparison to students attending new facilities built within the last 10 years. Moving forward, we will prioritize a comprehensive facilities review and commission a report to understand the current quality of facilities and assess equitable access to a high-quality facility. We'll also embark on a master planning project that will put the city on a pathway to ensure that over the next 10 years every student in the city has access to the world-class building they deserve. By ensuring we have a master facilities plan, every community member can play a role to ensure every student has access to world class buildings while we act as wise stewards of our facilities' resources.

We know that our students can achieve great things, and we owe them a high-quality school building to learn, dream, and grow in.

Outcome Three

Strengthen learning so that all students are academically prepared for college and career.

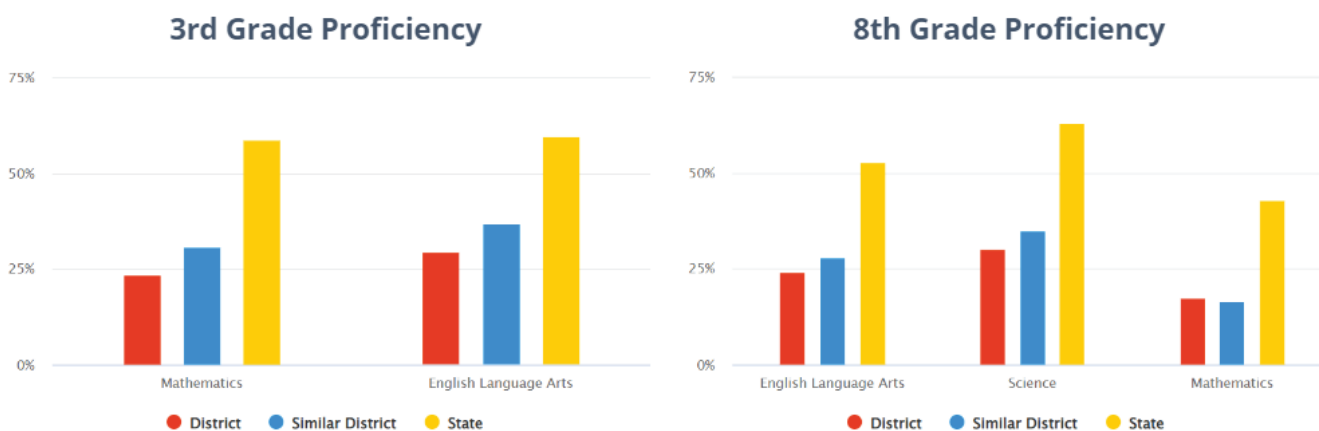
Strong academic preparation is critical to ensuring that all of Cleveland's youth can access opportunities and fulfill their potential.

Currently, Cleveland students are lagging behind their peers at the national level and across Ohio. Just 13 percent of Cleveland 4th graders are proficient in math and reading, as measured by the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)¹², and Cleveland's average scores on the 2021-22 state assessments fall below similar districts and

the state average.¹³

Community feedback also noted the struggle for many of the city's students to engage with grade-level work. Missing foundational skills in literacy and math were common concerns noted by elementary educators. Educators also mentioned the need for research-based curricula. Early reading allows students to build knowledge across a wide range of texts and subjects, ultimately increasing their educational success.¹⁴

Figure 9: Cleveland's average scores in reading and math fall below similar districts and the state average.



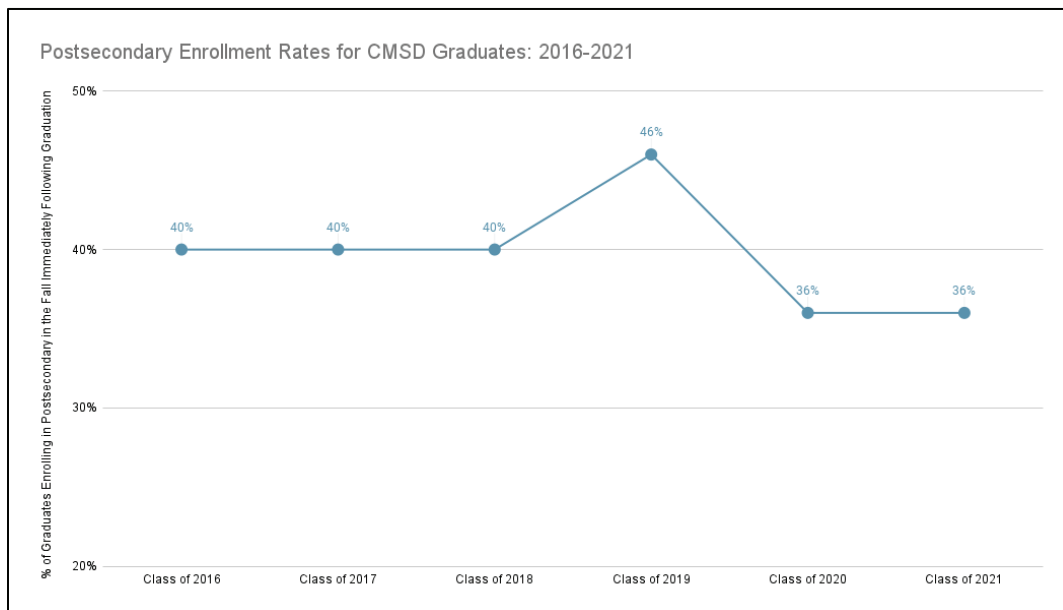
And while Cleveland has made significant progress in expanding preschool opportunities, we must devote additional attention to improving the quality of those offerings as well as providing additional literacy supports in grades K-2 to ensure that every student is on a path to reading proficiency by third grade.

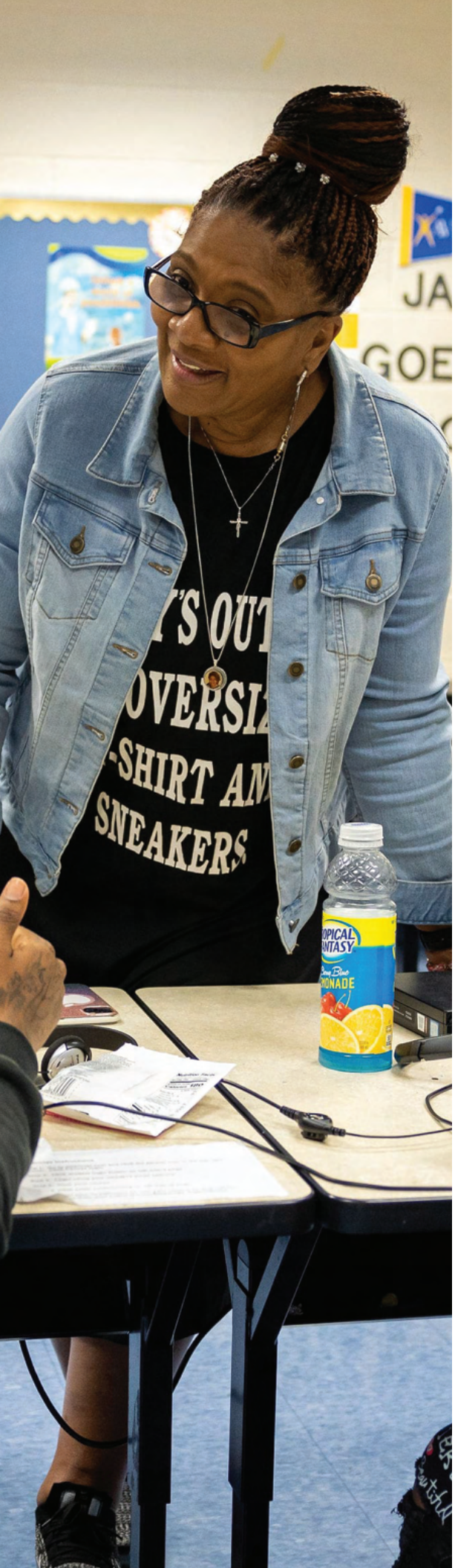
Preparing all of our students to be successful with grade level work from preschool through 12th grade requires that every student has access to a great teacher every year. We know, and research supports, that great teaching is a difference maker for students.¹⁵ We are committed to ensuring that Cleveland teachers have the best resources, curriculum, and tools. Teaching is a complex and difficult profession, and we must honor our educators by equipping them to meet the needs of all our students. To support that effort, we will seek to empower and support educators to leverage research-based methods and test

innovative approaches to learning that fully engages students in meaningful learning. We'll also partner with the Cleveland Teachers Union, Cleveland Public Library, and other community organizations to lead a city-wide literacy campaign in 2023 because we know that addressing the literacy crisis facing our youngest learners will require a full community effort.

Gaps in foundational skills in early grades persist at the secondary level and ultimately impact college enrollment and degree attainment. While more than 80 percent of CMSD students graduated from high school in 2021, just 6 percent were ready for remediation free college coursework as indicated by ACT and SAT scores.¹⁶ This is significantly below the state average of 24.8 percent. College enrollment of CMSD students is also trending downward. The figure below illustrates a 4% decrease in the percentage of students enrolling in college within 2 years.

Figure 10: The number of CMSD students who enroll in college in the fall immediately after finishing high school has decreased by 4 percent over the past 6 years.¹⁷





Of those students enrolling in college, only 10 percent ultimately graduate within 6 years. The city's economic future requires a prepared and educated workforce. We need to accelerate both college preparedness and build robust career pipelines that place students in high-wage fields with pathways to industry certifications. College completion puts students on a trajectory for their lifetime earnings to be 84% more than a student with only a high school diploma.¹⁸ Certain occupations and industry certifications in high-demand fields can also significantly outpace the earnings of high school graduates. Parents in our feedback sessions were acutely aware of these impacts and expressed a clear desire to see additional innovative, college and career-oriented programs.

High school is a time to have a laser-like focus on making sure that all of our students are ready for college and the workforce. First, we'll ensure that the curriculum and learning opportunities provided to our high school students are getting them ready for success in college. For our students that want to go into a meaningful career right out of high school, we will ensure that they have the access to the training and career pathways needed to begin a high-wage career. This includes technology offerings, such as the American Dream Academy, that empower students with the skills needed to start in-demand careers in STEM. Additionally, this effort will include continued partnership and expansion of programs like Say Yes, College Now, PACE, and the Greater Cleveland Career Consortium that provide support, advising, and resources for students as they consider college and career opportunities.

With over 50 percent of respondents on the CMSD Image Survey stating that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "People say the schools are getting better but I haven't seen any improvement," we know that we can and must work together to strengthen the quality of learning opportunities so that all of Cleveland's students are on a path to college or career.

Outcome Four

Build on what's working.

We heard from a number of families and students throughout the listening tour that a choice system is only as strong as the options within it, and every student deserves to have a high-quality option. Families indicated throughout the community listening tour that while they valued the ability to make individualized decisions about the schools their children attend, there were barriers for all students to access high-quality school options. Based on 2019 school report cards, less than 10 percent of Cleveland students attend a high-quality option (A- or B-rated public school), and more than 70 percent of students attend a D- or F-rated school.

The challenge of limited quality options is driving further inequities in the city. Black students are half as likely to attend a high-quality school as White students, with only 6 percent of Black students attending an A- or B-rated school compared with 13 percent of White students. In addition, nearly half of Cleveland's neighborhoods have majority Black residents, yet those neighborhoods contain only 14 percent of the city's high-quality schools and no A-rated schools. The following map shows the distribution of school locations and 2019 report card grades across the city.

Figure 11: The vast majority of Cleveland students attend a low-quality school.

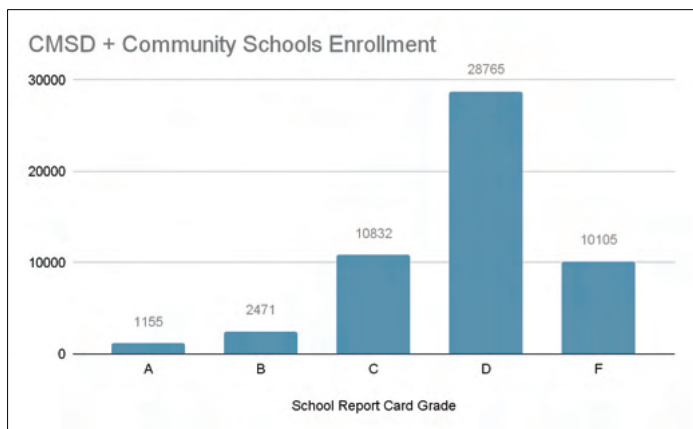
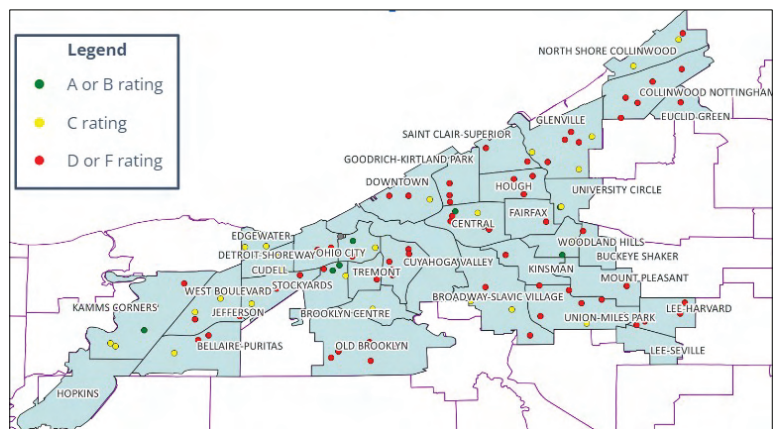


Figure 12: High-quality schools are not available in the majority of neighborhoods.¹⁹



Data from the 2021-22 school year shows similar challenges. While the Ohio State Report Card did not assign overall ratings or letter grades to schools in 2021-22, component ratings still indicate that significant work is needed to provide all Cleveland students with a high-quality school option. 80 percent of both district and community schools received a three-star rating or higher on the progress or student growth component; however, only 8 schools received a three-star rating or higher on the achievement component. This means that 94 percent of Cleveland students are attending schools that are not meeting state standards in academic achievement.²⁰

Parent responses during the feedback tour illuminated the challenges of finding high-quality school options – multiple stories were shared of students traveling across the city for hours to access a quality school. We also heard that the process of researching and enrolling in schools could be burdensome as parents tried to access and make sense of information about various school options.

As a result of these challenges, it is imperative to continue the work of the Cleveland Plan to ensure that there is a great, accessible school for every student. We must have a system that offers not just choice, but instead choices that match the needs and interests of all students. To do this, we will explore opportunities to bring innovative school models to more neighborhoods in Cleveland. We will seek to expand the reach and share the insights of our highest impact principals and classroom educators while investing in their continued growth, development and impact.

For all students to attend a school that meets their needs, we must also create a more equitable enrollment system. We will remove barriers by providing more communication to families about school options, ensuring that they know what schools are offering, what makes them unique, and

what they can provide for their student. This additional information will be coupled with a streamlined single application process that allows parents to apply and ultimately enroll in the public school of their choice. We'll also expand partnerships with organizations like the Cleveland Transformation Alliance to share data and information about school options. We know that when every student in our city gets to attend the school that best fits their needs and interests, all our schools, educators, and students will thrive. Cleveland has made tremendous progress over the last decade and accelerating this progress for our students will require both strong leadership and student-focused advocacy. We are committed to conducting a rigorous search for the next CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to identify a transformational leader who reflects the values of our community and is devoted to ensuring every child in Cleveland has access to a quality education. We will also work to ensure that the next leader of the district has the knowledge and resources needed to strategically chart a path forward for the district from the beginning of their tenure.

We also know that it will take commitment and collaboration from all Clevelanders to ensure that we make lasting improvements to our education system. We stand ready to work in partnership with champions across the city to ensure that we sustain and amplify our city's commitment to education.

“In order for Cleveland to grow as a city, we have to attract parents who believe that they can buy a home in the city and let their kids go to public school.

Parent

Outcome **Five**

Elevate parent voices to drive progress.

We know from this listening tour that when we engage parents and families, we better understand our education system's challenges and can identify solutions. Parents are acutely aware of what is working and not working in our school system, and they know best what their students need.

In the 2022 CMSD Image Assessment Survey, 64 percent of respondents in 2022 felt they were "very informed" or "somewhat informed" about schools, and 75 percent of the respondents said they felt the frequency with which their children's schools contacted them was "about right." However, we heard from parents in our feedback sessions that they do not always feel that they are contacted enough about significant school safety incidents or their child's academic progress.

Families have a desire to be engaged; however, there must be more flexible options and resources to meet parents where they are. Parents and families know their children best, and it is our goal to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge to best advocate

for them. We will seek to create opportunities to engage parents in ongoing dialogue. When we hear from families regularly, we can learn what is working, what is not working, and how we can best adjust our path forward.





This listening tour report marks the beginning of the next stage of our work as we double down on the implementation of the Cleveland Plan by investing in what is working and seeding innovation. With this initial feedback in hand and the development of our five priorities, we can begin crafting the specific city-wide strategies that will accelerate progress for all Cleveland youth.

Throughout the fall of 2022, we will collaborate with partner organizations and stakeholders across the city to create a plan with detailed strategies and aligned resources. We will also continue to partner with the community and engage in ongoing feedback efforts.

Our success in improving the educational outcomes for our students is paramount to our city's future progress, and we must approach our improvement efforts with energy and collaboration because **Cleveland's kids deserve supportive systems that help them thrive today *and* in the future.**

Where are we going next

"I will consider it a **failure of mine as Mayor**, if in the next decade, we don't **continuously** improve the quality of learning in our school system."

Mayor Justin Bibb



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