



**Dr. Eugene T.W. Sanders
Cleveland Metropolitan School District
State of the Schools Address
John Hay Campus
February 3, 2009
“The Path to Premier”**

Introduction

Good morning, and welcome to the campus of John Hay High School for this year’s State of the Schools address. I’d like to extend a special welcome to:

- Mayor Frank Jackson
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District Board Chair, Robert Heard
- Former CMSD Board of Education Presidents: Arnold Pinkney, Rev. Hilton Smith and Gerald Henley
- All District faculty members, those present and those watching on CMSD-TV-Ch22, and those watching Video On Demand,
- And the many parents, students and community leaders joining us here today.

We have titled this address “The Path to Premier”. And it seems appropriate that we would choose John Hay as the venue today, given that this tremendous campus has been recognized by the State of Ohio as an “Excellent” school.

So, before we get started with formal comments, I’d like to recognize the three principals here at John Hay,

- Erin Frew from the Small School program of the Cleveland Early College High School here on the John Hay campus,
- Tianna Maxey from the Cleveland School of Architecture & Design
- and Edward Weber, Cleveland School of Science and Medicine, as well as their leadership teams and all the faculty and staff at John Hay. This is quite a group!

I'd also ask the students and faculty members who are here from John Hay to please stand and be recognized.

Congratulations to you, and thank you for showing everyone what we can accomplish in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.



Let me say it is clear that education is a critical issue for Governor Strickland and for Mayor Jackson.

It is gratifying for all of us in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District that our mission to deliver the highest quality education to every child in our care is the same priority identified in Governor Strickland's State of the State address this past week.

Specifically, the Governor's plans resonated in several areas. These include:

- Preparing children for the 21st century. Here, our focus on innovation, STEM schools and schools of choice seems to be right in line with the Governor's thinking.
- Regarding the expansion of learning opportunities, in Cleveland we have two schools that are using a 10-week on, three-week off schedule, with built in professional development for teachers. We also use a variety of extended-day and extended-year strategies throughout the District today.
- Improving teacher quality is an obvious area of agreement. The availability of a state career ladder structure will allow us to expand the work we have already begun in fostering teacher leadership, peer assistance review and literacy and math coaching. Teacher residencies have proven successful in other states, and we are eager to use this strategy to improve teacher quality. We applaud the Governor's emphasis on scholarships to teachers who will teach in our hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subjects, so that we can continue to give our most disadvantaged students the teachers they deserve. We look forward to working with the Teach Ohio program to expand our ability to bring non-traditional educators into our workforce.
- We are at a critical point in history regarding public education in general, but even more critical in terms of urban education. Whether they be teachers, administrators, or support staff, we can only continue to employ people who hold themselves accountable for results. Regardless of how much money we receive, we must have high accountability for all staff. The citizens of our community deserve individual accountability and improved results.

- We are eager to measure ourselves against the nation and indeed internationally, knowing that our students are not just citizens of the City of Cleveland or the State of Ohio, but are truly citizens of our 21st century global community.
- In terms of funding, The Governor's plan lowers what our local taxpayers are expected to contribute to local schools, in order to fund the full range of educational services our students need.

These are all ideas that we hold dear. They are at the very core of our vision for the District, and our plan to implement that vision.

We feel that we have been ahead of the curve in many of these areas, as you will hear during the course of my remarks today.

That's why Mayor Jackson, Chairman Heard, and I welcome the opportunity for CMSD to be the first district in Ohio to embrace the Governor's reform agenda.

We believe that with these reforms, and other levels of accountability and the ability to place teachers where they are needed most, we can achieve our goal of CMSD becoming a premier school district in the USA.

I hope you enjoyed the video presentation of the 2008 school district highlights. It is always important to look back and learn from one's accomplishments; certainly the good ones, but even the things that didn't go as planned. We've introduced some impressive innovation to date, but we certainly can do better.

As the video suggested, it's been a busy year for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. But I don't want to spend the majority of my time today dwelling on where we've been. I want to talk about where we're going.

I'm proud of the passion with which we have approached our goals. Our achievements signify there were hills climbed, goals secured, and some goals within our sight. But our team is still far from satisfied with other aspects of our path to premier.

So, I'd like to begin today by sharing with you our plan to make it happen.

The Plan

There are five critical areas that form the cornerstone of our plan for the next 12-24 months. They are:

- TurnAround Schools
- Curriculum Innovation and Choice
- Safety & Security
- Technology
- Constituent Engagement

First, TurnAround Schools:

We have started with the schools in most need of help. I want all schools in the District to be inspired by the schools that are excelling, not to be dragged down by those that aren't. I want principals, teachers and students throughout the District to look up, not down, as they take stock of their progress. As long as we have failing schools, it will be a drag on the energy and innovation we need to realize our goals. We must take our successful strategies and take them to scale district-wide.

And so, we have introduced the TurnAround Schools initiative. This initiative focuses on ten of the District's lowest performing schools. These are PreK through 8 schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for 5, 6 or 7 years.

We have developed an aggressive improvement plan for each of these schools. We track their progress very closely. We monitor proficiency, attendance and school climate. We are allocating whatever resources we have available to make improvement. For example, a curriculum specialist, assistant principals, academic coaches, and parent support groups are engaged with every school.



Social workers and counselors will be assigned to the most challenging schools. And at these buildings, we'll provide focused professional development for staff, enhanced communication with parents and increased extracurricular programming.

We will not allow these schools, or the students who attend them, to fail. The

cost to the District and the community is much too high. We will turn these schools around, or we'll shut them down and reassign the administrators and staff. The time has come to increase our urgency to help those that need it most!

Ladies and Gentlemen, the speed of change in the world continues to accelerate at an unprecedented rate.

Thanks to the Internet, information moves around the world in seconds. Children have access to every book ever written, every piece of music ever composed, every scientific experiment ever conducted, every mathematical problem ever solved, all at the stroke of a computer key.

Our students hold video games in the palm of their hands that are more powerful than desktop computers were 10 years ago.

Google gets six billion hits a month and more than two trillion text messages were sent in 2008. Department of Labor data suggests that today's learners may have as many as 10-14 different jobs by age 38. And it's likely that several of those positions will take these workers outside the United States.

Gone are the days when a student graduates from high school in Cleveland, or Pittsburgh, or Detroit, showed up at a steel factory or auto plant, and signs up for a job for life.

In this new era, and in this new day, we often find ourselves trying to keep up with our young people, not the other way around. As educators, we need to acknowledge the speed at which the world is changing, and make sure we prepare our students for this brave new world.

As President Obama said in his inaugural address:

“Our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions – that time has surely passed...

For everywhere we look there is work to be done.

We will transform our schools...to meet the demands of a new age.”

We believe President Obama's words were never more relevant for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

That's why innovation in curriculum is the cornerstone of this District's reform strategy. The same old teaching methods and materials for the same old



world simply won't cut it anymore. So, we continue to stretch the definition of what a public school education should include ... right here in Cleveland.

For the last three years, we have plowed the ground and have sown the seeds of innovation and continuous improvement. Now we will water and nurture to harvest unblemished fruit for realignment, replications and expansion.

Some of this fruit includes the STEM schools – those schools specializing in science, technology, engineering and math that will equip our students with the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century global economy. We are proud that our STEM school at GE's Nela Park will be the first high school in the nation to be housed on the campus of a Fortune 500 company.

In just a few days, our students are moving into the renovated Nela Park facility to begin this unique collaboration. The relationship with GE includes mentoring from GE employee volunteers who have already spent hundreds of hours with our students exposing them to real world careers across disciplines from science, research and engineering to finance, human resources and communications.

By placing students within a corporate work setting we are teaching not only required curriculum to meet the standards of the OGT, we are modeling the type of professional behavior that will be expected of these students in the 21st century workforce. The administrators of the school are also collaborating with GE management to craft specific lesson plans that address real world issues, showing first hand how what students learn in the classroom is translated into a challenging and rewarding career.

GE is one of many outstanding partners whose generosity elevates the platform upon which we build. Others include:

- The Greater Cleveland Partnership
- Case Western Reserve University
- The Cleveland Clinic
- The Great Lakes Science Center
- Cuyahoga Community College
- Cleveland State University
- The Cleveland Foundation
- And the Gund Foundation

Among so many more.

We have nearly 300 collaborators and partners that support our educational endeavors each day.

To each and every one of you, we are grateful beyond words.

A round of applause for our partners and all army of believers members.

Other examples of the fruits of innovation we have introduced include:

- Our four single gender schools that opened in the fall of 2007 for students in grades PreK to 8. According to a survey conducted by the Cleveland Foundation, parents of students at these single gender schools report a 94% satisfaction rate with the schools.
- This past year, all of the Ginn Academy's ninth-graders were promoted to the 10th grade, and all but two of the 10th graders matriculated to the 11th grade. Not surprisingly, the Academy scored a rating of "Continuous Improvement" on its first Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card in its first year of operation.
- The Design Lab High School at Jane Adams, supported by Tri-C. This school gives students a strong foundation in creative thinking and technical skills that will enable them to solidify and grow Cleveland's position as one of the country's leading centers for industrial design.

In addition, we have obtained funding to explore the idea of a residency-based Honors Academy that will have the highest academic standards to prepare students for acceptance to the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities.

These new schools and programs are just the beginning ... and we need to give them time to grow and become successful. Our team will be closely monitoring their progress, ready to step in and assist, if needed.

These schools set a very high bar for achievement in our District. But we are holding ALL our schools to these same high standards. Every school must excel.

Remember, our reforms must be taken to scale.

Every student.

Every school.

Every neighborhood.

Every student must thrive.

Every opportunity for improvement must be seized.

We need to be more innovative in the area of teacher quality. Even in these tough financial times, we need a sustainable system that ensures long-term growth and success.

Again, ladies and gentlemen, this is a defining moment in the history of education in this Nation and in this District. We cannot put the interests of any individuals ahead of the interests and needs of our children.

Everyone must be accountable for the quality of their work. It starts at the top, with me and my team. But accountability must find its way into every school, every classroom and every home. We can settle for average, or we can strive for excellence.

We choose excellence!

Part of achieving excellence in our schools is to ensure the safety and security of every student at every school every day. If we cannot keep our students and staff safe, then everything else we do is of substantially less value.

We believe that with a combination of hardware technology and what we call “humanware”, we can continue to significantly reduce the number of serious incidents in our schools.

We have installed metal detectors in every single school, and X-ray machines in every high school and in select K-8 schools.

But it’s in the area of “humanware” that we have our greatest opportunity to enhance school safety.

To this end, we have added additional security staff, and increased the training hours of every officer. We have enhanced collaboration between CMSD and the community agencies and other groups that can help us improve the environment in and around our schools.

You should know that serious incidents were down 13% last school year with the implementation of these measures and we believe they will continue to decrease. This year to date we are showing a 23% decline in serious incidents.

As I have said before, there will be no tolerance for trouble, but we will strike a balance with concern, care and follow-through that will allow students to get the additional help, intervention and support they may need.

School safety is one area where we have made use of technology. I’d like to draw your attention to a few others.

The first of these is the District's new website. Our new site went live early this morning. Communication to our many stakeholders is key to our success, so we put a great deal of time and effort into the new site. The redesign was driven by recommendations from a cross section of the CMSD community.

Some of the highlights are:

- It is much more interactive
- It is accessible in both English and Spanish.
- I am proud the website is compliant with Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act, which requires equal access to information for disabled Americans.
- A new section called Support CMSD allows you to support the Cleveland School District either by volunteering or giving monetarily.
- And for those looking to reconnect with their alma mater there is an Alumni section.
- Future plans include giving parents access to their child's homework assignments and grades so that they will find it much easier to make learning a central activity in the home.
- And overall site navigation has been designed with the user in mind. *So, check it out...later, not now with your Palms and Blackberrys ... I still expect your full attention, class!*

I'm pleased to report our relatively small IT staff – just 15 full-time employees covering all schools – has taken technology to a new level in the District.

Video On Demand is now available in all school buildings. With the rate at which the moving image is supplanting the written word as a pedagogical tool, this is an essential development.

We in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District are committed to accelerating its deployment in order to make us more efficient, more effective and more impactful on the lives we touch.

None of this can happen without the engagement of our parents, teachers and community partners.

I am proud of our Student/Parents Organization which is represented here today.

They have more than 350 members, each of whom received training to increase their effectiveness as advocates and ambassadors. I look for that organization to quickly grow in size and influence, and we'll do everything we can to make that happen.

Our teachers must continue to be engaged at an unprecedented level. The "Mission Possible" initiative is an historic collaboration between teachers and the school district that will share best practices, facilitate mentoring, and will lead to much improved outcomes in the classroom.

We are also facilitating teacher engagement by encouraging professional development for every teacher. More than 6,000 educators attended our first-ever professional development day at the I-X Center this past November. We expect this month's building-based professional development day to be just as successful.

And, of course, we need the engagement of the corporate, civic, religious and non-profit communities in order to achieve our dreams. Times are tough for all of these organizations right now. But I know they all share our conviction that the long-term success of this community is correlated to the achievement of the young people in our public schools, and so I know I can count on their continued support.

Funding:

Our ambitious plans do not come without a price tag.

As you know, if the federal economic stimulus package is approved, CMSD is slated to receive more than \$173 million over two years. The money will be directly invested in our construction, special education and Title One.



However, we in Cleveland are looking at a more short-term financial concern, and that is the uncertainty of State funding. Depending on how the State allocates funds, we are projecting a deficit of somewhere between \$18 million and \$83 million in fiscal year 2009-10.

We can reduce that deficit by eliminating teaching and administrative positions district-wide, but that is a scenario all of us want to avoid.

So, we have put cost-saving measures into effect immediately, including:

- A hiring freeze for ALL divisions.
- A budget sweep.
- A freeze on all travel accounts and meeting expenses.
- Aggressive measures to lower utility bills and paper usage throughout the District.
- Clustering the use of buildings for evening and Saturday events by region.

Other measures we are considering include:

- Reducing the number of summer school sites, and limiting summer school to four days a week.
- Implementing a four-day, 10-hour-per-day work week from June 15th through August 3rd.

Our goal is to be fiscally responsible while minimizing the impact on the classroom experience as much as we possibly can.

We cannot compromise the education of the young people in our schools right now, just because they happen to be going through the system at one of the worst economic times in our nation's history.

The quality of their education will impact the quality of life in Cleveland, in Ohio and in America for decades to come. There is no more vital cause. There is no more pressing need and there is not a heavier responsibility.

The Vision

Most of you have heard me talk before about our vision of creating a premier school district here in Cleveland. In fact, the concept drives almost every strategic and tactical decision we make.

But it's fair to ask the question: how will we know when we have reached premier status? For sure, the State rankings will reflect significant, sustained improvement across the board. Our graduation rates, attendance records and other metrics will be on a par with the best performing districts in the nation.

But the true measure of a premier school district will be how it looks and feels to

our four most important constituencies: **our students, parents, teachers and the community at large**. Only when these four groups are in agreement that we have a premier school district will we know that we've accomplished our goal.

So, I'd like to spend some time with you imagining how a premier school district will look and feel to students, parents, teachers and the community. Let's start with the parents in a premier district.

The Parent's View:

How should a premier district look to parents and families?

As Bill Cosby once said, "In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure."

Parents must feel part of the educational process. Study after study, shows that without parent involvement, students have a significantly decreased chance of success.

Parenting in the 21st century is not easy. Think of the different challenges inherent in communicating with a 5th grader, versus a Junior in high school. Schools and parents must be on a two-way street. Parents must fully embrace the notion that learning does not stop at the sound of the school bell at the end of the day. That bell should signal the transfer of responsibility for learning from the school to the home; from the teacher to the parent.

Only when parents hold up their end of the bargain will they experience the joy of watching their child reach his or her full potential.

When children observe their parents engaged at school, they are more likely to bond with their teachers and learn more from them.

Family involvement is seen as a primary vehicle for academic improvement---it calls on every family to actively participate in their children's education.

Families should want to choose the Cleveland Metropolitan School District for their children. Not because we're the most convenient or least expensive option. But because we're the very best option available – a highly competent, radically innovative, forward-thinking team of professionals that inspires complete parent confidence. People often assume that as a leader of a public school system, I would oppose school choice. Quite the contrary. I am all for school choice. But I want parents to choose us!

However, we must be worthy of that selection. All of us must look in the mirror and ask the question, "What have I done today to make my school a school to which I would send my own child?"



Above all, parents want to know that their children will have a better life than they did. We're not only seeing change as it happens, but we're anticipating the next wave of change long before it becomes reality, and we're preparing children for what's next, not for what's last.

Let me be clear, we are not suggesting parents are working all by themselves. The Home, The School and The Community must all work together for your children. A veteran educator once told me a person will never stand taller than when they bend over to help a child.

We understand the pressure that parents feel. But we must not back down from what's right. Ladies and Gentlemen, we will not back down. We will tell it like it is and do the right thing by every student in this District.

The Teacher's View:

How will a premier school district feel to a teacher?

I don't believe that anyone gets into the teaching profession to do a bad job.

They chose to become teachers because:

they want to do good;

they want to spread knowledge;

they want to inspire kids;

they want to change lives;

they want to make the world a better place.

And today, in our District, that's exactly how most of our teachers still feel. Many of our teachers come to work early every day. They decorate classrooms, spend their evenings grading papers, and spend their summers taking classes to expand their knowledge. Many of them even dip into their own pockets to purchase items that will enhance the classroom experience for their students.

To teachers, principals, secretaries, bus drivers, custodians, counselors and administrators, and my cooks and cleaners, and my nurses and psychologists, and all other support personnel, the premier school district will be a dream come true. It will provide the environment that they need to be as great as they can be. The buildings will be up-to-date, safe and secure, and inspiring. They'll receive all the support they need to grow and develop as professionals. They will learn from the very best of their peers, as well as through sophisticated, targeted professional development opportunities.

These teachers and all District staff should be rewarded for what they do, not for how long they've done it. They will enjoy the fruits of their labor in the way that they would in other career paths. Their gifts will be acknowledged and celebrated in a way that encourages more excellence, more commitment and more joy.

They will never again wonder if they've chosen the right profession, or search the want ads to find an alternative way to make a living. Instead, by the example they set, they will draw other bright young people into this most important profession, restoring teaching to the position of prominence and nobility that it once enjoyed in our society.

These educators and leaders live, breathe and work right here in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District every day.

Now, to the small percentage of educators who do not share this commitment to greatness, our premier school district will become an unfamiliar, uncomfortable and disorienting place. They will soon realize that they will have their own version of school choice.

They can choose to re-commit to the dream, or choose to pursue another line of work.

We will actively support whichever choice they make.

The Community's View:

How will our premier school district look to the community at large?

The citizens of this region will speak about it with the same level of pride that they speak about Cleveland's other remarkable assets.

They'll tell strangers on airplanes about the Orchestra, the Rock Hall, our world-class hospitals, the Metroparks and the School System.

Economic Development Departments, recruiters and business development organizations trying to draw talented individuals and companies to Northeast Ohio will list the School System as one of the area's primary assets.

Stories written about Cleveland's renaissance will feature the turnaround of the School District as a vital instrument of change.

Foundations, corporations and individuals who have invested precious resources in our Schools will see a return on that investment that will match or exceed their expectations.

Commuters on their way to work will smile as they drive past school buildings filling up with well behaved, energized students in sharp-looking school uniforms, arriving on time to hear that morning bell.

But above all, employers will seek out our graduates for their readiness to make significant and immediate contributions to their organizations. And colleges and universities from all over the country will welcome these same graduates, impressed with their willingness to learn, their appetite for growth, their sophisticated view of the world in the 21st century, and their preparedness for the 22nd century.

Finally, let's talk about the student's view of a premier school district (*would the students please stand...I want to talk directly to you*).

The Student's View:

If we are to become a premier school district, you and your classmates must want to come to school every day. You should look forward to learning as much as you can, sure in the knowledge that what you learn before your 18th birthday will, almost without exception, determine the quality of your entire life.

Students, knowledge is power.

The power to be who you want to be.

The power to live the life you want to live.

The power to make a difference in the world.

For you, knowledge is freedom.

Freedom from the constraints of your parent's socio-economic achievements.

Freedom from the limited choices of previous generations.

Freedom to build a career and a life in any corner of America, in any corner of the world.

So the classroom must be a stimulating place, a place where you are challenged, inspired, motivated and fascinated by the acquisition of knowledge.

If Barack Obama can become President of the USA in 2009, there is nothing that is impossible!

I encourage you to dream and dream BIG!

I know school must be a safe place. And by safe I mean much more than free of

violence. That's an absolute necessity. But beyond that, school should be a place where you can feel safe expressing your doubts, struggles and weaknesses. Because only when you do that will you build the confidence, accomplishments and strength you need to succeed.

School must be a place where every one of you feels loved, cared for, welcomed, and missed when you aren't there. You must feel respected as special, unique individuals, where every single one of you can say, with complete confidence, "I can achieve my dreams."

School must be cool. It must be LeBron cool, hip-hop cool, X-Box cool, Obama cool.

It cannot seem dull relative to the other choices you can make. It should be a fusion of what you love and what you need, with the line between learning and living blurred into one line, for one purpose.

We know that young people have embraced technology at a remarkable rate. Facebook has so many users, that if it were a country, it would be the 8th largest country on earth. We know you can multi-task in unprecedented ways. It's estimated that the average teenager can manage as many as 10 instant message conversations simultaneously!



We must embrace these skills and capitalize on them as learning tools, not try to suppress them and try to enforce "learning as usual".

And if we can't do it in one leap, we owe it to these young people to at least meet them half way.

Each of you must feel proud of your school. Proud of yourself for your accomplishments, proud of your peers for their efforts and proud of adults for the example we set.

And, perhaps most important of all, students must be absolutely confident that they are in good hands. These young men and women must know that the schools we create, the unique curricula we write and the strict standards we enforce will prepare each and every one of them to graduate, proceed on to college, and be prepared to excel in this ever-shrinking world of ever-expanding opportunities.

Close

So, that's the dream. That's the vision of what our school district needs to be, can be and will be. Unfortunately, while dreaming is a necessary condition to achieving a premier school district, it is not sufficient.

Turning this vision into reality will take smart planning, unwavering commitment and meticulous execution.

But I want you to know something very important: we are not starting from scratch.

Instead, we are building on a powerful base, a base that has already produced some tremendous results.

A premier school district ought to be able to produce exceptional students. Imagine a school district that produces students ...

- Like Winchell Grant. (*PowerPoint slide is shown with student's name and accomplishments*)



- A student at Max Hayes, he's an Ohio State Young Scholar, who will attend OSU and major in Computer and Electrical Engineering. He has perfect attendance, has been on both the Honor Roll and the Merit Roll all four years. He was the captain of the tennis, soccer and track and field teams, AND he finds time to volunteer with the Special Olympics, Earth Day and Help-A-Pet Foundation.

- Imagine producing students like Scott Eubanks.



- He is the class president at South High School. He is a member of the National Honor Society, captain of the football team and previous captain of the track team. He volunteers at the Harvard Community Center and at the Enoree Missionary Baptist Church where he tutors young men who participate in the Governor's Closing the Achievement Gap Program.

- Imagine producing students like Anais Cruz.



- As a 12th grader at James F. Rhodes High School, she has already received her Pharmacy Tech Degree. She volunteers with the Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland, the Syringe Exchange Program, and has worked with soup kitchens in the area. She has maintained a 4.72 GPA on the Honors scale, and has been accepted to University of Toledo.

- Imagine producing students like Earlaina Kemp.



- She is a member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Career Campus Mock Trial Team. She is employed as a Page at the main branch of the Cleveland Public Library. Perhaps that's where she got the inspiration to make her own movie, entitled, "Manchild". She has made presentations about her movie at the National Women's Studies Conference, at a press conference hosted by the District, and at the City Club of Cleveland.

- Would the four students please stand and be recognized.
- These are just a few of the over 50,000 students who are achieving greatness in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this pivotal moment in the future of our city, state and nation, it is my honor to help lead the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I thank you for your ongoing support of our efforts. I am frequently asked the question, "*Can Cleveland really become one of the country's premier school districts?*" With your help, I will continue to respond, with confidence, "**Yes We Can**"!

Thank you.