

Dr. Eugene Sanders
“Whatever It Takes”
January 5, 2009

OPENING REMARKS

Thank you, Mayor Jackson, Chair Link, and the entire Board of Education.

Good evening everyone, and Happy New Year.

Special thanks to President Thornton, President Berkman, and Dr. Michael Casserly (from the Council of Great City Schools) for your attendance here today.

I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to the many individuals and organizations that have devoted thousands of hours of their time, their talent and expertise to bring us to this moment.

These individuals and organizations have invested their time in the humanitarian goal of providing children with the quality education they need to survive and to succeed.

That is more than a matter of principle, it is truly a matter of the heart.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE: “Whatever it Takes”

Today we commit ourselves not only to changing course, but to changing lives.

Today we do more than offer hope for children and their families.

As we present a plan for transformation of our schools, we make a bold promise that we will do **“Whatever it takes”** to ensure a bright future for every child in Cleveland.

We are entitling our transformation plan: **“Whatever It Takes”** to stress the importance of the urgency of action that needs to occur.

“Whatever It Takes” means that we can no longer accept an incremental rate of progress; instead, we must take bold, aggressive action to advance our schools.

There will be some who will want to slow the reform process and others who will attempt to derail and destroy reform.

Every single indicator we have looked at suggests that bold and aggressive action is the key to school reform in Cleveland.

We have talked on many occasions of the need to do more to ensure the academic success of children in Cleveland.

We have implemented many different changes in the tools students use and the ways that teachers teach.

We have experimented with changes in class time, changes in the length of a school day and school year and the manner and location in which we deliver our academic program.

In one innovation after another, we have seen measures of success of which we can be proud.

But we can no longer ask any students to wait for the changes to affect **them**; bold aggressive action to ensure the success of **all** students must be taken now!

As Mayor Jackson said in his inaugural address, “We must take the position not to say, “I have mine, get yours the best way you can.”

When we turned our calendars to the year 2000 ten years ago, we found ourselves **over-prepared** for Y2K, and yet **unprepared** for September 11 in 2001, the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster in 2003, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Virginia Tech tragedy in 2007.

Who among us could have predicted that the last half of the first decade of this century would include a boom in digital, mobile technology, the near collapse of the American economic system and the inauguration of an African American President of the United States?

In preparing our students for the rapidly-changing world that awaits them, it becomes more apparent with every decade that the tools students need to succeed and to survive in the 21st century are far different than those we provided to students in schools during the 1900’s and far different from the education we have provided in the last decade.

It is likely that none of us in this room envisioned the extent to which our own lives would change in just a few years with the arrival of I-pods, MP3s, digital photography, Blackberries, social media and advancements in telecommunications that now connect us to the world, its organizations and its people in unprecedented ways.

School administrators and teachers have debated for years about how to best prepare students for 21st century jobs, but what we are facing year after year is the rapidity and unpredictability of workplace and workforce changes.

Each new technological innovation demands an equal and appropriate educational innovation.

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF OUR SCHOOLS

We will do **“Whatever It Takes”** to ensure that none of our attend schools that remain in *Academic Watch* or *Academic Emergency* while other students prepare for their futures in innovative academies with flexible, performance-oriented cultures...

We will do **“Whatever it Takes”** to ensure that none of our students is learning in outdated schools that hold on to traditional 20th century models of education, while charter schools and specialty schools operate “outside the box” in established 21st century learning communities.

Every child in our city, not just those who attend the new and innovative schools, deserves to learn in a school environment that is safe, productive and inspiring.

Today, we do more than present a new “wish list” for the future of Cleveland Schools.

The 20th century policies and practices that lead 46% of our kids to the streets without high school diplomas in their hands must not simply be reformed, they must be replaced.

While we talk of **one** change in **one** school, or in **one** program area, 10 more changes are taking place in the world around us.

From top to bottom, there will be no “business as usual” in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in the days ahead.

We will do **“Whatever it Takes”** to transform our schools.

When ANY child falls behind in his or her studies and is not being supported at school or at home, we will do **“Whatever It Takes”** to provide the support needed.

When ANY child in Cleveland feels unsafe at school or on the streets he walks in his neighborhood, we will do **“Whatever It Takes”** to keep students safe.

When the instructional resources and the teaching methods in ANY of our classrooms reflect 20th century models of education, we are not doing enough.

When students report to me that they are bored in class because they only work on worksheets each day, we are not doing enough.

Today we say: “It is no longer enough to have a vision, a goal, or a mission to make every school a safe, personalized, rigorous and engaging one for our students.

Today, we move into full gear with one purpose: to turn vision into victory, to turn goals into accomplishments and to complete the mission we began when we set foot on our *Path to Premier*. We will do **“Whatever it Takes”** NOW to transform our schools.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CMSD TRANSFORMATION PLAN

Development of the CMSD Transformation Plan has been a comprehensive process involving three foundation-funded assessments of CMDS's specialty programs, turn-around strategies and facilities.

The final Transformation Plan is based not only on staff and community input, but also on objective, data-based research.

Community forums held at schools throughout the city have played a vital role in gathering input for school-by-school recommendations.

Input from a Community Advisory Committee that included parents, educators, community leaders and public officials was helpful to consultants who made the final recommendations and assisted in developing the plan.

Three external audits were conducted to take a hard look at where Cleveland's schools are today and what we must do now to address disparities in the quality of education we deliver.

The Council of Great City Schools audited our specialty programs, Education First reviewed our turnaround strategies and the Boston Consulting Group studied our use of school facilities.

We owe a significant debt of gratitude to Ronn Richard and the Cleveland Foundation and also to David Abbott and the George Gund Foundation, for funding this critical strategic development initiative.

The integrated process involved some of the nation's best consultants who conducted an objective, fact-based analysis of where Cleveland Schools are today and identified "pockets of success" on which we can build for the future of all of our schools.

Today, we act on those recommendations with a promise to do whatever it takes to realize the success they envision for our students.

GOALS OF THE CMSD TRANSFORMATION PLAN

The Transformation Plan is now, and will ultimately prove to be, less about the schools that we will close in Cleveland, and more about the doors we will open for the children who attend our schools.

Today, we pledge to them that we will do whatever it takes to provide, not just *some* of them, but *all of them* with the knowledge and skills they need now to reach their potential with the following transformation goals:

1. We will graduate all students ready to compete in the 21st Century.

2. We will provide high quality schools in every neighborhood so that all families have choices.
3. We will hold everyone accountable for success—teachers and principals, central office staff, parents and students, and community.
4. We will recruit, support and retain high-quality principals and teachers.
5. We will expand what is working today and be bold in rethinking and changing what is not working.
6. We will attract and retain students and families in Cleveland.
7. We will right-size the District by eliminating excess capacity, addressing overcrowding and ensuring effective use of resources.

By the 2014-2015 school year, the Cleveland community should expect every school in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to be rated “Continuous Improvement” or above and 50% of Cleveland’s schools to be rated “Excellent” or “Effective” on the Ohio report card.

We will do **“Whatever It Takes”** to make it happen.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE

As we “right-size” our school system, we will do **“Whatever It Takes”** to “right size” the entire district, including the central office.

The transformation plan calls for cutting the overall central office budget and we are committed to following that recommendation.

An essential part of the CMSD Transformation Plan includes transformation of the central office to create a foundation for successful and sustainable change District-wide.

A newly designed central office scorecard will define key performance indicators that will measure progress and provide opportunities to communicate success to the community.

At the Central Office level, school personnel are committed to doing **“Whatever It Takes”** to assist and support teachers and staff in the transformation of our schools.

In order for the Transformation Plan to work, it is important that the Central Office be transformed as well. The Central office administration will also be repurposed as part of the transformation.

Effective tomorrow, all at-will employees in the Central Office will be on a day-to-day contract with the CEO.

Every at-will employee will be required to interview for new positions and job descriptions that will match the transformation of the District.

There will be no guarantee of re-employment. Our goal will be to put the best people in the best positions to assure that we achieve the best academic outcomes.

Also for the 2010 school year, we will re-align the direct reports to the CEO.

We will align our administrative leadership division with our curriculum division under one umbrella of the Chief Academic Officer.

While these two units currently work together very effectively, I believe that aligning the principal leadership with curriculum leadership will better assist us in achieving our goals.

TRANSFORMATION: WHY NOW?

We must do whatever it takes to transform our schools AND WE MUST DO IT NOW!

Cleveland has a unique opportunity to capitalize on state and national initiatives that are providing unprecedented support and funding for school reform.

More than at any other time in recent history, there is gathering momentum for funding and investing in innovative school practices.

Throughout the nation, there is a call for public school leaders to address the issue of failing schools, particularly at the high school level, where many school buildings are too large, are academically deficient, or are often too violent or unsafe.

Never before, and possibly never again, has the climate been so right for the transformation of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

TRANSFORMATION COSTS

The plan includes both the savings that will result from closing buildings and the additional costs of turning around low-performing schools and investing in district reform efforts.

Given a projected \$53 million budget shortfall in 2010, savings by law will be applied first to deficit reduction.

Savings will result through operating fewer schools and reducing spending in Central Office functions.

We will also identify other cost reductions to balance our budgets.

The total cost for the first three years of the plan is \$70 million.

In the meantime, we will do whatever it takes to secure sustainable funding through multiple sources, including federal stimulus funds and school improvement grants and community partnerships.

TRANSFORMATION: ACCOUNTABILITY

Personal accountability will play a critical role in the days ahead.

The bold and humanitarian goal of ensuring success for every child in Cleveland may be considered an unattainable dream by some. But I remain encouraged by every student, every teacher and every school leader whose personal commitment to excellence is already making a difference in our schools.

THE ROLE OF CHARTER SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN TRANSFORMATION

As part of our Transformation Plan, the District will actively engage with successful charter schools both here in Cleveland and throughout the nation.

We will take the following immediate steps regarding our partnerships with charter schools.

When the Transformation Plan is approved by the BOE, we will actively seek charter school partners for two immediate opportunities:

1. To offer one of our existing schools for charter to join us as a school within one of our existing schools. We refer to this as the “blended model.”
2. We also will offer vacated school buildings to charter schools for their operation and management.

As we move forward, we also plan to offer through the RFP process an opportunity for national charter organizations to manage low performing schools in the District.

Real change—transformation change—the kind of change that means life or death for many of Cleveland’s children—will require a shared commitment by everyone in our organization to increased accountability, to increased choice and competition and a commitment to honest and meaningful self-assessment as we turn our schools into the 21st Century learning centers they must become for our students.

We will do **“Whatever it Takes”** to make it happen.

THE CMSD TRANSFORMATION PLAN: THE DAYS AHEAD

Success will take all of us—educators, families, students, and the Cleveland community—working together for change in our schools.

In the coming months, I will push the school community to raise its expectations for our students.

It is my hope that you will join me in doing whatever it takes to transform our schools.

Today, we begin the extraordinary process of transforming our school district into the crown jewel it has the potential to become in the City of Cleveland.

Tomorrow we begin the hard work ahead of us as we move the Transformation Plan into full gear.

Change is essential.

Decades of inaction and of slow and ineffective reforms have consistently produced students unready for the rigors of the modern workplace.

Our students' lack of preparedness is unacceptable, our graduation rate, and the current school system is not working for all students—It is a relic of a time when high school graduates with basic skills could live prosperous lives and find work in the steel and auto factories that formed the backbone of our country.

The first order of business is sharing the Transformation Plan with the community and with our schools.

Tomorrow morning, our central office staff will be located at each of our buildings to answer questions and listen to concerns.

For the following two weeks, we will be holding community meetings in each of our ten academic neighborhoods.

The schedule is on our website and has been sent out to parents and community members.

We urge everyone to join us in these meetings to discuss the plan and how it will impact your community.

CREATING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS DISTRICT-WIDE

The key ingredients of an effective school are well known and documented. Cleveland, like all other cities throughout the nation, has examples of successful K-8 schools and high schools, and we have schools that are doing much better than other urban schools in the state and nation.

We have learned through our own successful innovative practices that students learn best in small, safe and personalized schools.

Students learn better when staff members and school leaders have high expectations for them and provide a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum that incorporates technology and critical thinking skills.

We know that family involvement in a student's education is one of the most important ingredients for student success.

At its core, the CMSD transformation includes a school-by-school plan to improve academic performance in every one of these critical areas.

We have therefore divided the schools into four main categories of transformation:

Growth - Refocus - Repurpose - Close

- **Growth schools** are schools that are showing the strongest absolute academic performance or strong improvement trends. These schools will be provided the autonomy and support they need to continue to improve student outcomes, with a strong expectation for continued growth.
In this category, we currently have sixteen K-8 and nine high schools identified as Growth Schools.
- **Refocus schools** are schools that, with increased support, can become Effective and Excellent-rated schools. These schools will be provided supports based on specific needs. Example supports may include new and reinvigorated academic programs and additional principal and teacher training. Supports will be matched to schools in the planning period leading up to the 2010-11 school year. Some high schools in this category will, over time, open new academies in existing buildings to provide additional high quality academic options for students.
In this category, 17 K-8 and six high schools have been identified as Refocus Schools.
- **Repurpose schools** are schools where the most significant change will occur, with a goal to dramatically improve academic performance. Three options will be considered for these schools (and will be deployed either separately or in combination):
 1. Replace school leadership
 2. Require teachers to reapply to the school
 3. Consider conversion to charter school status

At the high school level, repurposed schools will transition from comprehensive high schools into two-to-four proven academy models over time.

Instructional support will also be provided to these schools as we work through structural and staff changes.

Repurposed high schools will also begin with a strong 9th grade support system for students.

Decisions regarding which strategies and which academic programs will be supported at each school (K8 and HS) will be determined during the planning period in the first half of 2010.

In this category, 12 K8 and seven high schools fall have been identified as Repurpose Schools.

- **Closed schools** are the lowest-scoring schools, based on CMSD's four objective decision criteria:
 - (1) academics, (2) building condition, (3) facility demand, and (4) performance drivers). Students in these buildings will be reassigned to neighboring schools.
- In this category, 11 K8 and two high schools have been identified as Closed Schools.

In addition to our four categories for schools, successful programs, in a few cases, will relocate to better utilize space and better serve students.

School staff and student population in those cases will remain together and move to a new location in 2010.

Through these relocations, CMSD will close another five facilities, bringing the total number of building closures to 18 in this transformation.

Finally, we will continue to support and to monitor 24 K8 schools that will be reviewed again, leading up to the 2011-12 school year when they will be placed into one of three categories—Growth, Refocus, or Repurpose.

WHY SHOULD YOU BELIEVE ME NOW ABOUT TRANSFORMATION

One of the first questions I am sure will be asked by both the media and the community is “why should you believe me about transformation?”

Especially in light of previous announcements about reform and change.

Here is why this transformation will be successful:

1. The establishment of a Transformation Management Office with full time dedicated staff to oversee the entire transformation process.
2. A monthly community report that will let the community observe the process as it unfolds. We commit to unprecedented transparency in the transformation process.
3. Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for federal funds to promote transformation and reform.

4. Community is demanding reform, choice, and accountability unlike any time in history.
5. the economic and sustainability of our city and region is at stake. This is why we have selected the transformation theme of **“Whatever It Takes.”**
Change is never easy for anyone, but in a rapidly-changing world, it is essential for everyone.

CONCLUSION

This Academic Transformation Plan is the most ambitious school improvement plan in the recent history of Cleveland, and we believe it will prove to be among the most significant improvement plans for an urban district of our size.

I appreciate the support of the Mayor and the Board as we embark on this important mission.

While the days ahead will appear challenging for some, it is truly an exciting time for all of us in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and a promising one for the children of Cleveland.

While it may seem easier to hold on to what we have for fear of what will be, the world beyond us will continue to change.

Public schools, more than any other modern organization, have long been viewed by the public as being resistant to change. But there is in fact so much change occurring in schools, leading school reformers say teachers and school administrators are overwhelmed by it.

But what’s missing in our ever-changing public schools is what is at the heart of this Transformation Plan—*accountability*.

School change doesn’t mean anything to a child, to his parents, to his teachers, to his school or his community, unless it is accompanied by clear improvements in student performance.

Our schools will forever see their share of change, but let’s not be what many districts find themselves to be-- “change inept.”

It’s one thing to change our direction; it’s quite another to change ourselves.

From top to bottom, today we pledge to change the way we operate in Cleveland Schools and most of all, we commit ourselves to having something extraordinary to show for it—the success of each and every child.

“Whatever it takes!”