

**An open letter to the
Cleveland community**

The time to transform Cleveland's schools is *now*.

As leaders of Cleveland's major businesses, we are proud to support the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Academic Transformation Plan.

For too long, Cleveland's public schools have been failing – most importantly, failing our city's children by inadequately preparing them to succeed, which in turn hurts all of us.

Sadly, three-quarters of CMSD schools have earned one of the two lowest ratings – academic emergency or academic watch – on the state's "report card," with the low test scores and graduation rates that highlight student failure.

What's more, because enrollment has declined much faster over the past decade than the number of schools or employees, the district faces a steadily rising deficit of more than \$50 million for the 2010-2011 school year – a shortfall that is prohibited by Ohio law.

Clearly, the cost-reduction elements of the transformation plan are an absolute necessity, and we encourage all parties to be creative and willing to compromise in order to achieve them. But that is just the beginning.

Even more important is understanding how to make the remaining schools work better, and the transformation plan does that. The success of several innovative CMSD school models provides evidence that flexibility is important and accountability is essential. All professionals in the system must be held accountable for their performance and cannot be allowed to impede the major changes needed to improve student success.

The plan is built around "right-sizing" the district and growing, refocusing and repurposing schools to ensure quality education in every neighborhood. It includes creating "choice" programs throughout the city to serve diverse learning needs, establishing relevant career- and college-ready options at the high school level, selectively partnering with charter schools, better balancing merit and seniority when staffing schools, and much more.

We know that change will not be easy. But we support CEO Eugene Sanders' transformation efforts and hope that everyone with a stake in quality education – that is, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, elected officials and the entire community – will work together toward the plan's success.

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