CLEVELAND'S PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

reinventing public education in our city and serving as a model of innovation for the state of Ohio

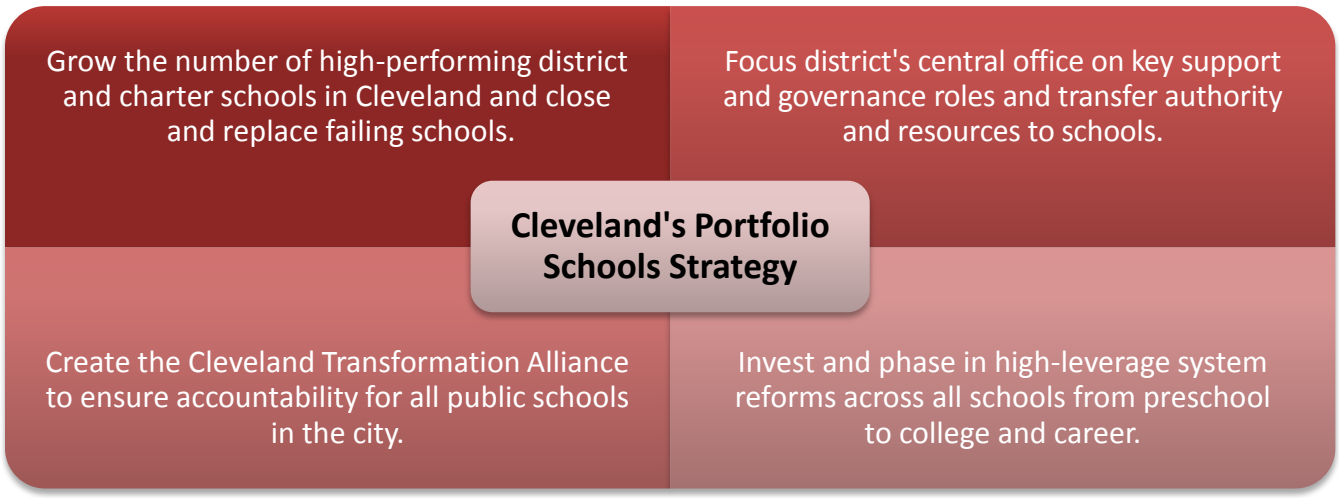
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this plan is to ensure that every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school and that every neighborhood has a multitude of great schools from which families can choose. To reach this goal, Cleveland must transition from a traditional, single-source school district to a new system of district and charter schools that are held to the highest standards and work in partnership to create dramatic student achievement gains for every child. The plan is built upon growing the number of excellent schools in Cleveland, regardless of provider, and giving these schools autonomy over staff and budgets in exchange for high accountability for performance. It aims to create an environment that empowers and values principals and teachers as professionals and makes certain that our students are held to the highest expectations.

This plan is driven by a fierce sense of urgency. The intensity of global competition demands that students in Cleveland build the knowledge, skills and attributes that position them to be successful and competitive in the 21st century global economy. The future must include many different kinds of schools that give children and their parents choices from an array of innovative options. Fundamentally, schools in Cleveland must break the one-size-fits-all premise of today's education system.

This plan recognizes that public education in Cleveland is at a crossroads. Recent reform efforts undertaken by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) and its partners have generated positive results for some students. The number of high performing district and charter schools in Cleveland has grown from 14 in 2006 to 37 in 2011, enrolling more than 11,400 students. And the district now offers a more diverse set of options for students and families than ever before, including 13 new schools opened since 2006. However, the pace of change is not fast enough, nor deep enough to overcome the challenges facing the district. We have no other option but to reinvent our school system, as unacceptable academic performance, declining enrollment and an untenable financial situation threaten the very existence of public education in the city.

Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools is grounded in an emerging national approach known as the "portfolio strategy," which is showing promising results in cities such as Baltimore, Denver and New York. It has four major components:



Grow the number of high-performing district and charter schools in Cleveland

The principal focus of this work is to significantly increase the number of high-performing schools while reducing and eventually eliminating low-performing schools. To do this, the district will employ four distinct strategies. (1) *Promote, expand, and replicate existing high-performing district and charter schools.* Great schools, measured by a consistent standard of quality, will have full autonomy over school budgets, staff selection and assignment, academic and student support programs, school calendar and school schedules in exchange for high accountability standards and access to financial and other resources. (2) *Start new schools.* Cleveland will attract the best national education models to our city, invent our own schools that are unique to Cleveland and encourage local community partners and Cleveland teachers to co-create new and innovative school models. (3) *Refocus and strengthen mid-performing schools.* For those schools that meet minimum state standards and have some critical academic and social conditions in place, the district will employ precise, customized and differentiated interventions and investments and grant some levels of autonomy. (4) *Repurpose and address low-performing schools.* The lowest performing schools will be targeted for immediate and dramatic action, including closure and reassignment of students to better schools, closure and start-up of a new school, phase in of a new program and phase out of the old, or turning the school over to a capable charter operator.

Focus district's central office on key roles and transfer authority and resources to schools

Organizational roles and relationships will change in three fundamental ways. The primary roles of central office will be to oversee the portfolio of schools to ensure continuous improvement, provide system coordination for essential functions (enrollment, data systems, etc.) and provide some targeted services directly to schools. Secondly, schools will be given varying levels of autonomy based on their level of performance and will be accountable for delivering an excellent education. All schools will have to abide by certain state and federal requirements, such as state testing and serving students with disabilities and English language learners, among others. Finally, the district will shift to a weighted per-pupil funding system for all schools and transfer a majority of spending control to schools based on the number and needs of the students they enroll. This will include the transfer of some locally generated tax revenues to high-performing charter schools that are sponsored by or have agreements with the district.

Invest and phase in high-leverage system reforms across all schools

Beyond the investments in this new, performance-based system of schools, Cleveland will invest in several fundamental building blocks upon which this plan must be built: high quality preschool education, college and workforce readiness, year-round calendar, talent recruitment and capacity building, academic technology enhancement, and support for high-quality charter schools.

Create the Cleveland Transformation Alliance to ensure accountability for all public schools

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance, a public-private partnership with representatives from the district, the charter sector and the community, will be charged with ensuring the growth of the portfolio of high-performing district and charter schools in Cleveland. It will assume the following unique roles: ensure fidelity to the citywide education plan, assess the quality of all Cleveland schools, communicate to parents about quality school choices and serve as a watchdog for charter sector growth in Cleveland.

Cleveland's plan requires the right policy conditions, including necessary changes in state policy, a fresh start in labor-management agreements and relationships, and a financial sustainability plan. The long-term survival of the district is dependent upon the interwoven elements outlined in this plan.