

2021 State of the Akron Public Schools

Thank you all and welcome to my 2021 State of the Akron Public Schools address. It's good to be here with you today. This year's speech is my last State of the Akron Public Schools Address as superintendent, a role that I have served in since 2008. So today I want to focus on what has changed over the last 13 years, and provide a few updates on our schools.

When COVID struck, we adopted a temporary brand. Although we have always been Adaptive, Responsive and Supportive, never more has that applied than it has in the past calendar year. To underscore the many ways we have been Adaptive, Responsive and Supportive I want to call your attention to the flipbook that summarizes our approach this past year as we faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of you have been sent a link to view these materials. They will also be on our website after my speech. Also, Bruce Wings from the Akron Press Club will collect your questions and will present them when I'm done. And thanks again to the Akron Press Club for sponsoring this event.

The email address for those of our viewers wanting to ask questions is:

pressclub2021@gmail.com

I would like to acknowledge our Akron School Board members:

Dr. N. J. Akbar, President

Dr. Derrick Hall, Vice-President

Bruce Alexander

Diana Autry

Patrick Bravo

Lisa Mansfield, and

Valerie McKittrick.

Our Student Board Members:

Kyrice Brunson, East CLC

Madison Dies, Firestone CLC

Chandler Forshee, Kenmore-Garfield HS

D'Essence Jackson, Buchtel CLC

Abbigail Kerns, Ellet CLC

Mikayla Perryman, North HS

Salam Said, AECHS

Sha'Heen Williams, NIHF STEM HS

Thank you for your leadership.

Wow, what a difference a year makes. In my wildest dreams I never envisioned making this speech virtually. I know we have all grown tired of the isolation and the lack of in-person interaction with our peers. But thank you all for joining us. I'm told we have more than 500 watching online. And look, some of you didn't have to get dressed up and drive somewhere in the cold!

It is amazing how nearly 30 years can go by in a flash. I have this box of Kleenex here in case I am driven to tears by the hundreds of happy, sad, funny, and so many other memories of our time together.

So first, why choose to retire? Ok, this is my attempt at humor for those of you who don't know that side of me. No, I have not found a way to embezzle several million dollars to buy a tropical escape. With the State Auditor's Office looking at our books each year, I wouldn't get too far with that one. Nor none of the things that seem to drive people away, poor relationships, constant negative headlines in the paper, or embarrassing social media posts. The reality is, I made a promise to myself years ago, that I would try to lead with integrity and respect and not overstay my welcome.

That, to me, is a very important aspect of leadership, you have to plan for, and know when to exit. No leader can be everything an organization needs. Because over time, the organization changes and so does the leader. And with reflection, a leader will know when it is time to go, to turn over the role to another, so the organization can grow and achieve higher levels of performance. You see it's not about

the individual, it is about the collective. All of the people who make up the Akron Public Schools, including all of you deserve the right leader for the right time. Back in 2008, maybe that was me, I venture to say that the jury is still out, because legacies are formed long after a leader exits. Why? Because leaders, during their tenure, start many things but actually complete few. The foundation may be laid, but the house has yet to be completed.

In early fall, I was sitting in my office actually reviewing some past speeches of mine and realized the connection to the idea of planting seeds. And I could not get that idea out of my head. In fact we have planted many seeds over the years. Anyone who gardens will know that sometimes seeds flourish and grow into plants that bear fruit, and other times we are not so lucky. So the work in our collective garden, so to speak, has always been about improving our community and providing opportunities for our children to learn, grow, and to become

And I'll call this part, "little did I know."

Little did I know that in 2010 that first cohort of students in our Project Lead the Way Bioscience class at North High School, would help form the foundation of our vision for the College and Career Academies of Akron. You see, using a career themed lens to teach students is part of what our partnership with Ford Next Generation Learning is all about.

Speaking of Ford NGL, it was a news article that popped up on my computer that outlined the work going on in Metropolitan Nashville Schools that led me to the academy model in the first place. Just think, what if I would have bypassed that article?

Little did I know that way back in 2002, when I met the likes of the late Tony Gorant, Len Smith, Lou Ciraldo, Brad Schroeder and others on our Business Advisory Council, that these relationships would help me understand the needs of our local businesses and provide the foundation for all of our outstanding business partnerships within the Akron Public Schools.

Little did I know that our agreement with the Akron Education Association back in 2010 to sign the memorandum of understanding to participate in the federal Race to the Top grant program, would

prepare APS for so many other transformational changes in our schools in partnership with our excellent teachers.

Little did I know what started out as a (I'll just use the word lively here) discussion between former Mayor Don Plusquellic and me in front of my bosses, Dr. Sylvester Small and Donna Loomis at the time, would turn into a fruitful relationship to rebuild our schools as community learning centers.

And on August 1st of 2008, I stood in my office at 70 North Broadway and called my mom and dad and asked, what did I get myself into? It was all so overwhelming being named the 22nd superintendent of our schools.

Little did I know how my relationships with many of you across this community would enrich my life so much.

During my tenure there have been many ups and downs, opening new schools, closing schools and facing upset students, parents and staff that their beloved buildings had to close. The heart breaking stories as well. Attending the memorial service at East High School for Marine Corporal Derek A. Wyatt who lost his life in 2010 while serving our country in Afghanistan. To the many services over the years to mourn the loss of our students, staff, and family members. And, the loss of community leaders like Phil Maynard, Duane Isham and others who have had a major impact on our community. The death of N'Kia Crawford and other young people due to senseless acts of violence; they all weigh heavily on our hearts.

And of course the happy times, the annual May Festival, our annual science fair where our students get to show off their scientific knowledge, Bands in the Round, and the hundreds of other ways for students to showcase their talents are a wonderful testament to them and their teachers. Speaking of teachers, our annual Teacher of the Year Banquet has been a highlight of every year honoring our dedicated educators. In fact, I want to mention our Teacher of the Year, Maggie Oliver from Helen Arnold CLC. We had a tremendous audience last spring for our first ever virtual Teacher of the Year celebration. And Maggie, please know how much we wished it could have been done another way with more of a celebration, but we know you understand. You're a wonderful teacher who inspires children and other educators. Thank you and congratulations.

My fondest memories are those in which our seniors cross the stage at graduation. After all, our most important work is ensuring that our students are prepared for what comes next. So looking to the future, I want to reflect on what I believe are the needs of our children in terms of their learning in the days and years ahead.

When many of us went to school, we had to memorize facts and figures. I remember sitting in Mrs. Hunter's class in 4th grade at Mount Pleasant Elementary School in Cleveland trying to memorize my times tables. Being able to recognize states on the map, memorizing state capitals, or the formula for the quadratic equation in 8th grade Algebra class. Yes, so much had to be crammed into our brains. Today however, and more importantly tomorrow, I believe our students need to be equipped to know how to solve complex problems that cross disciplines. All of the core subject areas remain important, but the amount of information today is staggering. In just the last 10 years, we have probably learned more about the universe than all of previous recorded history. I am not saying that memorizing facts and figures is not important. What I am saying is that what you do with that information is most important. The connections we make, the inferences we gain from analyzing data, and finding solutions to our complex problems is what students need to know how to do. Today, and more importantly tomorrow, regurgitating facts and figures is not what is needed, creating new knowledge is.

Over the last four years we have implemented our College and Career Academies of Akron transformation. As the only school district in the State of Ohio achieving designation as a Ford Next Generation Learning Community, we have brought together nearly 360 business and community partners to help prepare our students for what comes next after graduation.

With the support of Ford Next Generation Learning, the United Way of Summit County, the GAR Foundation, ConXus NEO, the Greater Akron Chamber, Summit Education Initiative, and our business partners, we are in the midst of a transformational change in our community. Our students now have the opportunity to get exposure to the various career fields our local employers have to offer, and will have a better chance to enlist in the military, enroll in college, or gain employment.

On December 9th, we celebrated the addition of Goodyear as a named academy partner for Ellet CLC and the National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School. I would like to thank Goodyear CEO Rich Kramer, and the entire Goodyear staff for your commitment and partnership. Welcome to our College and Career Academies of Akron family.

We now have 12 named academy partnerships:

Buchtel CLC - we have the Summa Health Academy of Leadership and Innovation and the Huntington Academy of Global Industry and Design.

East CLC - the Bridgestone Academy of Applied Engineering and Technology and the Key Bank Academy of Business and Health Services.

Ellet CLC - the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Academy of Global Marketing and Media and the Goodyear Academy of Applied Engineering.

Firestone CLC - three Kent State University academies; the Academy of Advanced Technology and Engineering, the Academy of Design and the Academy of Performing Arts.

At Kenmore-Garfield - the First Energy Academy of Emerging Technology and Design.

At North High School - the Akron Children's Hospital Academy of Health and Human Services.

National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School - the Goodyear Academy of Advanced Technology and Design.

And we are currently looking for three additional named academy partners at the following academies:

At Ellet - the Academy of Community Health and Safety, which includes the pathways of animal studies, criminal justice and fire safety.

At Kenmore-Garfield - the Academy of Innovation and Industry. The career pathways in this academy include construction and building technology, culinary arts, and nursing/patient care.

At North High School - the Academy of Global Technology and Business. This academy includes the pathways of entrepreneurship and marketing, HVAC technology, IT support services, and programming/software development.

For more information on being a named academy partner, go to our website at ccaa.akronschools.com. You will also find our Academies latest Annual Report posted there.

Our academy partnerships also include our post-secondary institutions to help meet our goal of increasing the number of students who are ready to enroll in college before they graduate from high school.

In addition to Kent State University which is a named academy partner for the career academies at Firestone CLC, we have added “sister” university and “sister” college partnerships as well.

The University of Akron is the Sister University for Ellet CLC and the National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School. Stark State College is the Sister College of Kenmore-Garfield High School, and the University of Mount Union is the Sister University of North High School. As I stated last year, the goal here is to improve college preparation so more students can succeed at the post-secondary level.

With nearly 60 career pathways within our high schools, along with these robust partnerships, there is no good excuse for our students not to take advantage of this opportunity. And, in an effort to better prepare our middle school students for their high school experience, our Board of Education approved our middle school college and career academy master plan in December.

Over the last year, a steering committee met and developed this master plan. We want you to know, we’re not just replicating the high school model. Middle school academies are their own, unique creation. We have designed them keeping focus on what middle schoolers will have ahead of them in high school. So they must be different.

In middle school, academy learning will promote a positive school climate, integrate social-emotional learning and shift instruction to an inquiry-based model. Simply put, students and teachers will work in small learning communities.

They will solve real world problems that are driven by community issues and by students’ own personal interests. We call this thematic learning. They will also be exploring careers...getting an earlier start than ever in APS.

And---different from the high school academies-- in middle school we will rely heavily on nonprofit and philanthropic organizations to provide career exploration and service learning opportunities.

Students will also develop individual plans including the opportunity to take higher level classes and earn high school credit while in middle school. All of this will help our students to become better learners, classmates and community members, prepared to enter the high school academies. I can't imagine where Akron Public Schools would be without the work that is being done by our non-profit partners.

Our key partners who were instrumental in launching our high school academies will continue to be instrumental with our middle school transformation as well. Today we want to acknowledge our new partners specifically for our middle schools.

Akron Community Foundation (ACF): The Akron Community Foundation is where generous families, individuals, companies, and nonprofits make charitable dollars go the furthest for the permanent good of our community. ACF served as the Convener for all of the master planning sessions. Additionally, ACF provided funding for the launch of the middle school transformation, including funding and housing a full-time staff person to coordinate the middle school partnerships.

Martha Holden Jennings Foundation: For more than 60 years, the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation has awarded grants to Ohio's schools for a wide variety of projects and initiatives that foster DEEP LEARNING and EXCELLENT TEACHING. The foundation has been the primary funder of the exploration, planning and launch of the middle school transformation.

I would like to thank John Petures and the Akron Community Foundation, along with Dr. Dan Keenan and the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation for their support of our expansion of College and Career Academies of Akron to our middle schools. I also want to send out a very special thank you to the GAR Foundation.

From our STEM Programs to the College and Career Academies, and many more, Christine Mayer and Kirstin Toth have been our thought partners throughout this journey. I can honestly say, without the support of the GAR Foundation none of these programs would be possible. Thank you for

standing by us from day one. It should also be noted, that we have two new financial partners supporting us in our college and career academy work. The Hewlett Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

The United Way of Summit and Medina has been awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. These funds will go to Akron Public Schools to build and sustain comprehensive wellness and learning opportunities for students through the College & Career Academies of Akron.

This grant will support educators as they transform teaching and learning practices to ensure students are both college and career ready. In addition, the grant will also support the development and expansion of College & Career Academies into our elementary schools.

This will jump-start a master planning process to create systems and structures needed to strategically plan and build the infrastructure required to implement and sustain the vision of making our College and Career Academies of Akron, a K-12 transformation. It will propel us to a place that will fulfill our goal of creating a K-12 experience that will be a foundational change for our district. We also have been awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the Hewlett Foundation.

This grant will support our strategies to improve student engagement, and enlist parent and community support for student learning by sharing information and involving them in key decisions about schooling. It will also support our educators as they adapt to these unprecedented circumstances. United Way of Summit & Medina will act as fiscal agent for both grants. But let's not stop there.

This year we also successfully added Portage Path CLC to our International Baccalaureate Program family in the Firestone Cluster. With the addition of Portage Path CLC, all Firestone Cluster schools are now part of the IB family. And yes, I think we should expand our IB programming to other schools as well, so stay tuned. And speaking of expanding, I am really speechless regarding the work of LeBron James and the LeBron James Family Foundation.

So it wasn't enough to transition the Wheels for Education Program to the I Promise Program, then adding the I Promise Scholarship, then the I Promise Institute in collaboration with the University of Akron, and then to the creation of the I Promise School. From there to the I Promise Village, a place where families can have a stable housing environment to get on their feet. The latest addition is House

Three Thirty located at The Tangier which is being converted into a multifunction community resource space. All I can say is wow! When you look at the West Hill neighborhood, it is being transformed. And that transformation does not end there.

Through the I Promise Huddle, leaders from across the country are learning from our experience here in Akron through an annual program to spread the word and explore promising practices and share experiences on how the We Are Family philosophy can help change our communities for the better. For me, to witness this transformation and the effect it is having on our students and community is utterly amazing. Kudos to LeBron James and Michele Campbell for their inspiration. You see, by bringing great people to the table, we can also drive change across our community.

With that being said, I am so proud of our partnership with United Way of Summit and Medina and their vision for a community where all individuals and families achieve their human potential through education, financial stability and healthy lives.

In 2017 United Way also established its four Bold Goals 2025. In support of education under Bold Goal 1, by 2025 65% of APS third-graders will be reading at or above grade level. And for Bold Goal 2, by 2025 90% of APS high-schoolers will graduate in 4 years, with 60% being college/career ready. In addition, United Way is focused on supporting a variety of financial services within the community. These include the Financial Empowerment Center, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, Bridges Summit County, and Bank On Rubber City. The Family Resource Centers operated at our Helen Arnold and Robinson CLCs are locations where people in the surrounding neighborhoods can come and get the resources they need to get by during this difficult time. For our families, services provided include health and social services, academic enrichment and more, so that our students can succeed. United Way is also expanding the footprint, and will open another Family Resource Center at McEbright CLC. To Jim Mullen and the entire United Way Summit and Medina Board, thank you for all you do, not just for Akron Public Schools, but for our entire community. As I stated before, the pandemic has forced many of us to do things a little differently this year.

And some of us never miss a beat. I am always impressed with the work of Project GRAD Akron and Executive Director Jackie Silas-Butler. In October the Annual Achieving Dreams event was virtual, and Jackie figured out how to get the Knight Center to cater the food and have it packed so that patrons only had to drive up, pick it up, take it home and reheat it. Then, to outdo everyone else, Stacey Abrams was the keynote speaker, and those who attended, received a copy of her book. All I can say is congratulations on a job well done.

Then in December, our conference room on the 5th floor at the Sylvester Small Administration Building was filled with non-perishable food items. To me it looked like the Akron-Canton Foodbank, which by the way under the leadership of Dan Flowers, has done an outstanding job of providing much needed food to the Akron Community. At any rate, Jackie and Project GRAD Akron provided care packages to the college students who are in the scholarship program to help them get by during winter break. How thoughtful. I am still upset that my grilled leg of lamb gyros didn't win the top prize in the 2011 Cooking for a Cause Project GRAD fundraiser, losing out to sauerkraut balls. Even my daughter Jennifer, who was my assistant, protested that it was so unfair! But all is forgiven Jackie, and I promise not to move your office again before I retire.

Our partners who are focused on student achievement, have relied upon Summit Education Initiative research and predictive analytics to establish metrics that we all follow to ensure students are on track for success.

Because of the hard work of Matt Devers and SEI, we know that by the end of the freshman year in high school, students who earn 6.5 credits, obtain a 3.0 GPA or higher, and miss fewer than 8 days of school are more likely to graduate from high school, college and career ready.

We have seen the percentage of freshmen students who have earned 6.5 credits increase from 41% in 2018 to 64% in 2020. The percentage of high school freshmen with 3.0 grade point average or higher rose from 26.1% in 2018 to 29.1% in 2020, and the percentage of students missing eight days or less from school stands at 55%. In addition, out of school suspensions have decreased by 12.3% this past year, and our in-school suspensions decreased by 38.1% among our high school freshmen.

Based on data from our most recent state report card, from 2019 to 2020 our four year graduation rate has increased from 79.8% to 80.2%. And for students enrolled in our career and technical pathway programs, their 4-year graduation rate increased from 94.6% in 2019 to 97.8% in 2020.

Last year I reported that our students earned 1,451 industry credentials before leaving high school 2019. In 2020 this number dropped to 1,239, and please remember that in March of last year we switched to virtual learning. Remember, in 2018 the number of credentials earned was under 100.

In the 2018-19 school year our students earned 7,764 college credits while still in high school. This past year that number increased to 9,297 credits earned.

Last year I also reported on our partnership with the Cleveland Browns Foundation on the Stay in the Game attendance initiative. As a reminder, the goal of this program is to raise awareness among our students, their families and the entire community about the value of getting to and staying in school.

In October the Arby's Foundation provided a grant in the amount of \$100,000 to support this effort. The presentation was made during a virtual event attended by APS students and Cleveland Browns players who discussed how important it is to get to and stay in school. In 2018-19, our attendance rate for APS was 92.3%, and in 2019-20 that rate increased to 93.4%.

The partnerships I have mentioned are just a few examples of how this community has come together to support our schools. Though we have a history of partnering with outside organizations, today is a far cry from 2008. And there are just too many among you to name who have stepped up to the plate to help our students. To everyone that I have met with, collaborated with, and even argued with, I say thank you. Because through those discussions we have indeed made progress, and I believe the district poses a great opportunity for its next leader.

Now, in every career there are regrets. Things that were not on the radar, and things that could not be accomplished. The main thing that I regret is not being able to get funding from the State of Ohio to renovate or rebuild those schools that we are still using. These include North HS, Kenmore HS, Miller-South, Firestone Park, Pfeiffer, and Riedinger. The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission funds our program in relation to our student population. Kenmore-Garfield is the last building to be

funded with state support and is slated to open in 2022. Any further school construction costs must be borne by APS.

Remember our partnership with the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission is based on the total student enrollment, which has declined from about 31,000 when we first started our project to about 21,000 students today. We will however study these buildings to get estimates of renovation versus replacement costs, and plans for how they can continue to be utilized. The board has requested the completion of a Facility Master Plan for these buildings, and we will commence that process.

Of course the elephant in the room is COVID-19, what can I say? During my time here at APS, I have been through the Ebola Virus scare in 2014, MRSA, H1N1, TB, Foot and Mouth Disease, head lice, bedbugs, mercury spills, you name it. But nothing like this, where the entire district is shut down, and we had to make the switch to virtual learning. The one person whom I have come to depend on through all of this is Health Commissioner Donna Skoda, and her staff at Summit County Public Health.

You see over the years, she and I have worked together on every major health issue that has affected our schools. Usually I would get a call, I would be asked if I was sitting down, and then would come the information. In every situation we would talk things through and come up with a plan. And, on some occasions we would not agree on how to approach a problem, but would always come to a joint solution. For that I say thank you.

During this pandemic I am so proud of how our educators flipped from in-person learning to online learning in quick fashion last year. To our principals and administrative staff, thank you for putting up with our constantly changing directives. It is hard to believe that we have been virtual since March. Yes, I do acknowledge that it is best for our students to be back to in-person school. However, I would like to point out that with 21,000 students, and nearly 4,000 employees it is very difficult to reconcile all of the risks, opinions and competing interests. Especially in a population that is already at risk because of the lack of access to healthcare and many of those basic needs that some take for granted. Did you know, 30% of children in America are going hungry? That's one in three children.

So, let's talk about that...food insecurity. Since last March, our Child Nutrition Services Department has given out nearly two million meals. And they've done it while holding grab and go meals in a bag in front of 37 of our schools just about every single day. These meals did not just go to our APS families but to any family with school-aged children living within our city. And yes, some of our employees working to distribute these meals did get sick. Let's remember that the majority of our support staff have been working since last March.

In addition to our Child Nutrition employees, bus drivers, because we are required to transport charter, community, parochial and non-public schools, have been working. Our facilities and grounds staff, office support and more have been working in-person since last year doing an excellent job.

We have now started to administer COVID vaccines to our staff with the help of Akron Children's Hospital. Our plan focused on the staff who support our Kindergarten to second grade, and students with disabilities first, so they can return to in-person school by mid-March. Last week, we were notified that Akron Children's received the balance of the doses we requested. That means tomorrow and Saturday we will administer the first doses to those remaining APS employees who requested the vaccine. And after the second doses are administered in three weeks, we will be back to in-person school soon thereafter. The priority is to get all of our educators who are working directly with students in our schools vaccinated first. We chose 10 North Main because of its central location, space to operate two clinics that can vaccinate more than 60 people per hour, and we have adequate parking.

Last week we started what we call Remote Plus. Students selected for Remote Plus are those who are struggling academically or who have special needs. We felt that these students should be transitioned back to school first with one or two days per week with individualized support from their teachers. Out of 2,800 students identified, we had about two thirds show up. We will continue to provide these services through early March just prior to the return of our teachers to get ready for in-person learning.

And for extra support, for the past several months, we have offered APS Plus, After Hours Support. Staff members work evenings and Saturdays to help families with just about everything they need, including schoolwork.

So....our current plan for the full return to in-person learning is to begin with our Kindergarten through second graders, and special needs students on March 15th. For the remaining students, in grades 3 through 12, they will return on March 22nd. We will have parents select whether they want their children to remain remote or attend in-person. Through February 19th parents can fill out a selection form to make their choices known. Based on these parent choices, we will then have to staff both in-person and virtual courses. Let me be clear, there is no guarantee that a student will continue to have the same teacher that they have currently once we transition to in-person learning. More information about these options can be found on our website at akronschools.com.

I want to thank our Board of Education members and our staff, for working through this pandemic. Everyone has been dedicated and flexible, showing the utmost concern for the safety of our students, staff, and the community at large. For that you have my eternal gratitude.

Looking to the future and coming out of this COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to see us embrace a more blended model of education. I can envision our classrooms and educational delivery model affording all students a choice between in-person and virtual learning. This gives our students a choice that matches how they want to learn and not on how we want to teach. We know that students come to us with a variety of needs. Some of them can thrive in a virtual environment while some do need in-person learning. I envision virtual classes for hard to staff topics, we could offer on-line courses for students who may be engaged in paid internships but still want to take a course or two. What I am trying to say is that the sky's the limit. Reaching the other side of this pandemic has also opened our eyes to the challenges that our students face.....and that is the learning loss over the past year.

Our team is actively working on plans to establish more robust summer programming for students who will need to catch up to their peers over the summer. With a focus on literacy and math, we can help students who have fallen behind so they can start the 2021-2022 school year on a solid foundation. If you tuned in to Governor DeWine's latest update, he has the expectation that we will develop these plans and submit them to the Ohio Legislature for review.

Our experience with this pandemic, in addition to the protests related to the death of George Floyd, has also laid bare many of the inequities that exist in our society. At APS we are working to identify and eliminate racial disparities related to our policies and practices.

We are committed to ensuring that we have and maintain a diverse workforce throughout the District and, in particular, within our teaching staff in our schools. Over the last several years, our Human Resources Department has engaged in various diversity recruitment initiatives through attendance at college and university job fairs, connections with historically black colleges & universities, direct face-to-face recruitment of diverse applicants, membership in the Cleveland Area Minority Educators Association. We are also getting current APS students interested in careers in education by establishing Future Educators Clubs at two of our high schools, Buchtel CLC and North High School.

Our work continues this year with grant opportunities through the Ohio Department of Education to support the APS Grow Your Own program. With this grant we will be able to assist current diverse APS employee candidates, and help them become teachers for our District. We expect other grant opportunities to be provided by ODE in the near future. With the support of our Board and community, we will continue to increase the number of diverse staff members so that we can better serve our own diverse student population.

At the Board level, an Equity Policy, a Racial Equity Policy and a board-level committee devoted to Equity have been established. We have already started the process of implementing organizational changes to better focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our ultimate goal is the establishment of an executive level position to oversee the implementation of this work across the district. The focus on diversity, equity and inclusion is a change in direction I believe our community sorely needs. And, as a member of the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, I have witnessed this change in direction over the years.

Under the leadership of Steve Millard, I have seen the focus on talent move away from trying to attract people to Akron and Northeast Ohio, to a concerted effort to grow our own talent pipelines. Through collaborative efforts such as Elevate Greater Akron and Opportunity Akron, we have also seen a

greater focus on providing opportunities to our minority communities that have been excluded from economic growth. Thanks to Mayor Dan Horrigan and County Executive Ilene Shapiro, for supporting these efforts. Although our work is not done, we are making progress. Now, moving on to finances.

In May of last year, we projected a fiscal year-end deficit of \$15.4 million. By the November 2020 financial report, we projected a revised deficit of \$2.2 million. With the addition of the various COVID-19 relief funds there will be a positive impact on the District's cash balance. In addition, we avoided some expenses this year in transportation, fuel, and utilities. We also received more than \$14 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding, including \$10 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. The District is anticipating another round of ESSER funds due to the recent Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act in the amount of \$42 million.

Among other uses, the anticipated ESSER funds are intended to be used for student recovery purposes. It is imperative that we prepare and maintain an academic recovery plan to ensure funds are spent accordingly. The curriculum team has been proactive in their response to the shift to online learning and continues to adapt and create a well-rounded learning environment for our students.

We are developing a comprehensive academic recovery program in order to assist students from this extraordinary school year. Costs will include intervention during the school day, summer intervention, after hours support, and social, emotional, and family supports. While the many grants received will help to offset the costs, ESSER funds will pay for a majority of the academic recovery costs.

As you know, APS has been discussing the need for additional revenue for more than a year. As good stewards of taxpayer dollars, we continue to be flexible and respond as new information becomes available. We are in the process of updating the forecast with our January numbers, but we need a few more months of data to really show the true impact of our 2020-2021 school year. As explained in the financial forecast and subsequent Finance Committee meetings, we will likely finish the year under budget.

There is much to consider before coming to the community with a levy request, including:

- Returning to in-person instruction
- The financial position of the District - how will 2021 finish up?
- Community support, including how the recent reappraisals will affect the taxpayers

Finally, I was disappointed that the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan did not get adopted late last year. However I am hopeful that the Ohio House will again take up the matter. The next couple of years will be difficult as we try to reconcile the additional state and federal funding with providing extra student resources so they can overcome COVID-related learning loss, and just paying our bills. But I am confident that these issues will be resolved, thanks to the leadership of our CFO, Ryan Pendleton.

Moving forward, the school board has encapsulated much of what I have spoken about today in their Advance APS, 3 in 3 Plan. Making progress in three priorities in three years, covering academic achievement, equity, and engagement.

This plan will serve as a guide for the district and the new superintendent to chart a course of action to improve our graduation rate, focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and to increase community engagement efforts. Many seeds have been planted so far, but it will be up to the community to make sure that the garden is properly tended.

In closing, this has been a challenging year for me; well for all of us actually! And, as I reflect on the last 29 years of my life, I hope that I have served this community with integrity and respect. It's so funny how you think about all of the things that can happen in one's life, and I can honestly say that overall, this has been an enjoyable experience, except for calling a snow day. And to my senior staff, every chance Dr. McWilliams-Woods and I get, from national funders, to state leaders, to our families, we brag about how solid our team is. Through your innovation and drive, my job has been made that much easier. Make no mistake, what has made my journey truly enjoyable is this community and all of you. No matter where my path takes me, don't ever forget that Akron is a very special place, and you are very special people.

*As a reminder, the email address for those of our viewers wanting to ask questions is:
pressclub2021@gmail.com*

Thank you and God bless!