



Mike DeWine, Governor  
Dr. Stephanie K. Siddens, Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction

Oct. 27, 2021

Dear President Keenon:

Thank you for East Cleveland City School District's recent submission of a proposed academic improvement plan pursuant to [Ohio Revised Code 3302.103](#). State law requires the state superintendent of public instruction to review each proposed plan and approve it or suggest modifications within 30 days of receiving it. If the state superintendent suggests modifications, the district board must revise the plan and resubmit it within 15 days after receiving the suggested modifications.

The academic improvement plan outlines the key strategies and related benchmarks to ensure the long-term success of students in your district. In my review of this plan, I focused on the proposed academic benchmarks to ensure they represent ambitious, achievable goals while also looking for evidence of stakeholder input and effective improvement strategies.

The pandemic continues to have a major impact on achievement at the local and state levels. In the 2020-2021 school year, district-level student performance generally was lower than in previous (pre-pandemic) baseline years. The Ohio Department of Education recognizes districts have had to work even harder to support students as a result of pandemic-related challenges. At the same time, it is important that we continue to have high expectations for student success. The benchmarks are designed to determine whether, after three years of implementation, the district is making sufficient progress on long-term goals to justify the continued implementation of the plan rather than reverting back to the oversight of an Academic Distress Commission. Requested revisions should ensure all summative three-year benchmarks are set no lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Accordingly, I am requesting the following revisions to your proposed academic improvement plan:

**Academic Benchmarks**

**1. Important notes:**

- The plan has many measures and indicators listed. For the purposes of the summative review conducted by the State Board of Education, the relevant measures are the academic outcomes measures listed on pages 10-14 (color-coded green and blue) of the Sept. 30, 2021, submission.
- **Graduation rate data:** Due to timing of graduation data collection, the class of 2025 graduation data may not be official by the 2025 deadline for this academic improvement plan. The Department will work with the district in the summer of 2025 as needed to calculate an unofficial graduation rate for the purposes of evaluating this benchmark.

2. **Graduation rate:** In the 11 District Plan<sup>1</sup> for improving outcomes for students with disabilities, the district has proposed a graduation target for students with disabilities of 86%, which is higher than the proposed graduation benchmark for all students in this academic improvement plan. Please either revise the benchmark to align with the 11 District Plan or provide rationale for the differences.
3. **Industry recognized credentials:** The benchmark your district set for the percent of students who have earned industry credential(s) is 47.87% in the class of 2025, which is below the previous baseline of 56.32% set with the class of 2018. While we understand the percentage for the class of 2021 dropped to 7.95% due in part to reduced opportunities to earn credentials as a result of the pandemic-related challenges, the district must implement strategies and articulate a target for the class of 2025 that exceeds the pre-pandemic baseline of 56.32% to demonstrate substantial progress.
4. **Pre-K benchmark:** The improvement plan should represent the full array of ages and grades served by the district. Accordingly, please include at least one Pre-K benchmark that will demonstrate the extent to which district preschools are adequately preparing children for kindergarten. That way, decisions can be made about preschool instruction, length of day, length of program and access. The Department's Early Learning and School Readiness team will be available to discuss this recommendation and assist in planning related strategies.

### **Improvement strategies**

The following comments reflect specific revision requests related to the improvement strategies in the proposed plan. Team members at the Department are available for additional assistance and information in specific subject areas.

- **Literacy**

- The state support team's urban literacy specialist and the literacy specialists at the educational service center can provide support on these related activities. Please revise the academic improvement plan to include partnership with these key literacy supports in each of your literacy-related strategies.
- The academic improvement plan should clarify the intent to continue implementation of all tiers of the Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventory as started in the Striving Readers grant. The implementation should include:
  - Each elementary and secondary building leadership team should engage in the facilitation of the Reading-Tiered Fidelity Inventory, using the Striving Reader's data as the baseline.
  - After the Reading Tiered Fidelity Inventories have been completed, the building leadership team should engage in goal-setting discussions based on progress made or not made since the onset of the Striving Readers grant. Data and goal setting should be shared with the central office so trends across buildings are identified. State Support Team 3 can help with implementation and goal setting at the secondary level and the urban literacy specialist can provide support at the elementary level.
- In your district's academic improvement plan, Keys to Literacy for elementary and Keys to Literacy for preschool are identified as the science of reading professional development. Revise the academic improvement plan to clarify that the district's curriculum review team will participate in this training before the curriculum audit takes

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<sup>1</sup> The 11 District Plan is a comprehensive five-year plan focused on improving outcomes for students with disabilities in Ohio's 11 urban districts. The 11 District Plan is a result of a settlement agreement in a special education lawsuit, *Doe v. State of Ohio.*"

place so that those conducting the audit will be able to effectively identify strengths and gaps in resources and materials for instruction and intervention.

- The Department also recommends utilizing the state support team’s urban literacy specialist and the literacy specialists at the educational service center for the reviews.
- Page 18 of the academic improvement plan states teachers will receive professional development in “explicit literacy instruction.” Instruction should look different at grade levels and intervention support. The academic improvement plan should outline explicit instruction professional learning for grade bands (for example: for preK-3 explicit instruction for phonological awareness ([Heggerty](#)) and phonics ([Florida Center for Reading Research](#)) and for adolescent Anita Archer’s explicit instruction ([Phonics for Reading](#)).
- **Existing comprehensive literacy plan:** East Cleveland should have an existing comprehensive literacy plan from the Striving Readers grant. This existing plan should be explicitly referenced in the strategies of your proposed academic improvement plan to ensure alignment between these two related plans. The Department previously assigned East Cleveland an urban literacy specialist to support the literacy component of the 11 District Plan. This specialist is very knowledgeable in the science of reading and will be a positive support for implementation. This same literacy specialist can help with the implementation of the newly enacted dyslexia legislation.
- **Align to comprehensive literacy state development grant:** East Cleveland is a participant in the Educational Service Center’s comprehensive literacy state development grant and should include related grant activities in the academic improvement plan. East Cleveland should engage in the Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant community of practice for decision rules, grades 6-12.
- **Special Education:**
  - **11 District Plan:** The district’s existing 11 District plan is a well-designed plan that comprehensively addresses [language and literacy](#), [professional learning for individualized education program \(IEP\) supports and services](#), [professional learning for leadership and teachers](#), [positive behavioral intervention and supports](#), [multi-tiered system of support](#), [post-secondary transition](#), Universal Design for Learning and Assistive Technology and services through age 22 for students on IEPs. This existing 11 District Plan should be explicitly referenced in the strategies of your proposed academic improvement plan to ensure alignment between these two related plans. For example, identify how all students (including students on alternative assessments and in a self-contained classroom) are included in the least restrictive environment, provided instruction with evidence-based practices, progress monitored and included in local assessments.
- **Early Learning:** Please include strategies for early learning and at least one benchmark (also noted above) in preschool that will tell the district the extent to which time in in-district preschools is adequately preparing children for kindergarten. That way, decisions can be made about preschool instruction, length of day, length of program and access.

As always, please continue to engage your state support team as you make adaptations to your plan and embark on implementation. Your state support team is available to assist your district leadership team using the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) to develop and align your improvement infrastructure (district leadership teams, building leadership teams and teacher-based teams). State support teams also have expertise in early literacy, early learning and school readiness, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports and special education. In addition, state support teams can assist with building capacity to support your plan goals.

State law requires that the revised improvement plan must be submitted within 15 days after receipt (no later than Nov. 11, 2021) of this letter. The Department stands by to assist and provide additional information on these revisions. Please contact Marva Kay Jones at [marva.jones@education.ohio.gov](mailto:marva.jones@education.ohio.gov) to coordinate any follow-up requests.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Stephanie K Siddens in black ink.

Stephanie Siddens, Ph.D.  
Interim State Superintendent of Public Instruction

cc: CEO Henry Pettiegrew, East Cleveland City School District