

Cleveland Scholarships for Education and Training (CSET) program



City of Cleveland
Frank G. Jackson,
Mayor
Office of the Mayor
Cleveland City Hall

Mr. Terrance C.Z. Egger
President & Publisher The Plain Dealer
1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Terry:

I hope that you are doing well and want to acknowledge that The Plain Dealer has covered an issue over the past week that is key to the future of Cleveland: education. Based on your coverage, I felt compelled to write you this letter so that I can address statements made in your paper regarding the Cleveland Scholarships for Education and Training (CSET) program.

First, let me say that these are children, not "drop-outs" as stated in How to reach those who reject our help. It was also stated that our children "squander life and chance." That statement is applicable to many, including adults. It is particularly applicable to those who have no excuse because life and society have been good to them.

Finally, today's editorial states, "Mayor Jackson's heart was in the right place...but his head was not." Let me assure you that my heart and head are in the same place and that is to create an environment for success for all our children and to serve all our children, no matter who they belong to.

I have said many times that the key to our success and future is the education of our young people. Traditional educational systems are focused on educating children from Kindergarten to the 12th grade. I am focused on pre-Kindergarten to a bachelor's degree, or at minimum, to

an associate's degree.

All post-12th grade education, including community college courses, should be treated as college, which means that a young person can be successful, fail or choose to stay or leave. In either case, young people deserve the opportunity. I have several scholarship programs because I recognize a cookie cutter approach will not work. Through money raised by employee contributions to the United Negro College Fund, the Mayor Frank G. Jackson Scholarship Fund gives out scholarships to CMSD seniors, City of Cleveland employees and City of Cleveland employees' children who are high school seniors or undergraduates. This scholarship is competitive, including a minimum GPA of 2.5, an essay, and community service.

In addition, CMSD has an arrangement with the University of Toledo that allows CMSD graduates that meet certain criteria, including a minimum GPA of 3.0, to attend that university tuition-free. The school district is currently in conversations with Bowling Green State University, Cleveland State University and The Ohio State University to see if we can replicate the University of Toledo program.

On the other hand, the CSET program is designed specifically for CMSD graduates and Cuyahoga Community College. This program has two requirements: graduate from CMSD and apply for financial aid. Its purpose is to provide a college education opportunity for all CMSD graduates.

Much has been said in your paper about the fact that under the CSET program there is not a minimum GPA requirement and that 54% of the students did not return to Tri-C for the second year of the program. Your paper has said the program is "rife with dropouts", implying that their lack of enrolling in Tri-C for the second

year is only negative. This and similar statements largely ignore the fact that some of the students who did not return to Tri-C likely moved on to other colleges, the military or vocational training programs. While we don't have the tracking data to prove this, I am relying on common sense to know that not all of those who didn't return simply dropped out of college.

Your paper has suggested that I set a minimum GPA as a criterion to ensure what your paper defines as success. I will not do so. It reminds me of the times that I've been asked "why are we spending this money on these children." I will not set a minimum GPA for the CSET program because I do not have any throwaway children. I will not say to any child that you are unworthy of an opportunity for higher education.

I do recognize that there are some changes that have to be made. Since beginning the program in 2008, we have identified that there are some needs that CMSD students have to address. We recognize that many CMSD graduates were unaware of the options available to them in terms of financial aid and in applying for college. We know that many of our students need help in transitioning from high school to college and how to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. That is why last year, Dr. Sanders, the school board and I began developing a course for all CMSD juniors and seniors to help address these issues.

Starting with this school year, all 11th and 12th graders must take the two-year "Colleges and Careers" course in order to

graduate. This course includes a strong financial literacy component and instruction on how to apply for financial aid. It provides knowledge to all CMSD juniors and seniors to help prepare them for college and understand what they have to do to be successful.

What they do when they get there is a choice they must make - that is part of the learning curve of college. The "Colleges and Careers" course is designed to help them make good choices for their own futures. CSET is designed to get them in the door. Only the students can decide what happens next. This is also true for those who are part of other scholarship programs that require a minimum GPA.

Finally, what about the 46% of the 2008 CSET recipients who are enrolled in their second year at Tri-C? The coverage in your paper has mostly dismissed this accomplishment. More than 200 young people - who might not have had the GPA or the money to go to other colleges - are in their second year of college. I am proud of them. Their families are proud of them. And we as a community should be proud of them.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read this letter and your commitment to making Cleveland a better place.

Sincerely,

Frank G. Jackson,
Mayor
City of Cleveland



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