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By RHONDA CROWDER
Staff Reporter

The needs of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District are vast. At the same time, the passage of a 15-mill school levy placed on this November’s ballot promises to shore up the shortfall. With that, last Thursday’s State of the Schools address given by CMSD CEO Eric Gordon at the City Club of Cleveland sounded more like the campaign cries of an incumbent politician than an annual report.

He began by touting the Cleveland Plan for Transforming Schools initiated Mayor Frank Jackson and how it has managed to change legislation surrounding labor practices, length of

school days and year, authorizing the opening of charter schools, and closing the lowest performing schools.

He also mentioned that the plan garnered national attention. However, just as Jackson has continuously stressed that implementation rest solely on the passage of a school levy, Gordon did the same.

“Passage of the Cleveland Plan is only the first step of our three part strategy. Now, we must resource our Transformation Plan,” he said. And subsequently, the remainder of his speech focused on the need to pass Issue 107, what it can do if passed and the things it will accomplish.

He explained that it will buy real reform, allowing the district to implement new school models where they have failed to see desired results. It will provide the investment to bring best practices to scale and ensure students graduate prepared to enter the workforce or attend college.

Gordon said passage of this levy will allow the district to expand pre-school, invest in K-8 programs to improve reading and math, provide instruction in STEM subjects as well as arts and languages, and expand opportunities for more personalized education. It will also help them attract and retain the best teachers, provide professional development and buy technology.

Additionally, mentorships, internships, apprenticeships and other real world experiences are so critically important and a key investment of this levy, he said.

Gordon was even proud to announce that expulsions are down and attendance is up.

On the other hand, Gordon had to speak to the recently released preliminary data from Ohio Department of Education revealing that CMSD is likely to receive a rating of Academic Emergency, the equivalent to an F, 2011-12 reportcard.

“I was devastated by this news,” said Gordon. “The reality is, despite all of our efforts, CMSD student achievement remains low and flat.”

The district also failed to meet the value added goal, which defines students’ expected growth, for the second year in a row.

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The truth is the Cleveland Metropolitan School District serves many students very well. Graduation rate increased another 3.8 percent this year. And more kids are going to colleges and universities than ever before but it’s simply not enough,” he said.

“It’s do or die time for CMSD,” Gordon added. “The state of our schools in the days to come, depends on the investment that each and every one of us is willing to make right now.”