

**February 28, 2019**  
**State of the Akron Public Schools Speech**  
David W. James, Superintendent

Welcome to the 2019 State of the Akron Public Schools address. Thanks to the Akron Press Club for serving as the annual sponsor for this event, and The Tangier for hosting us again this year.

I would like to acknowledge our Akron school board members:

Rev. Dr. Curtis T. Walker, Sr., President

Tim Miller, Vice-President

Bruce Alexander, Ginger Baylor, Patrick Bravo,

Morgan Lasher, and Lisa Mansfield.

If there are any former school board members with us please stand and be recognized (Byron Arledge, Amy Grom, James Hardy, Jason Haas, Linda Omobien, Veronica Sims, Sophie Albrecht, Howard Taylor, Shelia Smith, Debbie Walsh, John Otterman). I would like a brief moment of silence to remember former school board member Betty Dalton who passed away this past summer. Thank you.

I would like our elected officials or their representatives here with us today to please stand and be recognized. (Recognize Mayor Horrigan and, County Executive Ilene Shapiro if present)

To all our honored guests, welcome.

I also want to recognize and welcome some of our students here with us today. Our Student Ambassadors, my Superintendent Seminar Students, and new this year, our student representatives to the Board of Education. Our student performers from Buchtel CLC Jazz Band, **the Key of G's**, under the direction of Kevin Calavan, thank you.

Do you all know what a tag line is? Just do it? With a name like Smucker's it has to be good? Those are tag lines. It's not so much about what you do, but who you are.

At Akron Public Schools our tag line is *Connecting Community to the Classroom*. We created it when we began to extend our reach further into our city as we engaged our College & Career Academies of Akron transformation.

The tag line also celebrates the many ways our community enhances learning opportunities for our students. Your volunteerism, mentorship, experiential learning opportunities, financial contributions and partnerships provide our students with meaningful relationships and support.

These community connections number in the hundreds, and we are grateful for every contribution made for the benefit of our students. This year my speech is going to be different than the last 10.

That doesn't necessarily mean it will be shorter! But you may be happy to hear I won't focus as much on facts and figures. You can get that information from the printed information at your tables.

This year, I want to talk about you.

Last year I spoke about moving the needle and how many of our community partners have implemented programs that are helping do just that, in assisting our students as they reach for success. This is important because, the social, emotional, behavioral, economic, physical health and a host of factors can prevent students from reaching their true potential. I happen to believe that our entire community must wrap its arms around our young people, and that their education is everyone's business.

Last year was also a very humbling time for me. I know that some of you thought my speech last year was my farewell speech. (Pause...)

Well it wasn't. Though tempted to go to elsewhere, something inside me did not sit right. I decided to stay, and it became clear that this has been the right decision. I had to weigh the wonderful team I have in the Akron Public Schools, an active and engaged school board, an enthusiastically supportive community with some very special partners, and the impactful work that continues to this day.

Several respected leaders provided helpful insight and enlightened me from a different perspective. Thank you, Bill Considine, Don Taylor and Marco Sommerville. Each of you helped me see a different perspective; especially as it relates to our community, our families, and all 21,000 of my kids.

My board members as well; you were patient and understanding during a challenging time, especially looking at the prospect of starting a search for a replacement. My staff, some of who bribed me with chocolate and arranged a celebration without my knowledge after I decided to stay here, I say thank you for making me realize that this is home. Not just in the physical sense, but in terms of this very

special community of Akron. But probably my better half said it best on a drive back from Columbus, oh wait.....there are kids in the room so I can't repeat what Jean said. At any rate 2018 was a whirlwind of activity.

Now, I don't know about you, but trying to bring even more exciting partnerships and opportunities for our students and community is very difficult. However, each year we seem to exceed the previous one.

Our role as a school district is to educate students so they are prepared for the future, not the world that I grew up in. In the 60's and 70's we had our version of societal change, the civil rights movement maturing, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the assassination of some of our great leaders, the demise of jobs that provided opportunities for our parents to be better off than their parents, and more opportunities for people who look like me to get a post-secondary education. That world was not perfect by any means, but there were opportunities for those willing to put in the hard work. It was also a time when our economy and our communities began to change.

The jobs that replaced many of the factory positions required higher levels of education, and technical skills. But many jobs that replaced those that were lost, paid less. Since the time I graduated from high school in 1980, the world has changed even more. This past year the Fund for our Economic Future issued a report entitled *The Two Tomorrows*. That report summarized that everyone in our region has not accessed the full benefits of the economy, particularly our minority populations, especially in the areas of educational attainment and workforce training. This is important to our community as we work to keep and attract jobs here, help entrepreneurs start new businesses, and grow our economy. We *must* ensure that our economy grows in ways that benefit everyone. The city of Akron, Summit County, the Greater Akron Chamber, along with GAR Foundation developed the Elevate Akron plan to address many of the same issues that are outlined in the Two Tomorrows report. I know that some of you are thinking: is this an economic development speech or an education speech? In my mind, economic development and the success of our community go hand in hand. It's all about education. Education forms the foundation for the talent that is required to support our local businesses, and our local economy. Both

rely on talent pipelines that span pre-school, K-12, and postsecondary education.

Today we can no longer look at these systems as separate. They form a continuum. And our job is to collaborate, so our children are successful in reaching their career ambitions. As a public school district, we have to do things differently. We are no longer an island all to ourselves, our organization must remain focused on student success by becoming more flexible, more engaged with our community, and using our resources in an efficient manner, so we become the best urban school district in the country.

August 1<sup>st</sup> began my 11<sup>th</sup> year as superintendent. That's 11 years facing many challenges. None has been more critical than leading our efforts to manage the district, so needed resources can be used to support our teachers and students, as we transform into the talent pipeline our economy needs.

As we have consolidated our schools to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, we knew we also had to maximize the efficiency of our multiple smaller administration buildings spread out across the city.

In April, we purchased the office building on the northwest corner of Main and Market streets to consolidate our administration footprint. 10 North Main Street formerly housed Summa Care.

We are in the process of moving out of the Sylvester Small Administration Building and the Conrad Ott Staff Development Center. Today I am happy to report that we will move into our new location during the week of April 22nd. And staff located at the Conrad Ott Staff Development Center will move in after our current school year ends in June. This move will not only help further transform the Akron Public Schools but will provide an economic boost to the northern edge of downtown Akron as well.

As part of our move, we will provide much needed parking for United Way by transferring our former parking lot at 70 North Broadway to Summit County so it could become part of the Sojourner Truth Building, now owned and occupied by United Way. In addition, we traded our vacant Perkins Middle School property with the city of Akron for the parking lot around 10 North Main. The city of Akron is planning a new housing development at the Perkins site in cooperation with East Akron Community Development Corporation. Our properties at 70 North Broadway and 65 Steiner Avenue will eventually be sold and could potentially be converted into market rate apartments or condos, increasing the number

of downtown housing units. I believe that these investments on behalf of the Akron Public Schools, United Way, the city of Akron, and Summit County are good for the northern end of downtown, and our city in general. None of this would be possible without our school board, Mayor Dan Horrigan, County Executive Illene Shapiro, and United Way CEO Jim Mullen. Each approached this project with a collaborative spirit this community is known for. They deserve a round of applause.

This relocation allows our organization to focus on our core mission to serve our students and their families. It also gives us the opportunity to operate more effectively by having our entire central office in one place. By moving, we are avoiding significant building repair and upgrade costs for the 70 North Broadway and 65 Steiner Avenue properties that could total several million dollars each.

In late spring, we will dedicate our new home as the Sylvester Small Administration Building and the second floor the Conrad C. Ott Staff Development Center. The board and I feel these are fitting tributes. Having our central office in one location will allow us to go deeper as a cohesive, collaborative team to support creative educational partnerships such as those associated with our College & Career Academies of Akron.

Throughout my speech today, you are going to hear about our major accomplishments at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels as we transform all of our schools using the College and Career Academy model. Starting with our high schools, I am pleased to announce that we have met all of the timelines outlined in our 200 page master plan and we are ready to launch our academies this August in every one of our high schools. This means every 10th through 12th grader in our district will be selecting one of 57 career pathways. Students will also be able to earn industry credentials and college credits in these pathways before they graduate. These pathways are aligned with our regional talent needs including nursing, advanced manufacturing, pre-med, teaching, engineering, technology, construction, and many more.

We have already seen the positive benefits of our first named academy partnership with Akron Children's Hospital at North High School. Two years ago, Bill Considine joined me on stage to announce the Akron Children's Hospital Academy of Health and Human Services.

Our partnership between Kent State University and Firestone CLC continues to provide opportunities for our students we could have only dreamed about years ago. This year we celebrated two sister university partnerships with The University of Akron and Stark State College.

The University of Akron has formalized its long-standing partnership with APS to become a Sister University for the Akron Early College High School, the National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School, and Ellet High School. By the way, the Akron Early College High School, based on state performance indicator ratings of student achievement is ranked the highest among the public high schools in Summit County. Principal Cheryl Connolly thank you.

Stark State College has signed on to become the Sister University partner to Kenmore-Garfield High School. Thank you, Dr. John Green, Dr. Beverly Warren and Dr. Para Jones, for your leadership and partnership. Our local companies, both large and small have also stepped up to the plate to help our students get on the road to a bright future.

Bridgestone Americas celebrated the opening of the Firestone Complete Auto Care center at East CLC in our Automotive Technology Program, as part of the Bridgestone Academy of Applied Engineering and Technology. Summa Health is a named partner with Buchtel CLC in the Summa Health Academy of Leadership and Innovation. At East CLC we have the KeyBank Academy of Business and Health Services. Goodyear continues its long-standing partnership with our National Inventors' Hall of Fame STEM Middle and High Schools. We hope you noticed the video monitors on your way in, where we shared with you the names of our many, official partners other companies and organizations that are teaming up with us to Connect Community to the Classroom.

Just to remind you, our College & Career Academy program is a partnership with Ford Next Generation Learning. And I would like to thank Cheryl Carrier, Ford NGL's executive director and the Ford NGL team for their support. By the way, I also want to acknowledge Pat Shipe, president of the Akron Education Association.

This week we have reached an agreement with the association on several issues related to our College & Career Academy work. These items include class schedules, professional development

needs, and academy team meetings to support our academy work. Pat thank you for your leadership in co-chairing the transformation team that is leading all the internal shifts in instruction and services to our students. This team has been a model of collaborative leadership for our district, for the state of Ohio, and for the Ford Next Generation Learning network of 36 districts across the country.

As we continue to add partners, stay tuned for our next significant college and career partnership announcement happening next week.....I can't tell you more details....because it will take away from the event.....but I'll tell you it involves one of the most valuable community resources we have in this region.

As we further expand our college and career academy transformation, we are ALSO aligning our elementary and middle school programs to support student success. So, College & Career Academies will soon cover all grades, not just high school. That's exciting news for us. More off campus education!

But, as has become tradition at this speech, we have some breaking news, and it concerns our longstanding and fruitful relationship with GAR Foundation.

So, I don't steal their headline, I'm going to simply ask GAR Foundation President Christine Mayer and Senior Vice President Kirstin Toth to come up and take the mic for an exciting announcement concerning some of our youngest students.

[PAUSE - Christine and Kirstin speak. Three mins, appx.]

Thank you, Christine and Kirstin. The support provided by GAR Foundation is critical to many of the innovations that we as a district have been able to implement. This latest opportunity will provide elementary students with much needed field experiences at some of our area's unique community assets, allowing them to go deeper in their learning. These won't simply be field trips. They'll be like field trips on steroids. These are college and career readiness trips to begin their preparation to be the talent pipeline this region deserves.

We have also submitted a major grant application to the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation to support our College and Career academy work in our middle schools. If approved, this grant will support student service learning projects with our business and community partners. It will help us further hone instructional strategies that will focus on student growth and preparedness for high school, including

social emotional strategies. Our goal is to ensure that our middle grades students are better prepared so they can maximize their high school college and career academy experience.

Numerous employers have raised red flags regarding their workforce needs, especially in healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. With the help of ConXusNEO we have a better understanding of the need for our young people to get the proper education and experience required to be gainfully employed. I would like Sue Lacy, president of ConXusNEO to stand and be recognized for her support of our community. Sue understands how education, workforce and economic development all intersect. She is also working with Ford NGL and Akron Public Schools to expand our college and career academy work to our region.

In October, students from Akron, Barberton, Kent and Tallmadge city schools along with several manufacturing industry partners travelled to the Henry Ford Museum and Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant in Dearborn, Michigan to get a better understanding of manufacturing related careers. I would like to thank local car part suppliers OGS Industries, S&A Industries, and Steere Enterprises, Al Spitzer Ford of Cuyahoga Falls and Klaben Ford and Lincoln of Kent dealerships, the Greater Akron Chamber and ConxusNEO who all worked together to make this trip possible. For our students it was an unforgettable experience.

Now on to another connection.

The Bold Goals established by United Way of Summit County seek to improve third grade reading, increase our high school graduation rate, increase financial empowerment, and reduce the impact of the opioid epidemic. Under the leadership of Jim Mullen, we have deepened our relationship with United Way. Aside from involvement with our college and career academy work, United Way continues to increase community engagement efforts to support the provision of wrap-around services in the community with our schools serving as hubs. Wrap around supports can help remove some of the barriers to student learning, and can help families and individuals live a healthy, stable and successful life.

With the help of KeyBank, United Way and Akron Public Schools are collaborating to launch the

first phase of what we are calling Family Resource Centers to provide wrap-around supports in our neighborhoods. I would like to thank Jim Mullen, Tim Burke from KeyBank for their support of our schools and community.

Earlier this week at Firestone CLC, the Rite-Aid Foundation announced the Prescription Drug Safety Program. This program will provide our students with access to online courses that address prescription drug abuse and misuse in our community. I would like to thank Tracy Henderson, director of the Rite Aid Foundation for their help in combating this problem. And US Congressman Tim Ryan and State Representative and Ohio House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes for their valuable support.

And speaking of wrap around supports.....after more than a year of planning with the LeBron James Family Foundation, on July 30<sup>th</sup> we opened the I-Promise School. Perhaps you have heard????

I am personally honored that LeBron has kept his promise to our local kids, bringing partners to the table to provide much needed wrap-around supports to help our students and their families. The I-Promise School is serving as a catalyst for communities across the country to re-think how they can support our children and their education with the We Are Family philosophy. It has been humbling to see the many partners who have come to the table to help make our I-Promise School a success.

Again, Connecting Community to the Classroom.

Of course, none of this would be possible without a visionary board of education and my hard-working staff. I also want to acknowledge the support and hard work of Michele Campbell and her team at the LeBron James Family Foundation, please stand..... as they have been with us every step of the way.

And back to our teacher's union and Pat Shipe. Because of your commitment and leadership Pat, we have been able to open the I-Promise School as an Akron Public School, with our excellent Akron teachers. Like Jennifer Wicks our Teacher of the Year from Findley CLC. The I-Promise School is an example of our core belief that public schools work. Yes, I always stress that the I-Promise School is an Akron Public School. Why? Because too many times we are told that public schools cannot be innovative, and simply don't work. We are proving the critics wrong.

And while I'm thanking folks, a special thank you to our citizens who provide financial support for ALL 48 of our community learning centers every day.

Now, we know that some of our families do struggle meeting their basic needs. And for our students, having to worry about where their next meal is coming from, to having the proper clothing, or a place to live can wreak havoc on their academic success. The wrap-around supports provided to our families at the I-Promise School are an example of what communities can do together to support some of our most challenged students. I want to thank the Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank, Summit County Jobs and Family Services, Community Legal Aid, JP Morgan Chase, WKYC Channel 3 and many more organizations for the services you provide to our I-Promise students and their families. And to LeBron, thank you for your consistent leadership and dedication to this city and our kids. *Connecting Community to the Classroom.* (Pause)

Last year I acknowledged the issues related with student behavior and how this can have a negative impact on learning. I reported on some of the programs that we implemented, such as the PAX Good Behavior Game with the support of Jerry Craig from the ADM Board. Student discipline is still a challenge. Recent events highlight the problem. Student disagreements on social media, rivalries among neighborhood groups, and other issues can make their way into our schools. No parent wants to have their child assaulted whether at school, on the way to and from school, at the mall, gas station or grocery store. No teacher comes to work every day expecting to be assaulted by a student, especially when they are there to support student success. Unfortunately, these issues continue to be a challenge for us.

I'd like to address recent news reports about some conflicts in two area schools that made news. And let me begin by giving us a pat on the back for having a reputation in the media for being quick to respond with public records and detailed information. We are transparent and open.

Ask reporters how difficult it might be to get information from some organizations, and you'll understand why they come to APS so often!

But, in our haste to meet a request, we left a little asterisk off a document.

Recent reports indicating a handful of schools experienced more than 100 incidents in the past

year were misleading. The numbers reflected how many **students** were involved in these altercations, (emphasize) not the number of altercations.

In fact, 84% of our students do not get in trouble and **have no suspension** days per year.

Ten percent are involved in one incident per year, four percent of students have three incidents per year, and three percent have more. Three percent.

I admit that we have much more work to do regarding how we respond to students who misbehave. Out of last year's issues regarding student discipline, we have re-established a joint discipline committee with the Akron Education Association to work on more innovative solutions.

Our board established an ad hoc committee on a Portrait of a Graduate through the lens of student discipline and behavior. Over the last 12 months, this committee representing the board, community members and our staff has concluded that social and emotional issues are primary factors in supporting student success. I want to thank Jeremy and Christy Lyle and Bishop Joey Johnson for co-chairing this committee. We are collaborating with many community organizations to meet these social and emotional needs.

Here are just a few:

Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority

I-Care Mentoring (Jonathan Greer)

Project GRAD Akron (Jackie Silas-Butler)

Summit County Juvenile Court (Judge Linda Teodosio)

Summit County Public Health (Donna Skoda)

Summit Education Initiative (Derran Wimer)

The Akron Promise (Tom & Dee Ghinder)

These and many other partners collaborate with our teachers helping our students achieve success. And speaking of success, I often feel like a proud dad of 21,000 students. I'd like to share some their successes with you.

Null Dev Rai, a biomedical science student at North High School was selected as one of five

Presidential Scholar semifinalists for the state of Ohio. Also, North High senior Alejandra Trevino was selected by TEDxAkron as one of 14 speakers for the 2018 TEDxAkron live show at the Goodyear Theater last April. She was one of 200 people to audition for this event.

Gillian Allen in Kenmore-Garfield's Culinary Arts program was accepted to the most prestigious culinary school in the country, the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park, New York.

Our students and Junior ROTC cadets participated in hundreds of service projects for our community. Kudos to third grade teacher Becky Feora at King CLC. She used the Heimlich maneuver to save 11 year old Griffin Starcher from choking. Griffin called Becky, "One of my favorite teachers." (I'd say so!)

A first in our exceptional performing arts programs was a performance by the Cleveland Orchestra Ensemble at Firestone CLC.

At Glover CLC, teacher Julie Paulus requested and received dozens and dozens of donated mirrors to fill the I AM Wall for students to see their reflections along with encouraging, written quotes to build self-esteem.

Students from Miller South School and Firestone CLC Akron School for the Arts received high honors from the National Scholastic Art Awards committee in New York City. Miller South eighth-grader Andra Benninghoff was awarded a National Gold Key for her drawing titled Pink Eye under the direction of Alison Rich.

Two of our students had their artwork shipped to New York for the National Award Events and festivities, including the National Ceremony at Carnegie Hall.

Buchtel Middle School Business Professionals of America scholars did a fantastic job representing Akron at the BPA National Leadership Conference in Dallas.

One of several chess teams at Jennings CLC took the state title in its first try in state competition! Our robotics teams have collected four invitations to four world tournaments.

To Tommy Bruno and the staff at our radio station 91.3 The Summit, for the Rock and Recovery™ Scholarship Program. This new opportunity for high school seniors at APS focuses on raising

awareness for substance abuse and recovery issues.

How about National Inventors Hall of Fame Akron STEM HS senior Jackson Tankersley? He went to his eighth state level Ohio Academy of Science, State Science Day last May at The Ohio State University. It's got to be a record! Tankersley presented his project for the science fair entitled, "Bioelectricity Changes in Urine Microbial Fuel Cells Inoculated with Livestock Solid Waste Slurry". All I can say is wow, I can't believe I got that out and got it right.

Firestone CLC/Akron School for the Arts senior Reyna Moran won Playhouse Square's Dazzle Awards for the second year in a row. Our students have received many, many musical awards. Too numerous to mention.

Eagle Scout Nick Salladay was a STEM senior last year who, for his Eagle service project, coordinated the installation of outdoor lighting in the pavilion at Wedgewood United Methodist Church in Ellet. He contacted local companies for donations of lights, wiring and hardware, and under his direction Scouts and adult volunteers finished the project in about 60 hours.

We also snagged more awards for its STEM education than any other school district in the state in 2018.

The Ohio Academy of Science awarded six of our schools and 90 of our teachers in the district with the Governor's Thomas Edison Awards for Excellence in STEM Education and Student Research.

Speaking of academics, 41 of our elementary and middle school students received perfect scores on their state tests covering English Language Arts, Science, and Math.

And kudos to the students and staff at the National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM High School and David Hill CLC, they are the recipients of the 2018 Momentum Award from the Ohio Department of Education. The Momentum Award is presented by the State Board of Education and recognizes schools for exceeding expectations in student growth for the year. Dina Popa and Tina McIntyre thank you for your leadership.

At the district level we continue to make progress with implementing the International Baccalaureate Program in the Firestone Cluster. Joining Firestone, Litchfield and Case Community

Learning Centers, Resnik CLC received authorization to become an IB Primary Years Programme School in January. This leaves King and Portage Path CLCs, both of which are in the IB planning process. We are hopeful that over the next two years both schools will be approved and join the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme.

Please join me in celebrating these successes as well as all the other successes our talented students and faculty achieve every day in the Akron Public Schools

Speaking of our community learning centers, in August we opened the new Case Community Learning Center. This fall we will welcome students and staff to the new Ellet CLC. We are also finalizing our design plans for the new Kenmore-Garfield CLC, with a target completion date of summer of 2022. Kenmore-Garfield is the last building that the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission will co-fund with Akron Public Schools. As our student population has fallen since the beginning of this partnership, so has state funding. This will leave Firestone Park Elementary, Pfeiffer Elementary, Miller-South, and North High Schools without state funding. Currently we are working with our Facilities Services Department to keep these buildings in operation by making needed repairs. Funding these capital needs will place additional strain on district finances.

I know I'm preaching to the choir, but as you know school funding in Ohio is very cyclical and complicated. Ryan Pendleton, our Treasurer/CFO watches economic cycles because more than 35% of our revenue comes from property taxes. Since 2008 we have seen very little to no property value growth. During that time, we also had to pass a new operating levy. Unfortunately, we must prepare for the next recession. This recession will follow the Great Recession, which we have not yet fully recovered from.

As stated in the October 2018 five year forecast, the district's current forecast indicated continued trend toward increasing revenue shortfalls, but with the support of the Board and administration team, we've balanced the budget. While we have balanced the budget, we are not carrying a substantial reserve and unfortunately, in Ohio schools we depend on that reserve every five to ten years.

Ryan and I have worked diligently to be innovative and return as many operational dollars to the classroom as possible. This is evidenced by balancing the budget for three years in a row despite deficit

spending predictions, expanding college and career academies and targeted programming such as the I-Promise School.

2019 brings a new governor and a new state budget for education. Every two years, the governor reviews and modifies the budget to represent the State's priorities. Ryan has been working closely with representatives Robert Cupp and John Patterson, a republican and democrat respectively, to develop a funding formula that is equitable to all Ohio school districts and students. This year, we are hopeful that Governor DeWine will take into advisement the Cupp/Patterson funding formula. However, we cannot totally depend on the state of Ohio to solve all our funding issues.

Last year I announced our partnership with Paladina Health, a new health care delivery model. Paladina Health is a physician-access care model providing our employees experienced primary care physicians. With no co-pays or co-insurance, collectively labor and management have minimized the cost barrier to accessing these healthcare services. On October 9th we celebrated the grand opening of a Paladina Health Clinic at 400 West Market Street for our employees. I would like to thank, Chris Miller, chief executive officer, Paladina Health and Paul Catania, senior vice president, managing director, Akron/Canton Market from the Oswald Companies, our health insurance consultant for bringing us this innovative solution. So far, our move to this health model has been positive.

A recent survey indicates that 63% of respondents reported improved health after joining the program. Ninety five percent of respondents reported a positive overall experience with the program, and since we started the program, we have 1600-plus members enrolled, representing 28% of our eligible population. None of this would be possible without the collaboration of our six employee unions. For those union representatives present please stand, thank you.

Finally, in closing what I see today is a community-wide effort to improve the lives of our students. To help them become prepared for adulthood through a focused approach on career options. We will continue to face challenges, but by working together we shall overcome. As we close Black History Month, I am reminded of how the past does repeat itself.

Back in June of 1965 Dr. King gave the commencement speech at Oberlin College. Entitled

“Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” he relayed the story Rip Van Winkle by Washing Irving. Irving was born in New York in 1783 and died in 1859. In addition, he also wrote The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Dr. King recalled how Rip Van Winkle slept for 20 years and awoke to a whole new world. He also pointed out some details that he felt most people overlooked. In the story, when Rip Van Winkle started out on his journey up the mountain, he passed an Inn that had a sign hanging on the outside with a painting of George III, the King of England on it. After sleeping for 20 years and on his way back down, Rip Van Winkle passed the inn again. This time the sign had a painting of George Washington on it. Rip Van Winkle did not know who George Washington was because, according to Dr. King, “he slept through a revolution.”

King’s message to those Oberlin College graduates back in 1965 was this, and I quote: “There are all too many people who, in some great period of social change, fail to achieve the new mental outlooks that the new situation demands. There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution,” end quote.

My challenge to you is to help our young people prepare for the revolution that is taking place today. Our world is changing, jobs, technology, finance, society in general.

Key phrases today include the “Gig economy” “Big Data” and “Uberization.” It’s important for our kids to understand that they need an education today, to be prepared for the world of tomorrow. Please don’t let them fall asleep, to wake up and find that the world has passed them by. What Dr. King said back then at Oberlin College still rings true today.

Thank you all for your dedication and support, our young people need us now more than ever. Now let’s get to work and continue Connecting Community to the Classroom.

God bless and thank you.