



## ***Summary of September 2020 NeoSTEM Ecosystem Meeting***

***'There is going to be a renaissance coming out of this'***

*- Eric Gordon, CEO of Cleveland Metropolitan School District*

### **School leaders discuss needs for the 2020-2021 school year**

***What do you have to offer to support students, families and educators during the coming 2020-2021 school year?***

This was the organizing question for NeoSTEM's August 4 webinar featuring Eric Gordon, chief executive officer of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District; Mark Curtis, president of the Twinsburg Board of Education; Cynthia Booker, a local media teacher and Kasey Morgan, network manager of MyCom.

From simple encouragement for families to safe space where children can go when school buildings don't open this fall, the panelists offered a variety of ways for the community to support learning needs of students throughout Northeast Ohio in the Fall.

***Watch the webinar here, which was moderated by Jeremy Shorr, a TIES and NeoSTEM consultant.***

***Connect with the panelists here.***

### **Safe Places for Children During the Day**

"We need safe places for young people to be during the school day while school is not open. And so whether that be in our museums or our libraries or our Boys and Girls clubs...to the extent you're able to, we're going to have care needs for families where the family needs a safe place for the child to be. Since we can't have them in school, and that's a very practical thing that our Northeast Ohio out-of-school time providers can provide," Gordon said.

### **Encouragement for Families**

He continued, “The second one is, I would argue, even more important and not talked about enough is helping families move through this. And so we have been really clear in our planning that we want families to understand that all we're asking is that they do what they can and be great parents and not try to suddenly replace teaching by being the teacher and all if all they can do is get their child's homework home that day, great.”

He said families need to remember that the whole world is a learning environment and that children can learn as part of normal daily routines.

### **No Shame in Asking for Help**

Gordon said it is equally critical for families to understand that there is “no shame in asking for help.”

Gordon stressed that there are many resources in our community and that people are generous.

He said it is critical for children and families who might be feeling as if they are not cutting it to realize that this feeling of inadequacy is not true. “You're great moms and dads...you have lots of power and capacity,” he said.

### **Seeking Input From Teachers, Staff and Community**

At the time of the school shutdown in March, Curtis explained that the Twinsburg Schools were already moving to a one-to-one model with all students having devices and taking Chrome books home and doing work online.

“However, when you look at the staff and the teachers, you know, there's still a need to build, continue to build capacity in order to use that platform as a way of teaching. I mean, obviously, it's different than being in a traditional brick and mortar classroom,” he said.

While plans for the Fall are still being cemented, Curtis said the greater Twinsburg school community has played a critical role in helping build options.

At the same time that Twinsburg was trying to address the remote learning needs, the district began assessing its physical space options. “We literally had staff go into every classroom and measure every classroom for purposes of six foot social distancing and determine, you know, the number of students and staff that we can accommodate in any given space at any given time,” Curtis said.

Next, he said the district evaluated grade bands, surveyed families and consulted with the various unions representing teachers and staff at the district.

“First and foremost, was safety and the well-being of students and staff. We wanted to make sure that we can ensure their health and safety to the best that we could based on the guidance that we had,” he said.

### **Navigating Uncharted Territory**

“So, the entire approach, I mean, it's very thoughtful and time-consuming. But at the end of the day, and I'm sure most of my colleagues in district school will agree, it's not a situation where we're going to be able to please everybody,” he said. “We are in uncharted territory. And we continue to be, even though we know more than we did when we first started the initial shutdown in America.”

### **Resource Bank for Students, Families**

Booker said she would like to see a resource bank set up for students and families with a variety of available supports, including available tutors and programs.

“I think churches can be very instrumental in helping. Maybe there's someone within a church or synagogue that has expertise in different subject matters. Then they can help students, whether it's Saturday or Sunday, the church would work that out where they can help students with different classes, and also not just the subjects like math, science, English language arts, but also soft skills, because I think those often are left out,” Booker said.

Booker said she would like to see industry professionals volunteer to mentor students to supplement classroom teachers.

### **Be In-Tune With Teachers**

Booker said she knows that it is – at times – hard to understand what teachers are giving students in the way of work. She said it is important to try to connect with teachers and ask them for times to connect and talk.

### **Need More Community Partners**

Kasey Morgan, the network manager for MyCom, explained that her organization serves young people in more than 31 communities throughout Greater Cleveland by connecting them to “positive opportunities.”

Morgan said MyCom has been surveying existing partners to determine their capacity for offering programming for students in the Fall. “We sent out a survey to say, ‘should schools not come back in the fall? Would you be willing to open up your facility or do you know how you could serve young people?’”

She said 70 organizations responded, with 70 percent of them reporting that they would be able to serve students. Morgan said MyCom followed up with another survey in late July. “We asked, ‘Now that we know the majority of the schools are not going to be in service, what can you offer?’”

Morgan said about 30 partners have responded and MyCom is grateful for those offers of support, but realizes that much more will be needed.

“Many young people are going to need supervision along with warm, safe and dry environments during the day,” she said.

Morgan said MyCom currently only has identified partners who will be able to serve fewer than 1,000 students and MyCom seeks to serve between 50,000 and 60,000 students.

Morgan said she is hoping organizations will reach out to MyCom with offers of support for services they can offer to students. “Any amount of time is better than nothing. So we're trying to work with all types of schedules and we're trying to make sure that we have a lot of opportunities available for not just the young people, but our older young people as well,” she said.

“So in a nutshell, if you have availability, reach out to us and I'll send you the survey. I'll send you what we're looking for and we can bring you into our network so we can start to find safe places for our young people who are really going to need that, especially those that are neighborhood based because we recognize transportation is an issue,” she said.

### **School Buildings Could Be Offered**

Gordon said school buildings could be offered. The question, he said, is “Can we do it safely? Because we closed for kids and then reopening for kids is a challenge. And so we're actually talking about that very issue to see how can we partner with providers and make our spaces safely available, sanitized and all of the things that they need to be so that we can be part of that solution.”

### **Funding Will Be Tight**

Gordon explained that funding is going to be tight in the Fall for everyone, in-school as well as out-of-school providers. “There is a tsunami coming behind this earthquake and it's the budget. So we all need resources at a time that none of us have them,” he said. “The district is committed to still funding our part.”

### **Federal Government Support Needed**

“We're working really closely with our foundation community. We're really blessed to have a great community here. But this is a place and you've heard me advocate not just here, but on every opportunity I get. There is only one public body that can take care of our kids and our community right now, and that's the federal government,” Gordon said.

He explained that relief packages are desperately needed for K-12 education, municipalities, school districts and states so that badly needed services can be provided at a time when they are most needed.

“And without that, there's another crisis coming,” he said.

### **Social-Emotional Needs Critical**

“You know the saying, it takes a village to raise a child. And I think that statement can't be more true in this situation that we're in now when we were when school ended in March,” Booker said.

Booker said many students failed to show up for virtual classes in March and while some were seizing the opportunity to take a break, she said she recognizes that many were dealing with very complex issues at home, including no Internet, the need to care for younger siblings and challenges with immigration.

"I tried to do the best that I could. I had scheduled Google needs calls with students, but I also told the students, if you need to reach me at any time outside of the 9 to 10 a.m. schedule, just e-mail me. I'm here at your beck and call it doesn't matter if it's 10 or 11 o'clock at night. You know, it's all right," she said.

"I just opened myself up to be as accessible as I possibly could. So that's what I did to try and just be there, just to let my students know that I'm here to support you."

### **Students Are Not Broken**

Gordon said it is critical to realize that students are not broken.

"Increasingly, we're being treated as if we're clinicians who can do this very deep intervention with this notion that somehow all of our kids are broken. Our kids are not broken. They're resilient, wonderful, flexible young people. And so we have to lift up their assets," he said. "Now, you know, it doesn't mean they haven't experienced trauma, but it's how we heal from our trauma. Not that we had a trauma. It doesn't mean that, you know, that they've lost learning. Everybody keeps saying lost learning. We lost time to learn. We didn't lose the ability to learn."

Gordon said the community needs to send a message, particularly in communities like Cleveland that serve so many students in poverty, that resilience will win.

"There is going to be a renaissance coming out of this. And we have to enter with that attitude so that we bring their assets to the solution instead of always treating as if there's a new deficit that we're supposed to fix."

### **Testing and Mandates Not Needed Now**

Curtis stressed the importance of recognizing existing deficiencies and working to address them, including the digital divide.

"We recognize now that if learning is the real priority here, then what we don't need is testing and more testing, and we don't need more mandates. These are things that are an impediment to our ability to really engage our students in learning," he said.

### **Internet Access Needed**

Curtis said many students are in need of Wi-Fi in their homes.

### **PPE Equipment Needed**

Curtis also stressed the need for more PPE equipment donations to area schools.

### **Recognize That This is a Racial Justice Moment**

Gordon urged people to recognize that we have a unique opportunity to work for real and lasting change.

"As you're designing your solutions and as you're advocating and poking my system and pushing us to be different, keep challenging that we can come out of this as a more fair,

just and good system if we keep our eye on the bigger problem, which is the racial injustice that have been in this country longer than Covid. And using this moment to design toward something better. So keep innovating and innovate toward good.”