

Note: This column was first published in Crain's Cleveland in October, 2020. It is reshared here, with permission and updates.

Post-COVID-19 Cleveland plan starts with CSU

As civic, public sector and business leaders in Cleveland continue to assess the economic, social, fiscal and health impacts of the pandemic, it is increasingly clear that high-quality, low-cost public education will play a defining role in our collective future.



CSU President Harlan Sands

Whether considering short- or long-term changes in our post-COVID-19 economic and social norms — remote working environments, preventative health measures, travel practices, to name a few — the time for deciding how to create the inclusive kind of growth we need and best invest in building our future talent base is now.

This pandemic, unlike other crises we have faced, magnifies a confluence of economic and social disparities that will require a more thoughtful, creative and transformative way of thinking and collaboration. Any vision and blueprint for success begins with the transformational power of a public urban research institution to drive inclusive growth and innovation and build partnerships and pathways that remove barriers to social and economic mobility.

Why? Because city-centric, public research universities like Cleveland State University are where creative thought and intellectual capital "collide" to drive problem-solving in health care, industry and public policy — and create talent pathways for companies to grow.

A great example is the recently announced Cleveland Innovation District, in which CSU is a key partner. This \$565 million project has a \$110 million investment from JobsOhio.

This innovative collaboration will:

- Partner several key healthcare and educational institutions in Cleveland: Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, MetroHealth System, Cleveland State University and Case Western Reserve
- Create 20,000 jobs in Northeast Ohio in the next 10 years



- Rely on CSU to recruit, educate and graduate skilled talent for healthcare centers, emerging technologies, life sciences and data-intensive fields
- Have an estimated \$3 billion impact on the economy

In addition, our post-pandemic recovery can accelerate in Cleveland in several more ways:

1. First, invest in specific educational pipelines to increase the number of four-year degrees awarded – with specialty training geared to specific skills – where demand will be high in our new, post-COVID economy. Before the pandemic hit, Cleveland had more than 30,000 job postings in the health care sector alone, with more than 11,000 openings for registered nurses. Although some of that demand has temporarily slowed, current projections show significant current and future needs in urban and community health, public health, digital and connected medicine, information technology, biomedical engineering, and an entire host of health prevention and disease management support-related fields.

CSU already is looking at ways to help address these gaps.

With the Cleveland Innovation Project, CSU will increase number of 4-year degrees, certificates, adult learning opportunities and virtual education in 19 STEM fields to match employer demands.

Through "CSU 2.0," our ambitious and aspirational vision for our future, we are reimagining how we meet future needs of our community and the region by realigning our colleges and schools to leverage our strengths. Since 80 percent of our graduates choose to stay, work and live in Northeast Ohio after graduation, who is better equipped to "fuel" the number of higher education degrees, certificates, adult learning opportunities and virtual education programming that support current and future industry growth?



2. Make improving and sustaining the health of our community our No. 1 priority. Cleveland, with three major successful health systems in the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals and the MetroHealth System, and two large research universities in Case Western Reserve University and CSU, is one of the leading health care research and teaching hubs nationally. Nonetheless, more than half of Cleveland's children and more than 30 percent of its residents – triple the national rate – still live below the federal poverty line, and this drives poor health outcomes.

Cleveland residents are below national averages on most accepted and reported measures of health. Economic vitality and successfully attracting new industry depends on our communities being healthy. There is no better time for an integrated public health initiative – that focuses on education, training, solving the urban public health

challenges of Cleveland, and creating jobs around our new public health narrative – to finally and ultimately improve lives for all Clevelanders.

3. Collectively invest in re-educating and graduating the 1.5 million Ohioans – 315,000 who live in Northeast Ohio – who have some college education and no degree. Upgrading workforce skills – particularly important in times of economic downturns – leads to higher-paying jobs. Although various stand-alone certificate programs and specific training can pay short-term dividends, nothing equals a four-year degree as an economic "equalizer" for wealth disparity and prime driver in social mobility.

Creating talented graduates at scale transforms regional economies, draws companies in, and prevents industry and company "flight" when talent pools are thin. CSU, recently ranked by U.S News & World Report as the No. 1 public university in Ohio among "Top Performers on Social Mobility" and No. 119 nationally, is already a leader here, and will be looking to significantly expand, direct and streamline pathways to meaningful degrees that lead to jobs. Talent development is the key to Northeast Ohio's future.

4. Double down on partnerships that leverage our strengths and are specifically focused on broad-based talent recruitment, growth and development. Recently, focused conversations among local corporate, civic, educational and philanthropic leaders have led to several specific concrete commitments on public-private partnerships uniquely fitted to Cleveland.

One example: the Parker-Hannifin Living Learning Community at CSU, a residential experience that integrates academic support, leadership, training, mentorship and experiential learning. All 30 students from year one returned for their sophomore year – an extraordinary achievement that demonstrates our unique approach to "Engaged Learning" that changes lives.

Another: the partnership between CSU and Case Western Reserve University on the Internet of Things, a research collaborative funded by the Cleveland Foundation to position Cleveland as a leader in digital innovation. The initiative, which has already resulted in attracting top academic talent and the creation of research labs, was recently awarded additional funding that will further support the work impacting cutting-edge digital technology.

Over the next five to 10 years, we have a unique opportunity to define our own future here in Cleveland, and CSU stands ready to do its part: in promoting accessible, meaningful and affordable education, in producing workforce-ready graduates, in enhancing connections to good jobs, in leveraging intellectual capital to drive innovation and economic growth, and in building the kinds of public-private partnerships that give all of us confidence we can pull together, work together and make the necessary investments to move us forward.

There is no better time to start than now.

