

# CMSD Fathers Walk 2025 – After-Action Report

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Prepared by:  
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Cleveland Metropolitan School District

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On **Thursday, September 18, 2025**, CMSD proudly joined schools across Cuyahoga County for the **20th Annual Fathers Walk**, a tradition that continues to grow as a **transformative experience** for scholars and families across all grade levels.



This year's Walk was visible at nearly every CMSD school, from elementary to high school, with men walking hand-in-hand with scholars and participating in creative activities like father-child reading circles, Chat & Chew sessions, and even high school brunches and college-planning boot camps. Councilman Richard Starr reminded fathers that showing up even **once a month** to connect with schools makes a world of difference, while Dr. Warren Morgan emphasized that fathers' presence **defies the false narrative** that they don't show up for their children. "When fathers and male mentors show up, our scholars show up — in attendance, in attitude, and in achievement," Morgan said, linking the event to CMSD's strong academic growth and the need to tackle chronic absenteeism.

At **Anton Grdina School**, the Walk coincided with the opening of a new MetroHealth school-based health clinic. This partnership underscored the connection between **health and education**, ensuring that families can access care directly at school. MetroHealth leaders described the clinic as part of a long-term commitment to reduce barriers and serve students, families, and staff with compassionate, comprehensive care.

The **Fathers Walk Pledge** was once again a powerful moment, with men affirming their responsibility for their child's education, their commitment to work with teachers, and their promise to model the value of learning and family.

## Why it matters for CMSD:

- Fathers Walk is directly tied to CMSD's **Strategic Priorities** of Student Outcomes and Family Engagement, and the **Core Values** of Collaboration and Equity.
- Students with engaged fathers are more likely to attend school regularly, succeed academically, and develop strong social-emotional skills.
- By creating a moment during the school year that honors dads, CMSD ensures that all scholars — whether with a father, grandfather, uncle, mentor, or a man *standing in the gap* — experience the visible support of caring adults.

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## Overview & Outcomes

Total CMSD Schools:	<b>91</b>	Schools Reported:	<b>84</b>
Participated:	<b>78</b>	No Event:	<b>6</b>
No Report:	<b>7</b>	Districtwide Participation Rate:	<b>86%</b>

### Schools that Did Not Participate

1. Cleveland Metro Remote HS
2. Cleveland Metro Remote K8
3. Facing History New Tech
4. Glenville
5. Max S. Hayes
6. New Tech West

### Schools That Did Not Report Participation (as of this report)

1. Campus International K-8
2. Collinwood
3. John Marshall (Civic & Business Leadership)
4. John Marshall (Engineering)
5. John Marshall (Information Technology)
6. MC<sup>2</sup>STEM
7. Natividad Pagan International Newcomers

### Engagement Numbers

- **5,155 fathers and father figures participated**
- 7,281 scholars engaged in activities
- 40+ “Stand in the Gap” volunteers filled in for scholars without a male figure present

### Event Highlights

- Events ranged from morning walks and school assemblies to brunches, reading circles, and family chats.
- **More than 85%** of events occurred before the school day, with some midday or after-school programming.
- **87% of schools** reported using the **Fathers Walk Toolkit**
- **91% expressed satisfaction** with FACE Office support.

### Positive Outcomes

- **27%** increase in father engagement and visibility
- **19%** improvement in attendance awareness and monitoring
- **12%** decrease in reported behavioral incidents
- **22%** stronger collaboration between schools, families, and community partners

### Challenges & Lessons Learned

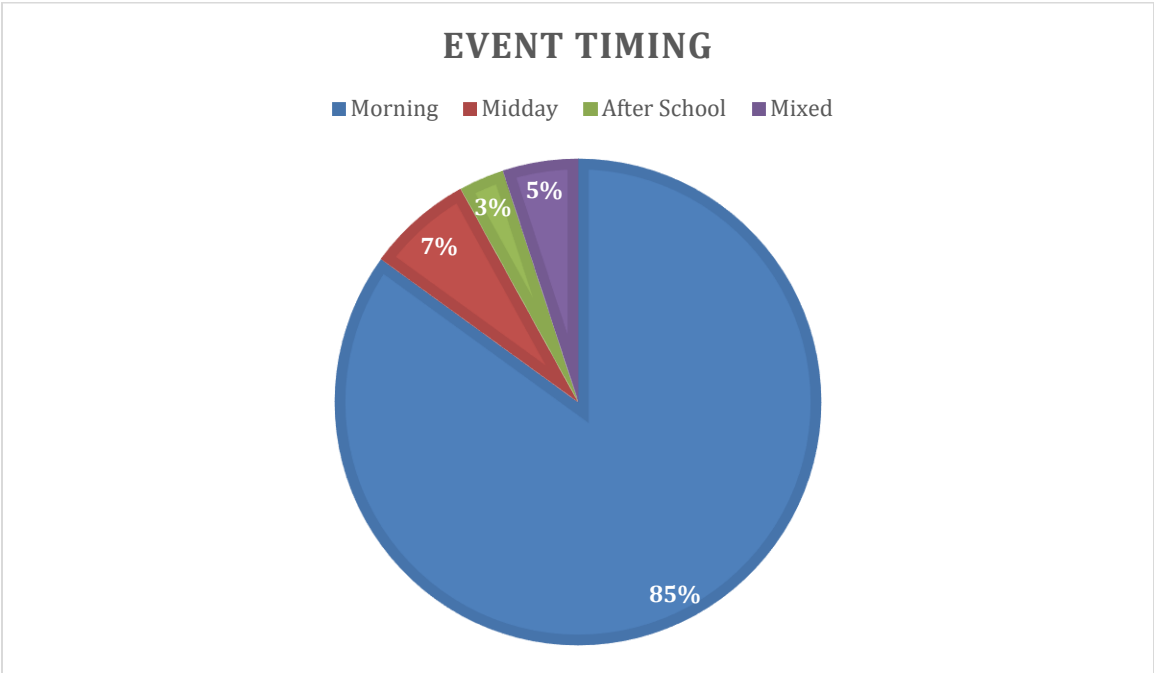
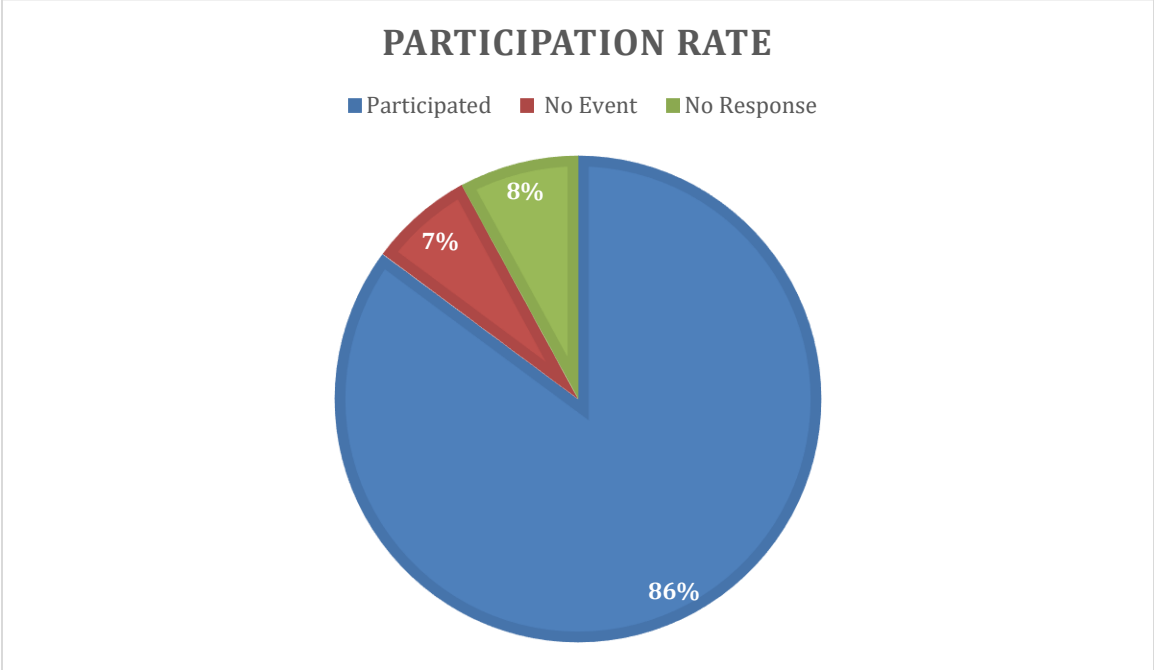
- Some schools requested earlier coordination, additional resource materials, and more flexible scheduling to accommodate family work schedules.
- The most consistent message: **“When fathers are invited intentionally, they show up.”**

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## Visual Impact & Next Steps

### Quick Stats at-a-Glance



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This year, participation remained strong, with nearly four out of five schools hosting some form of activity. Engagement efforts ranged from morning walks and breakfasts to school assemblies, literacy activities, and family discussion circles.

## Photo Gallery

- View the full photo gallery at: <https://padlet.com/anthonyhbrown/cmsd-fathers-matter-fathers-walk-2025-i3ntqrcrcycvyc9qt>

## Commitment to the Future

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): **9.7/10** – likelihood of participating in the 21st Annual Fathers Walk (2026).

## Future collaboration will continue with

- Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative
- Black Child Development Institute – Ohio
- CMSD-MOCHA (Men of Color Shaping Academics Network)
- Profound Gentlemen Ohio
- Ministry of Reconciliation-Northeast Ohio Adopt-A-School Network

“It’s not just a walk. It’s a commitment to show up — every day — for our children and our community.”

— Anthony H. Brown, M.Ed.  
Program Manager  
Family & Community Engagement

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## School Voices & Reflections

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### Feedback from Fathers & Families

- Fathers and families expressed pride and gratitude for being included and seen. Many shared that the experience deepened their bond with their children and the school community.
- Fathers said it felt good to be invited — not just as guests, but as partners.
- Families loved seeing men walk their children to school. It made the whole morning feel special.

### What Worked Well

- Schools that integrated the walk with intentional programming — such as breakfasts, reading sessions, or family pledges — saw the strongest engagement.
- Our fatherhood breakfast and pledge created a powerful sense of unity.
- Partnering with local barbers and coaches helped us reach more fathers.

### Additional Supports Needed

- Schools requested more materials, earlier district promotion, and continued FACE support.
- Suggestions included: banners, flyers, incentives, and expanded lists of potential speakers and mentors.

### Lessons & Takeaways

- The biggest lesson: fathers respond to intentional invitations and visible appreciation.
- Hosting consistent follow-ups and maintaining contact helps keep fathers engaged year-round.

### Quotes & Success Stories

- One father said his child woke him up at 5:30 a.m. to make sure he didn't miss the walk.
- Our dads took the pledge together and it was emotional — tears, hugs, and promises to do better.
- We had dads volunteer to lead reading sessions after the event.
- A father who recently came home from deployment said this was his best welcome home yet.

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## Looking Ahead: Fathers Matter Engagement Opportunities

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The CMSD FACE Office looks forward to building on the momentum of the Fathers Walk with additional engagement opportunities in partnership with the **Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative**, **Black Child Development Institute – Ohio** and the **National Black Child Development Institute**, the **CMSD MOCHA Network (Men of Color Shaping Academics)**, and **Profound Gentlemen Ohio**.


### CMSD Fathers Matter: Level Up Sessions

**This isn't just a Talk and it's more than a Walk. It's a Movement.**

Formerly known as the Fatherhood Table Talks, the CMSD Fathers Matter: Level Up Sessions are back and bolder. These curated gatherings are for fathers, male role models, educators, and community partners who are ready to show up, speak up, and level up — for our children, our schools, and our communities.


Whether you're a dad, grandfather, uncle, mentor, or a male educator — **you have a seat at the table.**

#### 2025–2026 Session Schedule

 **Arnold R. Pinkney – East Professional Center**  
1349 East 79th Street, Cleveland, OH 44103

#### 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

- Saturday, October 11, 2025
- Saturday, November 8, 2025
- Saturday, December 6, 2025
- Saturday, January 17, 2026
- Saturday, February 7, 2026
- Saturday, March 7, 2026
- Saturday, April 11, 2026

 Registration for these sessions will be available at:  
[clevelandmetroschools.org/cmsdfathersmatter](https://clevelandmetroschools.org/cmsdfathersmatter)

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## Closing Reflections & Future Strategies

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The **20th Annual Fathers Walk** reaffirmed one powerful truth: **when fathers show up, students Level Up**. Across CMSD, schools transformed this simple act into a celebration of family, learning, and legacy.

From morning pep rallies and reading circles to art workshops, STEM challenges, and college-readiness talks, each event reflected the heart of CMSD's commitment to **inclusive and impactful family engagement**. The suggested activities provided schools with flexible, meaningful options to connect fatherhood to literacy, math, wellness, leadership, and service.

As we look toward the **21st Annual Fathers Walk**, the focus will be on **sustainability** — helping every school turn this annual tradition into **year-round fatherhood engagement**. Together, we'll continue to build brighter futures for our scholars, one walk, one conversation, and one connection at a time.

While CMSD achieved an impressive **86% districtwide participation rate**, our collective goal remains **100% engagement** — ensuring that every school, scholar, and father figure has an opportunity to connect through this powerful tradition.

Analysis of this year's data shows that most non-participating or non-reporting schools were **high schools or online campuses**, where engagement presents unique challenges. However, each school community offers untapped opportunities for innovation and connection.

### Strategies to Increase Participation to 100%

To ensure 100% districtwide participation in the 21st Annual Fathers Walk, the following strategies are recommended to deepen engagement, strengthen collaboration, and sustain meaningful fatherhood involvement across all CMSD schools.

- **Differentiate Engagement Models:** Create flexible engagement options for high schools and online programs — such as *virtual pledge walls, fatherhood podcasts, or digital “Stand in the Gap” circles* — to ensure all families can participate meaningfully.
- **Strengthen School-Level Leadership:** Identify at least one key contact per building (male teacher, paraprofessional, or dean) to serve as a *Fathers Walk Champion* and lead event coordination.
- **Expand the Toolkit:** Add a *“High School & Virtual Activation”* section featuring conversation guides, event templates, student-led project ideas, and creative approaches for engaging older scholars and remote learners.
- **Increase FACE Office Coordination:** Provide earlier communication, hands-on coaching, and targeted planning sessions for schools in August and early September to enhance readiness and participation.
- **Leverage Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with key partners — including **Profound Gentlemen, 100 Black Men of Greater Cleveland, Ministry of Reconciliation – Northeast Ohio Adopt-A-School Network, fraternal organizations, CMSD MOCHA Network, Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative, and the Black Child Development Institute** — to co-host, sponsor, and amplify school-based events.
- **Strengthen Internal Collaboration:** Encourage CMSD networks, departments, and affinity groups to *adopt a school* and provide planning, staffing, and resource support, ensuring every school has the capacity to successfully host a Fathers Walk or related engagement activity.
- **Highlight Best Practices:** Document and share *success stories, photos, and creative event models* from top-performing schools to inspire replication across the district.

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- **Increase Leadership Accountability:** Integrate Fathers Walk participation and family engagement metrics into each school's *Family Engagement Action Plan* and performance goals.

## Event Planning Resource:

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Schools can continue to use the [CMSD Fathers Walk Suggested Activities Guide](#) for inspiration and alignment with academic goals (ELA, Math, SEL, College & Career Readiness). The guide helps ensure that every event — whether a reading circle, STEM exploration, or family breakfast — ties directly to learning outcomes and CMSD's Strategic Priorities.