In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, "If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much." We need to stand up for children with the sense of urgency that this issue demands. We need to stand up for children by taking a critical look at our schools and being honest about things that need to be changed.

By James W. Wade III

Students, teachers, clergy, parents and community leaders came together Thursday evening to celebrate the restoration of education cuts. This Education Assembly was convened by the Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC), a new coalition of religious congregations and community organizations from throughout Cuyahoga County working together to make the region a more just and prosperous place.

Over 850 people from the 40 religious congregations and community organizations that constitute Greater Cleveland Congregations gathered at Olivet Institutional Baptist Church to celebrate CTU President David Quolke, CMSD CEO Eric Gordon, and Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, for reaching an agreement that will restore cuts to early childhood education, high school transportation, summer school, athletics and other vital programs. The Cleveland Teachers Union and The CMSD Board are expected to ratify the agreement.

"We applaud CMSD and the Cleveland Teacher's Union for reaching a tentative deal that puts students first and restores these vital programs," says Rev. Jawanza Colvin, Pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church and co-chair of Greater Cleveland Congregations. "We look forward to beginning the pursuit of a long term strategy to ensure a quality education for all of our students."

"It is essential that the voices of the children and parents stay at the center of this public policy discussion," says Rev. Tracey Lind of Trinity Cathedral and GCC co-chair.

"GCC will commit ourselves to work with CMSD, CTU, Cuyahoga County, and the State of Ohio to reach a long-term budget solution that gives every child in the city access to an excellent education," says Rabbi Joshua Caruso, Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood, also a GCC co-chair. "We don't want to be back in this situation next year. We need a long-term solution."

Greater Cleveland Congregations is committed to working together to make Cuyahoga County a more just and prosperous place. GCC has identified Education, Jobs, Health Care, Criminal Justice, and Food Accessibility as its top priorities.

This Assembly was the first major public event for GCC since its founding Assembly June 6, at the Masonic Temple. Students, parents and community organizers gave personal testimony on how the cuts would affect them.

Rev. Gerald Cooper, pastor St. James AME Church presented the Action Steps going forward. "While this is a night of prayerful optimism and celebration, it must also be a night of renewed and determined commitment to the education of our young people," said Rev. Cooper.

"Tonight we need to stand up for children. But, because we are people of faith, we do not believe in one-night stands. We believe in long-term, committed relationships We need to be in this for the long haul and we need to be committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure that all of our children have access to a quality education. We need to stand up for children," he continued.

In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, "If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much." We need to stand up for children with the sense of urgency that this issue demands. We need to stand up for children by taking a critical look at our schools and being honest about things that need to be changed. We need to stand up for children by raising our voices to speak

truth to power. We need to stand up for children by lending our time, our energy and our resources to the cause of quality education for all children," stated Rev. Cooper.

Rabbi Caruso and Julie Silver, Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple Artist-in-Residence, closed the program.

After consulting thousands of Northeast Ohioans across GCC's diverse membership the group identified education, jobs, health care, criminal justice and food accessibility as its first priorities. GCC seeks to become the vehicle for a common prophetic voice to shape the major public policies affecting this region.

GCC is currently operating as a program of the Ohio Industrial Areas Foundation