



Education *for* Ohio's Future

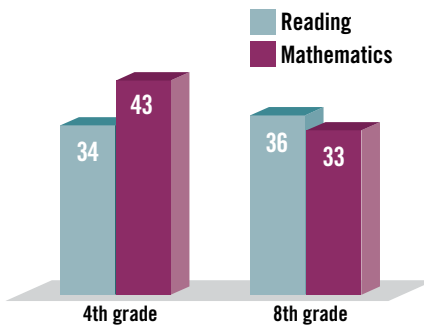
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY DECEMBER 2006

High Stakes for Ohio

As the new century unfolds, Ohio stands at a crossroads. Over the past 20 years, our state and local leaders have worked to improve student, school and system performance. We have seen progress in some areas, but our education system falls far short of preparing all students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Consider how far we still must go:

- **Failing to meet world-class standards.** Depending on the grade level and subject, between 68 percent and 89 percent of our students pass state tests in reading and mathematics. But on the more challenging National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is considered testing's gold standard and closer to international standards, only about one-third of our students meet the standard.
- **Continuing achievement gaps.** The persistent low achievement levels by minorities and low-income students remain a huge societal challenge; gaps range from about 20 to 40 percentage points on reading and math tests at every grade level.
- **Falling behind internationally.** Just as troubling, we are not keeping up internationally. "Above average" in the United States no longer is enough to sustain middle-class living standards, considering the globalization of the economy and the growing strength of other countries' K-12 school systems, which surpass us in many areas.
- **Trailing in higher education.** Currently, more than two-thirds of new jobs require some post-secondary education or training, but only 25 percent of Ohio's residents have a four-year degree. That places Ohio 38th nationally, while the United States ranks only 14th internationally on college graduation rates.

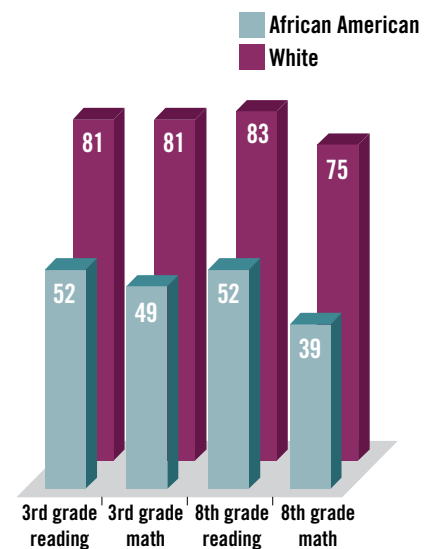
Few Ohio Students Meet World-Class Standards



Percentage proficient or above, 2005

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

Wide Achievement Gaps in Ohio



Percentage meeting standards on Ohio's achievement tests, 2006

Source: Ohio Department of Education

These data, and many examples like them, should serve as a wake-up call for anyone who cares about the state's future. We have a choice. We can continue to make incremental changes and take our chances that the rest of the industrialized world will not get too far ahead of us. Or we can make several high-impact changes to our school system and, in the process, meet our responsibilities to our children and grandchildren. The clock is ticking.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

State policy improvements in the following five areas will accelerate improved student learning, classroom by classroom, school by school and community by community, around our state.

MANDATE A SEAMLESS P-16 SYSTEM WITH CLEAR GOALS

A strong education system that prepares all students for the 21st century must have seamless transitions from preschool to higher education (P-16). But our system is fragmented, and too few students have access to quality preschool or affordable postsecondary education. We recommend the following:

1. The governor, Ohio General Assembly and other state policymakers must come together to create a master plan for Ohio's P-16 system that includes challenging goals and indicators capable of showing progress in the following critical areas:
 - Increasing the number of children in quality preschool and full-day kindergarten programs;
 - Increasing the number of students scoring proficient on NAEP;
 - Increasing the number of high school graduates prepared to do college-level work;
 - Improving two- and four-year college completion rates; and
 - Closing the achievement gap at every level of the system.
2. The governor and Ohio General Assembly must:
 - Give a restructured Partnership for Continued Learning the authority to review the P-16 plan and ensure progress is being made; and
 - Develop an integrated data system that includes information about preschool, K-12, higher education and workforce performance to guide decisions ... and allows us to track the progress of individual students.

CREATE WORLD-CLASS STANDARDS AND STRONGER ACCOUNTABILITY

Ohio's goals must be challenging enough and its supports effective enough so that all students are prepared for an increasingly competitive economy and diverse society. But our K-12 standards, curricula and tests are not yet aligned with the expectations of college and work, and our teachers do not have adequate tools to use the standards in their daily instruction. We recommend the following:

1. The Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Board of Regents must complete the alignment of the state's academic standards with the demands of college, 21st-century workforce skills and international standards. These more challenging expectations need to drive further expectations, instruction and assessment of Ohio's students.
2. The Ohio Department of Education, with adequate funding, must intensify its efforts to help improve chronically low-performing districts and schools, including:
 - Selectively developing curricula, model lessons, assessment tools and teacher professional development in the content areas where the data suggest student performance is weakest; and
 - Developing aggressive intervention strategies to more quickly and precisely assist districts and schools that are continually failing to meet performance targets and not improving at a significant rate.

GUARANTEE QUALITY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN EVERY CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL

Good teachers make the biggest difference in student success, and excellent principals are essential for attracting and keeping the best teachers. But we do not have enough quality teachers, particularly in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools and in high-need subject areas; our programs for preparing teachers and administrators are uneven; educator compensation is based on seniority and credentials, not performance; and too many promising state reforms have not yet affected local districts. We recommend the following:

1. The governor and Ohio General Assembly should review current policy and promote efforts with local school districts and unions to produce innovative collective bargaining agreements that allow greater flexibility in staffing; promote pay-for-performance strate-

gies based on well-researched evaluation criteria (including value-added analysis); and streamline processes to remove chronically ineffective educators.

2. The Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Board of Regents should conduct a comprehensive review of the state's teacher and administrator preparation programs, focused on improving admission standards, strengthening the curriculum content and emphasizing clinical experiences. This review should be used to determine future funding for schools of education.
3. The state Board of Education should fully implement the Educator Standards Board's new standards and professional development requirements for teachers and principals. It must ensure that the new requirements become part of local district practice, particularly in the areas of hiring, evaluation, promotion and professional development.
4. The Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Board of Regents, with sufficient funding, must intensify their efforts to ensure a more strategic distribution of high-quality teachers and principals in hard-to-staff rural and urban schools and in high-need subject areas. These efforts should include expanded quality alternative certification programs, local "grow-your-own" strategies and financial incentives.

ACCELERATE INNOVATIONS AND OPTIONS THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM

Students and families must have public school choices, both inside and outside the traditional public school system, because students cannot be prepared for an increasingly complex and competitive world with a one-size-fits-all approach. But our traditional public schools offer a limited menu of innovation, while our public community (charter) schools have no uniform performance standards, uneven accountability and an inequitable allocation of resources. We recommend the following:

1. The governor and Ohio General Assembly should expand innovation statewide by partnering with local districts to significantly increase quality options within public schools. This is particularly important in districts that have a signifi-

cant number of low-performing schools, where the state has a responsibility for intervening. The state should provide resources and waivers to create new schools within the school district to meet the varied needs of all students and their families. Schools, new and old, should reflect current research that supports high-quality and relevant curriculum; expanded forms of autonomy; the development of regional schools; the infusion of technology; a longer school day and school year; and accelerated options for combined high school and college coursework.

2. The Ohio Department of Education and state Board of Education must hold all community school sponsors accountable through performance contracts, and they should immediately shut down the schools that are consistently the lowest performers. These state organizations also should assume a greater oversight and enforcement role to ensure compliance and quality. Performance contracts should clearly spell out the academic achievement goals that schools must meet, create easy-to-understand indicators for measuring these goals, and hold schools accountable for effective financial stewardship and student success. Because accountable community schools offer an opportunity for innovation and choice, the Ohio Department of Education and state Board of Education should consider lifting the geographic restrictions on where charter schools can open; lifting the current cap on the number of permissible charter contracts; and providing greater financial support for charter schools particularly in the area of facilities.

ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING TIED TO RESULTS

Ensuring that all districts have sufficient resources is especially important now that all students are expected to meet higher standards. Despite improvements, Ohio's current funding system still does not — and cannot — ensure stability, equity or appropriate growth, and local districts are not accountable for spending tax dollars wisely. Ohio has discussed, debated and litigated our school funding system without acceptable resolution long enough; during this time, a generation of students has gone through the schools. We recommend the following:

EDUCATION TASK FORCE

This report was prepared by the Education Task Force of Ohio Grantmakers Forum to help grantmakers, policymakers and the public understand the current state of education in Ohio and consider policy recommendations.

Ronn Richard (*The Cleveland Foundation*) chaired the Education Task Force. Lisa Gray was project director. George E. Espy is president of OGF.

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*Steering Committee member

1. It is time for Ohio's elected leadership — the new governor and Ohio General Assembly — to fundamentally redesign the K–12 education funding system so that schools and districts have equitable, stable and predictable revenues. This will require a different mix of revenues, such as reworking property taxes; revisiting HB 920; or moving to other sources of revenue, such as sales and excise taxes.
2. Ohio policymakers must agree on a new definition of *adequate* funding that will answer the basic question: How much does it cost to educate students with different learning needs who attend school?
3. The state must increase its share of total education funding at each level of the P–16 system:
 - Early education — to ensure more low-income students are served;
 - K–12 — to guarantee equitable, stable and predictable resources; and
 - Higher education — to increase access and affordability.

Any increases must be tied to clear accountability and improved student results.
4. The governor and Ohio General Assembly should develop state policies to advance effective finance practices that promote the equitable and efficient use of resources, including the use of weighted student funding formulas to ensure that students with greater needs receive appropriate resources, cost sharing across districts and targeting funds to research-based practices.

GOING FORWARD TOGETHER

None of us can be satisfied knowing that our collective investment in public education is failing to equip our children with the skills they will need to thrive in the 21st century.

What's needed: State leadership. We encourage state education leaders to organize their response around the

five highest-leverage opportunities for change addressed by this report. Ohio Grantmakers Forum (OGF) will:

- Seek to establish and support an informal network of key state-level education stakeholders to encourage dialogue, information sharing and consensus building; and
- Consider funding research commissioned by this network.
- Monitor the progress that the state has made and issue a report in two years.

What's needed: More effective education grantmaking. To ensure that the nearly \$300 million in annual grants are deployed wisely, OGF will:

- Promote implementation of the Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking, outlined by Grantmakers in Education;
- Encourage that grantmaking decisions be aligned with the findings and recommendations of this report;
- Support education reform through policy advocacy, while observing the necessary governmental restrictions; and
- Facilitate awareness of and support for education reform through greater citizen and stakeholder engagement at the local and state levels.

What's needed: Community engagement. To facilitate the exchange of ideas and information and build support for sustainable local and state-level change, OGF will sponsor a series of conversations in cities and towns across the state. We will not simply ask participants to rubberstamp and ratify the recommendations in this report, but to weigh alternatives and help leaders set priorities.

For all audiences — OGF members, policymakers and the public — the essential first step is a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that Ohio faces. We hope this report contributes to that understanding.

OHIO GRANTMAKERS FORUM

Ohio Grantmakers Forum is an association of foundations, corporate contributions programs and other grantmaking organizations. Its mission is to provide leadership for organized philanthropy in Ohio and to enhance the ability of members to fulfill their charitable goals.

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