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BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

CREATING BREAKTHROUGH HIGH SCHOOLS IN OHIO

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The Center on Reinventing Public Education at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington engages in research and analysis aimed at developing focused, effective, and accountable schools and the systems that support them. The Center, established in 1993, seeks to inform community leaders, policymakers, school and school system leaders, and the research community.

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BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation asked attorneys at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) to explore legal and policy issues affecting high school reform and redesign efforts in a select number of states, including Ohio. As a major presence in funding and supporting redesigned high schools, the Gates Foundation has an obvious interest in these issues. To date, the Foundation has invested nearly $1.3 billion in efforts to improve education for all young people, including supporting the creation of more than 2,000 high-quality high schools in 41 states and the District of Columbia. The Foundation's investments in Ohio's school reform efforts are in excess of $60 million.

To identify legal, regulatory, and policy barriers to the creation and successful operation of redesigned high schools in Ohio, CRPE attorney Mitch Price interviewed high school principals, teachers, union officials, state and district policymakers, reform advocates, and others involved in high school redesign work. These interviews were structured to identify barriers to school reform, as perceived by educators on the front lines. Price then analyzed relevant laws and regulations to determine how valid these perceptions were. Both state and federal laws were analyzed, including the Ohio Revised Code and the federal *No Child Left Behind* statute. Collective bargaining issues, as well as policy statements by state education officials, also were examined.

Written by Donald Van Meter, an Ohio-based education policy and strategic communications consultant, this report presents the results of the analysis of perceived barriers to high school redesign and real impediments embedded in federal and state statutes and regulations, as well as in local district policies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Ohio today, high schools are squarely in reformers' sights—viewed increasingly as elements of a continuum of learning experiences that begins at birth and extends into college and throughout people's lives. Unlike the high school redesign agendas of other states—where the focus is on a select number of "break-the-mold" models (e.g., new stand-alone high schools, small conversion schools, and charter schools)—Ohio's reform agenda is broader and more diffuse. It reflects a blending of "out-of-the-box" thinking and more conventional strategies to make all high schools, including long-established, traditional high schools, work.

Very simply, Ohio's drive to create breakthrough high schools puts less emphasis on the models being used and more on the learning environments that state policymakers and educators are trying to create. The parameters of the reform agenda are defined by the 2004 recommendations of the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities, which urged the state of Ohio to:

- ✓ create more personalized learning environments and improve learning conditions for every student;
- ✓ ensure that all students have an opportunity to take a challenging curriculum that prepares them for success in postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship;
- ✓ significantly increase the number of students who graduate from high school by preventing students from dropping out and by "recovering" those who do leave before graduation and getting them back into school or an alternative program; and
- ✓ bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education by getting the P-12 system, colleges and universities, and adult workforce centers to work together to support the academic needs of all students.

While educators and state policy leaders have made substantial progress in implementing these recommendations, serious impediments have been encountered. Discussions with

Ohio educators and policy leaders reveal that formidable legal and public policy barriers have slowed progress in all four areas of the state's high school redesign agenda. These stakeholders believe that the actions that need to be taken in the face of these barriers can be grouped as follows:

Give new, "break-the-mold" schools and other innovative programs greater operational flexibility, while improving accountability measures for these innovative organizations and instructional programs.

- ✓ Grant "time-off-the-clock" accountability waivers to schools and districts during the first year of a high school transformation initiative.
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of the High Schools That Work model and other innovative instructional models in raising both academic achievement and career-related technical skills.
- ✓ Blend stepped-up accountability measures with the targeted removal of restrictions on the formation of high-quality charters, and ensure that charter schools receive more equitable funding.
- ✓ Devise additional measures of quality for alternative education programs to supplement the state's achievement tests as accountability tools.
- ✓ Continue to offer waivers from Carnegie Unit requirements as an option for school districts.
- ✓ Explore ways to make Ohio's teacher credentialing process more flexible for small, redesigned high schools.
- ✓ Restructure the state's accountability system to ensure that school districts have incentives to persist with students who take longer than four years to graduate, and to actively pursue and recover students who have left before earning a diploma.

Raise academic aspirations and expectations for all students, ensuring that they have an opportunity to take a challenging curriculum.

- ✓ Implement the Ohio Core curriculum, which the Ohio General Assembly enacted in December 2006, ensuring that this curriculum can be delivered not only in college-prep classes but also via career-technical programs, College Tech Prep programs, early college experiences, and other innovative delivery models.

- ✓ Review the curriculum within each of Ohio's 16 career and technical education (CTE) career fields to ensure that all technical content standards are fully aligned with the competencies that are needed for success in the workplace as well as with the state's academic content standards.

- ✓ Bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education, beginning with assurances that the state's K-12 academic standards are fully aligned with the admissions, placement, and academic requirements of postsecondary institutions.

Improve the quality of teaching and expand support services that are essential to student success.

- ✓ Undertake a comprehensive review and evaluation of Ohio's teacher-preparation programs, and find ways to streamline and improve the quality of both pre-service and in-service training for Ohio teachers.

- ✓ Work to improve teacher quality and review certification requirements for CTE teachers, and give schools more flexibility in utilizing high-quality teachers to improve the academic performance of CTE students.

- ✓ Provide more funding for e-learning and distance learning services that extend state-of-the-art instruction and professional development to rural and low-wealth school districts.

- ✓ Develop a statewide strategy for high school advisory and counseling programs to increase the number of high school graduates by preventing and recovering dropouts.

- ✓ Support and mobilize the capacity of Ohio's college access and success programs to ensure that all students receive high-quality advising and counseling services both within and outside the high school.

Ensure that public schools have the resources they need to succeed.

- ✓ Resolve Ohio's decades-long school funding crisis, develop resource strategies that target programs with the greatest likelihood of success, and ensure that funding is tied to results.

- ✓ Increase the state's share of total education funding and rework funding formulas that rely heavily on local property taxes to finance public education.

- ✓ Simplify and make the formulas that are used to allocate state resources for public education more transparent.

- ✓ Eliminate the flaws in funding mechanisms that are currently used to support charter schools, early college high schools, and other out-of-the-box models of school organization, as well as programs that deliver instruction in innovative ways.

It should be noted that not all of the encountered barriers are based in the law and/or inherited regulations. To the contrary, some reflect people's differing philosophies—a tension between competing approaches that serves as a reminder that one individual's barrier to positive reform can be someone else's shield against unwanted change. Other impediments reflect a lack of funding and/or difficulties in reallocating existing resources. Still other barriers are set in Ohio's strong and highly valued tradition of local control of public education, or in fundamental cultural or "mindset" differences that are reflected in low learning aspirations and expectations.

If creating breakthrough high schools in Ohio is about translating strategy into operational terms, the keys to success will be sharpening focus, aligning resources, and changing the way people do business. But that is not a simple task. As one of the people interviewed for this project said, "Change can be traumatic for people given the high-stakes environment we're in. It's one thing to try to redesign the train while it's moving; but to say you have to redesign

the train while it's moving *and* stay on schedule is something else. The redesign process is hard enough, but we say that you have to change in this high-stakes environment."

INTRODUCTION

For years, perhaps decades, education improvement advanced policy by policy, program by program, piece by piece. Reform initiatives came and went, soon replaced by new ones. Few reforms were sustained over time; fewer still had lasting impact. It is no wonder so many educators—as well as parents, employers, and community leaders—respond with skepticism whenever a new reform effort is launched.

Rarely have reformers had the wherewithal—or sometimes, the imagination—to tackle education improvement on a more fundamental, structural level. When they have, they often have lacked the broad support they needed to gain traction and to sustain change over time.

The same myopia that has led to so many piecemeal reforms is likely responsible for what generally has been, over the years, a typically linear approach to education reform. Start with early learning. Focus on elementary schools. Deal with the problem of middle schools. Tackle the challenges we see in our high schools. And then, finally, try to figure out how to connect what we expect our K-12 students to know and be able to do with the knowledge and skills required for success beyond high school, both in postsecondary education and the workplace.

A generation ago, school reformers were focused primarily on the early years—usually from kindergarten through the primary grades and into middle school. Today, the emphasis has begun to shift to the opposite end of the K-12 spectrum. For many, high school is the apex of a defining stage of their lives. It is a cultural icon marked by science projects, term papers, class plays, and homecoming games.

High school traditionally has represented an important coming of age: a completion point for some—a jumping off point for others. But for many young people, high school doesn't work. Many students—both high- and low-achieving—simply fall through the cracks. Rather than serving as a springboard to greater things, high school for many is an irrelevant, uninspiring alleyway to nowhere.

Fortunately, reformers today—here in Ohio and across the nation—are showing a heightened interest in high schools. Perhaps this is simply a long-overdue response to the glaring reality that too many young people are dropping out of school and not earning a diploma, and too many of those who do earn a diploma lack the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in life beyond high school. Perhaps it is a response to the powerful imperative of a knowledge economy where the market for jobs and talent is global and the expectations for success in college and careers are higher than ever before.

Whatever the case, high schools are squarely in reformers' sights—viewed increasingly not as discrete entities, but as elements of a continuum of learning experiences that begins at birth and extends into college and throughout people's lives. Instead of playing a terminal role that leads only to graduation, high schools provide a pathway to postsecondary opportunities and the workforce. And high schools' effectiveness is determined, in part, by what their students know and can do when they start high school.

The significance of this continuum of learning experiences is reflected throughout this report, which explores everything from ways to raise children's aspirations in the early years to strategies for ensuring that high school graduates are ready to succeed in higher education and beyond. Few organizations have a better understanding of this continuum than the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Driven by a vision of high schools built on rigor, relevance, and relationships, the Foundation has developed and is advancing high school transformation initiatives that are redefining large, impersonal, and ineffective high schools—relics of a different era and a different economy—to create engaging, dynamic learning environments structured to help all students graduate ready for college, careers, and citizenship.

In Ohio, in 2003, this commitment led the Foundation to provide funding for the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities. This task force was charged to help Ohio's education leaders rethink the rules, roles, and relationships that define the high school, and to give the State Board recommendations for the policy changes required to ensure that all Ohio students receive a high-quality education that gives them the knowledge and skills they will need for success beyond the classroom.

In November 2004, the task force presented its final report to the State Board. Some of its recommendations focused on the creation of more personalized learning environments, while others called for actions that would provide all students with the opportunity to take a more challenging curriculum. Other recommendations dealt exclusively with the prevention of dropouts, and with strategies for reconnecting with students who leave high school without graduating. Additionally, the task force called for actions designed to bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education.

Many of the task force's recommendations recognized the need for changes in state law—either to eliminate statutory barriers or to modify the prevailing regulatory environment—or to clarify perceived legal and policy impediments to change. Yet, the recommendations also reflected the advisory group's efforts to wrestle with the matter of roles—to understand what the state should do as opposed to what local school districts and schools, or even parents and the community, should do to "fix" Ohio's high schools.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report takes a fresh look at some of these issues with a tight focus on the legal and policy barriers that may stand in the way of creating breakthrough high schools in Ohio.

The first section explores the state's education landscape—that is, the economic, social, political, and historical realities that have and continue to shape education policies and practices in Ohio.

To give readers a deeper understanding of Ohio's high school reform agenda, the report then takes another look at the action recommendations advanced by the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools. The report identifies the plethora of reform options that Ohio's education policy leaders have, yet it also structures these options in the context of a comprehensive reform strategy.

Next, the report examines specific legal and policy barriers that need to be addressed and makes recommendations for action—steps that need to be taken to remove or mitigate identified barriers. While this discussion reflects some of the thinking of the State Board's task force, most of the comments and observations here are drawn from interviews conducted with a diverse group of educators, education policy leaders, and school reform advocates during the first half of 2006.

Noting that there are no quick fixes and that long-term agendas will be required to create Ohio's breakthrough high schools of the future, the final section makes a simple point: creative, outside-the-box thinking has little value if policymakers and educators do not work together to turn clever strategies into measurable results. It is all about execution, and Ohio's success in creating breakthrough high schools will be determined here.

"BREAKTHROUGH HIGH SCHOOLS" DEFINED

High school reform can take several forms. In some states, it is tightly focused on new approaches to school organization—"break-the-mold" models that offer students nontraditional learning experiences, often in unconventional settings. School redesign initiatives are reflected in the creation of **new, stand-alone high schools**, **conversion schools** *(large high schools that have been reconfigured into multiple small learning communities),* **charter schools** *(public schools operated pursuant to agreements, or "charters," between local boards of education or the state and charter school organizations—frequently exempt from certain state and/or local laws and regulations in return for promises of improved academic achievement), and* **early college high schools** *(small autonomous schools that blend high school and the first two years of college).*

To be sure, each of these nontraditional models of school redesign can be found in Ohio, and they are examined in this analysis. Yet, Ohio's high school redesign agenda is much broader and more diffuse than this. It reflects a blending of out-of-the-box thinking and more conventional strategies to make all high schools—including long-established, traditional high schools—work.

For the purposes of this report, "breakthrough high schools" puts less emphasis on the models being used and more on the learning environments that state policymakers and educators are trying to create. Consistent with the report of the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools, those learning environments have the following characteristics:

- *Every student receives a personalized education in a school where he or she is known by adults at the school; every student has an advocate; no student falls through the cracks; and parents, families, and communities are involved in the life of the school.*
- *Every student takes a challenging curriculum that is based on widely understood and accepted academic standards.*
- *Every student is taught this curriculum by teachers and school leaders who are well prepared, valued, and acknowledged for success.*
- *Every student receives the academic supports and tailored interventions he or she needs to achieve academic success—and learns in a high school that never gives up on students no matter where they are in their education.*
- *Every student demonstrates his or her knowledge before earning a diploma by passing either reliable tests or other equally rigorous demonstrations of achievement.*
- *Every student, regardless of his or her parents' wealth, ethnic background, or geographic location, receives an excellent education that instills a lifelong passion for learning.*

A FINAL COMMENT

Across Ohio, there is a strong and growing desire for schools to do a better job—for all students to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in the college classroom, careers, and citizenship.

For public officials and other education policy leaders, this is not a simple challenge—particularly not when academic standards are being raised and the expectations of what every student should know and be able to do are being widely debated, when parents and communities are voicing deep concerns about the performance of their schools, when the demands on teachers and school leaders are becoming more intense, when new accountability measures are being developed and applied, when pressures are mounting to train the knowledge workers who will fill the high-skill, high-wage jobs that will be used to measure Ohio's future prosperity, and when school districts are being squeezed by tightened revenue streams and rising costs of operations.

In a brief report of this nature, it is impossible to address all of these issues in detail. But for educators, parents, reform advocates, and policymakers alike, this report serves as a guide to action. It also stands as a reminder that reformers need to be bold. Raising the academic achievement of Ohio's children and young people, as well as the performance of the state's schools, is hard work. It is a shared responsibility, and it is not for the timid!

EXPLORING OHIO'S EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Before looking closely at specific legal and policy barriers to redesigning Ohio's high schools, it is instructive initially to step back and adopt a broader perspective on the environment in which education policy is developed in Ohio. A consideration of relevant economic, social, political, and historical realities will provide useful context as well as a deeper understanding of both the challenges and opportunities Ohio faces.

What follows, then, is a summary review of some key topographical features of Ohio's education landscape.

A TRADITION OF INVENTION AND INNOVATION

- Ohio has a long and rich tradition of invention and innovation that is reflected both literally and symbolically in its history as a frontier state. From Thomas Edison to the Wright Brothers to William Holmes McGuffey—whose famous Eclectic Reader was so widely used that it has been said to have shaped our country's moral principles and national character—Ohio has been home to a pioneering spirit and many trailblazing paths to discovery.

- Throughout Ohio's history, the state has been an innovation leader in agriculture, aviation, and manufacturing. Today, state leaders are working aggressively to create the conditions in which Ohio also can be a recognized leader in innovation and technology commercialization. With such a tradition as a backdrop—and an inspiration—there is no reason Ohio cannot also become a leader in innovation in the education arena.

FERTILE GROUND FOR SCHOOL CHOICE INITIATIVES

- Ohio is a national leader in educational innovation in the area of school choice. Some of today's more innovative approaches to education—e.g., charter schools (called community

schools in Ohio), e-schools, and publicly funded vouchers for use in private schools—have found in Ohio fertile ground for growth.

- Ohio has one of the largest charter school movements in the nation, serving more than 70,000 students in 300-plus schools.[1] The most recent state budget expanded Ohio's private-school voucher program; it now provides state-funded scholarships for tuition at private schools for up to 14,000 students trapped in persistently failing public schools.[2] More than 21,000 Ohio students are enrolled in e-schools.[3]

- The willingness in Ohio to explore alternative ways of delivering publicly funded K-12 education is the result of a strong and growing base of innovators, entrepreneurs, sympathetic policymakers and, perhaps most important, parents and families who are dissatisfied with traditional public school models.

AN ABIDING COMMITMENT TO LOCAL CONTROL

- Ohio has a strong and highly valued tradition of local control of public education through elected local boards of education. Indeed, few states have embraced the notion of local control—in education and other areas of governance—more than Ohio.

- Local control is much more than a simple legal or constitutional issue—it is a mindset that is deeply embedded in Ohio's sense of itself. State government retains the power to grant or withdraw local control of schools; however, over the years, policymakers have delegated many management prerogatives to local districts. In fact, Ohioans value local control so strongly that state legislators historically have been reluctant to take actions that might be viewed as impinging on this treasured value.

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1. Louann Bierlein Palmer, Michelle Godard Terrell, Bryan C. Hassel and C. Peter Svahn, *Turning the Corner to Quality: Policy Guidelines for Strengthening Ohio's Charter Schools*, Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and National Association of Charter School Authorizers, October 2006, p. 6.

2. Ohio Department of Education, *The Condition of Education in Ohio in 2005*, Ohio Department of Education, p. 48.

3. Turning the Corner to Quality, p. 32.

- For example, when Ohio sought to implement statewide academic content standards, a new regimen of high-stakes assessments, and statewide curriculum models, public outcry in response to these perceived challenges to local control became a rallying cry for reform opponents. In 2004, the Task Force on Quality High Schools urged the State Board of Education to develop multiple models of a core curriculum that lay out sequences of courses that are matched to the state's academic content standards, suggesting that this approach is more aligned with local-control values than the adoption of a statewide core curriculum.

- Local control is a major reason for much of the fragmentation that permeates not just public education but also many other areas of public activity in Ohio. It is a force that reformers must take seriously.

LOCAL CONTROL AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

School districts are an important part of Ohio's system of educational governance—and the state has a lot of them. In all, Ohio has 723 school districts, including 614 city, exempted village, and local school districts; 49 joint vocational districts; and 60 Educational Service Centers. In addition, it has 92 career-technical and adult education planning districts.

Ohio's historical commitment to district-based authority has deep roots, but this commitment may feel pressure from two directions in an innovation-friendly, reform-minded environment. On the one hand, school districts may exhibit a natural resistance to what they view as top-down pressure from new state-level policies designed to do things differently. On the other hand, school districts may respond less than enthusiastically to what they feel as bottom-up pressure from school-level reformers who seek to change, or be granted exemptions from, district-level policies and practices.

Given its focus on state-level legal and policy barriers, this report will not address district-level issues in any great detail. However, it should be acknowledged that these perceived top-down and bottom-up challenges to district-level authority will require increased flexibility—and imagination—from school districts.

TREMENDOUS DIVERSITY OF COMMUNITIES

- Ohio often is described as a state of "city states," similar to ancient Greek society. The state has eight major metropolitan areas—Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown—each containing a central city urban school district ringed by a belt of suburban school districts. These 8 metropolitan communities are surrounded by an additional 80 counties that are either rural or dominated by small towns. All told, Ohio has 614 school districts (city, exempted village, and local) comprising 8 major metropolitan districts, 21 additional "urban" districts, and 585 rural and suburban districts. Additionally, the state has 49 joint vocational school districts, 60 Educational Service Centers (formerly called county school districts), and 92 career-technical and adult education planning districts.

- Not surprisingly, this diverse infrastructure leads to substantial fragmentation in educational policy and practice. The politics associated with Ohio's geographical and demographical diversity potentially can have both positive and negative impacts on education reform efforts. On the one hand, there is a natural resistance to top-down, state-level initiatives. One-size-fits-all solutions typically are not embraced—or effective—in Ohio. On the other hand, the diversity that exists in Ohio provides a rich laboratory for innovative approaches to educational delivery and programming to the extent that they can be shown to be well-suited to a specific community's needs.

LOW ASPIRATIONS, LOW EXPECTATIONS

- Transforming Ohio's high schools is only part of the challenge education reformers will face in Ohio. They also will need to raise students', families', and communities' learning aspirations and expectations. Polling data suggest that many Ohioans do not recognize that the changing world—the rapid advance and application of technology, the impact of globalization, and the premium placed on innovation and knowledge creation—requires more rigorous and more extensive educational training. Many Ohioans simply do not believe that all students need to be prepared for some form of postsecondary education when they graduate from high school.

- These are not just populist ideas. An October 2006 editorial in *The Columbus Dispatch*, commenting on Ohio legislative leaders' plans to pass a bill establishing a more rigorous curriculum for the state's high school students, noted that the paper "favors a two-tier diploma system" that would allow non-college-bound students to graduate with "a good basic education."[4]

- Recent public opinion research confirms the prevalence of such attitudes. On the one hand, there appears to be growing support for adding rigor to the high school curriculum. For example, in a survey conducted in 2004 by the Task Force on Quality High Schools, fewer than half of those surveyed said advanced subject areas such as algebra, biology, and chemistry should be required for graduation.[5] In a 2006 survey sponsored by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, strong majorities of respondents said that Ohio should make four years of mathematics (including two years of algebra) and three years of science mandatory for all students.[6]

- On the other hand, large numbers of Ohioans continue to believe that it is not necessary to prepare all high school students for college. For example, 60 percent of respondents in the 2004 Task Force survey agreed that it is "essential" for all students to gain the knowledge necessary for college, and just 55 percent of respondents in the 2006 KnowledgeWorks survey indicated that high schools should aim to prepare all students for college (down from nearly 78 percent two years before). However, 71 percent of the KnowledgeWorks survey respondents indicated that all high school graduates should go to college or receive additional training—recognition, at least, of the need for higher levels of knowledge and skills to be successful in today's world.

- Performance data for Ohio parallel such attitudes. Ohio ranks 30th nationally for percentage of recent high school graduates who go to college, and 39th for percentage of the state's population with a bachelor's degree or higher.[7] Just one in four Ohio high school students

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4. Editorial, *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 20, 2006.

5. Ohio State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities, *High-Quality High Schools: Preparing All Students for Success in Postsecondary Education, Careers and Citizenship*, Ohio Department of Education, November 2004, p. 23.

6. KnowledgeWorks Foundation, *Ohio Education Matters: Public Priorities for the Future of Ohio Education*, Ohio: KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2006, pp. 7-8.

7. Ohio Board of Regents, *Ohio Rankings in Education, Income, K-12 Indicators, Higher Education Indicators, Tax Revenue and Higher Education Support*, prepared for the Ohio Governor's Commission on Higher Education & the Economy, August 2003, p. 2.

completes a "rigorous core curriculum," which is defined by the Ohio Board of Regents as four units each of English, mathematics, and social studies, with at least three units of science, including biology, chemistry, and physics.

- Clearly, Ohio's culture of low aspirations and low expectations must be addressed as part of any high school reform effort.

RECENT HISTORY OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORM

- During the last decade, Ohio emerged as a national leader in standards-based education reform. The state has established clear, high academic content standards in grades K-12 in English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, technology, foreign languages, and fine arts, as well as early learning content standards to help ensure that the state's youngest learners enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Ohio also now has a complete, integrated system of rigorous assessments aligned with the content standards, including diagnostic tests in grades K–2, achievement tests in grades 3–8, and the Ohio Graduation Tests, which assess knowledge and skills at a 10th-grade level.

- Concerns from some quarters about "teaching to the tests" linger, but steady improvements in student performance are difficult to ignore. Since 2000, the average of students' scores on all state tests has increased by more than 19 points.[8] And, on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Ohio students outperformed most of the nation, ranking among the top five states in 4th-grade reading and mathematics and 8th-grade reading, and among the top seven in 8th-grade mathematics.

- Standards-based reforms also are transforming the teaching profession in Ohio and building teachers' capacity to perform at the high levels required to achieve improved performance results throughout the system. Recent reforms have led to the development of professional teaching standards, improved teacher preparation and induction programs, a more rigorous teacher licensure system, and standards for teacher professional development that are aligned with the state's academic content standards.

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8. Ohio Department of Education, *2005-2006 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio,* Ohio Department of Education, p. 1.

- Any major new reform initiatives in Ohio will be evaluated within the context of the standards-based reforms of the past ten years. Within that context, one particular challenge may be overcoming a widespread belief that "we've already done reform" in Ohio. Teachers frequently complain of a continuing parade of "reforms du jour"; given the magnitude of Ohio's standards-based reform efforts, prospective reformers should anticipate a certain measure of resistance to any additional initiatives in the near future.

A PROTRACTED AND DIVISIVE SCHOOL FUNDING CRISIS

- Debate about the adequacy and equity of public school funding has dominated education policy discussions in Ohio for decades, with prolonged legal action dating back for nearly 20 years. Consistent with Ohio's tradition of local control of schools, property tax revenues account for approximately 50 percent of school funding. The reliance on local property taxes, which vary widely from one community to the next, explains the substantial funding inequities that still remain among school districts across Ohio—despite the fact that state aid to schools has increased by $2.2 billion, or 56 percent, since 1999,[9] and that an additional $4.84 billion in state funds have been spent on school facilities construction and renovation during that same time frame.[10]

- The continuing inequities, owing in part to a property tax "rollback" provision that is embedded in the Ohio Constitution,[11] keep funding adequacy at the forefront of education debates in the state. Reform initiatives inevitably generate "no more unfunded mandates" opposition, and the education establishment is dogged in responding to virtually any major proposed reform through a school funding lens.

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9. *The Taft Years, 1999–2006: Making Ohio a Better Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family,* available online at: http://www.ohiochannel.org/documents/taft_legacy/pdfs/complete_book.pdf, December 2006, p. 8.

10. *The Taft Years,* p. 11.

11. Ohio Constitution, Article XII, Section 2a.

AN EMERGING FOCUS ON P-16

- There is in Ohio a widely shared recognition that the state's current education system is a disjointed education pipeline. For every ten students who start high school in Ohio, seven will earn a high school diploma, five will enroll in some form of postsecondary education or career training, and fewer than three will complete a baccalaureate degree within ten years.

- Education and business leaders in Ohio have recognized the urgent need to increase the number of high school graduates who are college- and work-ready, the number of young people earning some level of postsecondary education degree, and the number of Ohioans prepared for a lifetime of learning. Consequently, there is in Ohio an emerging focus on P-16 education—on establishing a seamless, aligned, P-16 learning system that does a better job of preparing young people for success in an increasingly technical workplace.

- Toward that end, the Ohio Partnership for Continued Learning was launched in 2005. The Partnership is working to (a) align high school graduation requirements with college- and work-readiness standards; (b) increase the number of high school students taking a rigorous core curriculum; (c) create incentives and other methods to hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are college- and work-ready; and (d) create incentives for colleges and universities to improve their graduation rates.

- The Partnership's work has huge implications for high school redesign efforts in Ohio. For example, among its specific priorities are expanding the state's assessment and accountability system beyond 10th grade, aligning 11th- and 12th-grade content standards with college and work expectations, and aligning the Ohio Graduation Tests with the assessments colleges use to assign students to remedial courses.

A FINAL COMMENT

These various "environmental" factors work to create an education landscape in which efforts to transform Ohio's high schools on any significant scale will clearly be a challenge that must be described as "not for the timid."

DEFINING OHIO'S HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN AGENDA

For many years, Ohioans were satisfied to educate a relatively small percentage of their students very well, while a much larger percentage received an education that was, at best, mediocre. Those who received the best schooling were largely white and wealthy, while students of color and those who were poor routinely received an education that prepared them for little.

In establishing the Task Force on Quality High Schools, members of the State Board of Education said that had to change—in part because it was morally wrong to do otherwise, but also because states with a ready supply of well-educated, highly skilled citizens will be the winners in the 21st century's knowledge- and innovation-based economy.

The thinking that led to the creation of the Task Force is reflected in the State Board of Education's charge:

> Despite the recent success in improving the performance of Ohio's schools and the students they serve, the state's system of public education is being threatened on three fronts. First, there are too few schools where all students are succeeding—and where wide and unacceptable achievement gaps that separate students by race, ethnicity, income and geography have been closed.
>
> Second, a large number of the state's students are leaving high school, either through graduation or as dropouts, without acquiring the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education or the workplace. Third, unless teaching and learning improves substantially, a large number of Ohio's schools—particularly its high schools—will not make adequate yearly progress in student achievement, as required by federal law.[12]

12. *High-Quality High Schools*, p. 3.

For these reasons, the State Board asked the Task Force to address three core issues:

- How should the state ensure that all Ohio students receive the kind of personalized high school experience that will enable them to meet the state's high academic standards? What changes should be made in the fundamental nature of how Ohio high schools are organized and staffed to provide a more personalized and effective learning experience for students?

- What new relationships and institutional arrangements are needed to help students make the transition between middle school and high school and between high school and college? How can we better align all elements of Ohio's P-16 system to ensure that all students have opportunities to succeed?

- What new instructional strategies, relationships, and institutional arrangements should Ohio high schools use to blend students' academic and vocational studies? How can the state do a better job of incorporating career/technical training and work experience into students' high school experience, while ensuring that all students meet the state's high academic standards?[13]

The Task Force's answers to these questions are reflected in four sets of recommendations that define Ohio's high school reform agenda.[14] **The Task Force recommendations are as follows:**

Recommendation #1: *The state of Ohio should create more personalized learning environments and improve learning conditions for every student.*

Acknowledging that many young people crave a personalized approach that meets their needs and aspirations, the Task Force said the state should (1) accelerate the development of small learning communities; (2) encourage school districts to work with their communities to identify and promote best practices associated with internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, service learning projects, and similar applied learning opportunities; (3) fund expanded professional development opportunities for teachers to build their skills

13. *High-Quality High Schools*, p. 3.

14. *High-Quality High Schools*, pp. 12-32.

and improve their effectiveness; (4) assist school districts on a range of community engagement strategies to change the relationships between high schools and the communities they serve; and (5) capitalize on the capacity of community colleges to better prepare, recruit, retain, and renew career and technical education teachers.

Recommendation #2: *The state of Ohio should ensure that all students have an opportunity to take a challenging curriculum that prepares them for success in postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship.*

Here, the Task Force advanced a uniquely Ohio solution calling for multiple models of core curricula that blend rigorous coursework and hands-on technical training to ensure students learn the state's academic content standards. It also recommended that, whether state- or locally developed models are used, every school district be expected to offer a high school curriculum designed to ensure that all students are taught the state's academic content standards, and that the State Board of Education adopt a policy that allows school districts to seek waivers from the state's Carnegie Unit requirement for graduation.

The Task Force also called for "curriculum mapping" from the early grades through middle school, so that students who reach 9th grade are more likely to have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in high school. Finally, it encouraged the state to provide scholarship support for students who complete a set of courses that reflects the state's more challenging models of core curricula, and to consider alternative systems beyond the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) to assess whether students have met the state's academic content standards.

Recommendation #3: *The state of Ohio should significantly increase the number of students who graduate from high school by preventing students from dropping out and by "recovering" those who do leave before graduation and getting them back into school or an alternative program.*

To implement this recommendation, the Task Force called for a comprehensive literacy intervention initiative for all students whose literacy skills are below the proficient level, beginning in middle school and continuing through 9th grade. It also urged Ohio's education policy leaders to target state intervention dollars to school districts that demonstrate they have a plan for identifying and providing services to students before they enter the 9th grade.

Other implementing initiatives encouraged the state to (1) develop tools for providing every high school student who takes the 8th-grade Ohio Achievement Test or the OGT with a personalized workbook with detailed, timely information about the student's academic strengths and needs; (2) identify and promote "best practice" counseling and advisory programs; (3) provide technical assistance and financial support to school districts that develop innovative dropout recovery programs, including flexible-day schedules and work-study initiatives; and (4) create incentives for school districts to persist with students who take longer to graduate and to actively pursue and recover students who have left before earning a diploma.

Recommendation #4: *The state of Ohio should bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education by getting the P-12 system, colleges and universities, and adult workforce centers to work together to support the academic needs of all students.*

To implement this recommendation, the Task Force urged the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents to work together to identify and eliminate any gaps between high school expectations and college expectations. As part of this initiative, it called for (1) the development of low-stakes, online early assessments that students can take to find out whether they are ready for college or the workplace; (2) continued support for Ohio's Early College High School pilots; (3) the promotion of dual-enrollment programs that improve the transition between secondary and postsecondary education; and (4) the development of an integrated P-16 data system that promotes rigorous curriculum alignment and program collaboration involving high schools and Ohio's colleges and universities.

The implementation of these recommendations is a big job, and action already has begun on a number of fronts. Under the Ohio Department of Education's leadership, specific success indicators have been identified and initiatives have been structured around five "pressure points." These are: (1) transitions from middle school to high school; (2) grades 9 and 10; (3) the Ohio Graduation Tests, which are a bridge between the 10th and 11th grades; (4) grades 11 and 12; and (5) transitions from high school to postsecondary education and the workplace.

RIGOR, RELEVANCE, AND RELATIONSHIPS MUST BE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Integral to all four of the Task Force's recommendations is the challenge of ensuring that all students*—regardless of race, ethnicity, income, geography, disability status, or other factors—have access to challenging curricula and excellent instruction. The state's education policy leaders are committed to closing the achievement gap between the state's highest- and lowest-performing students. Yet, to their credit, they have made it clear that it is not enough to improve the collective performance of schools and school districts. Rather, meaningful reform requires actions that penetrate to the level of the individual student—that ensure that* every learner *receives the kind of instruction and benefits from the kind of curriculum that he or she needs to be successful.*

This commitment is reflected in the state's Schools of Promise *initiative, which celebrates schools that show good performance for all students regardless of wealth. It also can be seen in the state's* Schools of Distinction *program, which recognizes schools that have successfully challenged longstanding attitudes about what students identified as disabled should know and be expected to do.*

By shifting their focus from what teachers teach to what students learn, schools identified through these two initiatives are rewarded for providing all students *access to content-rich classrooms, developing school cultures where faculty and staff share responsibility for the success of* every student*, and using accountability and instruction data to improve learning. This focus also must be an integral part of all elements of Ohio's high school redesign agenda.*

In a February 2006 presentation to the State Board of Education's Quality High Schools Subcommittee, representatives from the Ohio Department of Education explained their focus on these five pressure points in the following way:

> By focusing on specific pressure points, we suggest strategies that we believe will have the most impact and will help create a seamless transition and progression through high school. Although we understand that one program, one strategy or one model will not meet the needs of all students, we are designing a system that when viewed comprehensively has the capacity to meet the needs of all students and gives local

> school districts multiple opportunities and strategies to ensure that every student graduates with the knowledge and skills he or she needs to succeed in college and the workplace and to be a good and productive citizen.

While substantial progress has been made, policymakers have encountered some serious impediments—some reflecting opposition and a lack of political will, and others based on a lack of funding and difficulties in reallocating existing resources. Still other impediments are rooted in legal and policy barriers that need to be addressed. That is the focus of the next section of this report.

IDENTIFYING AND REMOVING LEGAL AND POLICY BARRIERS

Change is always hard, and one of the realities of the 21st century is that schools and the people working in them are increasingly being asked to do things differently—either to improve their performance and the achievement of their students, or to respond to changes in the external environment. The education community is being called upon to change faster and more often. It is being pushed to move toward more rigorous curriculum requirements, redefine the "classroom," prepare and develop teachers in different ways, create new measures of student achievement, adopt data-driven accountability systems, and the list goes on.

For some, seizing—or sometimes even seeing—the opportunities embedded in these change initiatives is difficult. These skeptics and the bureaucracies of which they are a part avoid change, sometimes at all cost. In part, this resistance to change is embedded in experience. One administrator who was interviewed in the preparation of this report suggested that teachers have become cynical because they have seen a parade of reform models come and go. In his words: "New initiatives are faced with a simple question, 'Why should I invest in THIS program?'" Another interviewee explained this resistance in similar terms. "One reason for this parade of programs is that our funding problem is so severe that schools and school districts will chase after grants just to get the money," she said. "They're not necessarily committed to the reform program; they just want the money."

Other stakeholders, including many supporters of Ohio's high school redesign agenda, worry about the chaos that sometimes comes with change and about the trauma involved in "redesigning the train while it's moving." They caution about the "implementation dip"—that is, the drop-off of student and school performance during the implementation phase.

In contrast, some educators and other stakeholders can be virtually seduced by change. They see it in the most positive terms—almost as American as apple pie—and they define anything that stands in the way of change as an inconvenient barrier that needs to be removed.

Then there is a fourth group—those who are willing to embrace change, but would prefer to see it introduced through a series of incremental steps over time.

There are two important messages here. First, one individual's barrier to positive change can be someone else's shield against unwanted change. It is a matter of differing philosophies—a tension between competing approaches. As one educator told us, sometimes these differences become intractable, but the job of policymakers is to think about how to marry these perspectives and to resolve existing tensions.

Second, sometimes barriers to high school reform have nothing to do with the law; rather, they reflect fundamental cultural or "mindset" differences. They point to the more basic question: *How do we do school?* As one individual told us, "Right now in Ohio, we aren't really to the point where we are citing specific education code provisions that are barriers to reform. Instead, we see trends bubbling up or these tensions starting to appear. Our potential barriers are more qualitative—that is, differing philosophies and approaches—not specific provisions of the education code."

If the interviews conducted for this study are indicative, this sentiment runs deep in Ohio. In fact, one interviewee connected this tension to foundations' efforts to drive school reform: "Foundations often think that if they just give seed money, they can effect change. But there is a strong culture that runs counter to change. So if the foundation money dries up too soon—before mindsets and cultures change—the district will revert back to business as usual."

While acknowledging these cultural issues, this report will focus *primarily* on those barriers that are rooted

> *"Redesigning high school involves changing the culture of high school. It's an adaptive rather than merely a technical change. Most states are looking at high school reform as a technical challenge—for example, increasing Carnegie Unit requirements, focusing on traditional core curriculum requirements, making changes in code and regulations, and so on. However, others are starting to acknowledge that high school reform involves more than just simple, straightforward technical solutions."*

in the law or public policy. In these pages, we will draw on the interviews that have been conducted with representatives of Ohio's education community. This section will identify and analyze legal, regulatory, and policy barriers to creating the type of breakthrough high schools envisioned by the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools. For that purpose, this section will be structured around, but not limited to, the Task Force recommendations summarized in the previous section.

BARRIERS TO CREATING MORE PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND IMPROVING LEARNING CONDITIONS FOR EVERY STUDENT

In 2004, when the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools concluded its examination of the challenges and needs of high school education in Ohio, chief among its recommendations was the imperative to create more personalized learning environments and improve the conditions of learning for every student. To achieve those dual objectives, the Task Force suggested continuing the development of small learning communities, identifying and promoting best practices to provide applied learning experiences, funding expanded professional development opportunities for teachers to align classroom practice with new thinking about effective teaching and learning, and exploring a range of strategies to connect schools more meaningfully with their communities.

The unavoidable reality, however, is that there are many barriers to outside-the-box efforts to change traditional education models and provide more motivating, effective learning experiences for children. There are barriers to changing the way schools are organized, barriers to changing the ways in which instruction is delivered, and barriers to changing the way teachers are prepared, assigned, and supported. These barriers are not insurmountable, but they are not insignificant.

Small Learning Communities

In Ohio, one such outside-the-box effort is the **Ohio High School Transformation Initiative**, which aims to improve student achievement levels and graduation rates by transforming Ohio's large, anonymous, urban high schools into smaller, more personalized schools with a rigorous, relevant curriculum centered on relationships. This high school conversion initiative has established a solid presence on Ohio's education landscape. To date, it has opened 73 new small high schools on what formerly were 18 large, low-performing urban campuses. These small schools represent new, customer-focused, market-driven options for meeting students' interests and needs—an exciting new variation on the popular "school choice" theme.

Despite some encouraging signs of progress, efforts to create effective small learning communities across Ohio face a number of barriers:

- **Obstacles to effective staffing.** Small schools confront a variety of staffing issues. For example, in some districts, new schools are allowed to select their teachers; in others, seniority provisions in collective bargaining agreements do not allow input on staffing, so a new school may end up with teachers who are not well-suited for the school's philosophy or approach. Teachers in small schools often need to take on more preparations and teach more courses than their peers in traditional schools. Collective bargaining agreements can be a barrier on this point, as the discussion on page 45 of this report demonstrates. More generally, the transition from a single, large, comprehensive high school to several small schools may require specific staffing needs (e.g., staff with backgrounds and interests aligned with the school's particular theme or philosophy) or staffing levels that bring added costs.

- **Lack of support and understanding at the state level.** There is for some stakeholders a perceived lack of understanding at the state level regarding what the transition to small learning environments requires at the local level. For example, some complained that state policymakers make no provision for the extra time teachers need to collaborate regarding changes in school culture or changes in pedagogy. In addition, there may be a disconnect between financial compliance and education policy issues associated with high school redesign. As one interviewee explained, "One can imagine a state finance auditor telling a redesigned small school that its average class size is too small, or its teacher load is too light, strictly on a financial audit basis."

- **Inadequate capacity for managing change.** Some individuals interviewed for this project reported that school districts do not always have the capacity to make informed decisions in policy areas such as curriculum and instruction. In Ohio, school board members are not required to have any special training or background. In many districts, school boards can be influenced by whichever special interest groups are strongest and loudest. Voter turnout tends to be small in the local elections where school board members are elected, so the influence of special interest groups is magnified. Any progress being made through reform initiatives such as high school conversions can be overturned by a change in the make-up of the school board.

- **Impact of "the chaos of change."** Many interviewees talked about the difficulty and "chaos" of change and its impact on teacher and student performance, especially the phenomenon of performance dropping off in the initial year of implementation—the so-called "implementation dip." One person's anecdote is representative: "Last year [during the first year of the transformation], we were not effectively educating our students because we were going through chaos. We made some mistakes, and there was a lot of confusion. But this year is better. The state needs to understand that when you're trying to change a tradition and a structure that has existed for a hundred years, the first year will be chaotic."

  Sentiments such as this led many people to suggest that the state grant some kind of "accountability waiver" to schools and districts that are undergoing such a change—i.e., during the first year of reform, do not hold these schools to the same standard as a school that is not in chaos. Or, as one person put it, "Change can be traumatic for people given the high-stakes accountability environment we're in. It's one thing to try to redesign the train while it's moving; but to say you have to redesign the train while it's moving and stay on schedule is something else. The redesign process is hard enough, but we say that you have to change in this high-stakes environment."

- **Information Retrieval Numbers (IRNs).** Information Retrieval Numbers, or IRNs, are used to signify individual schools for data collection and reporting purposes. Small schools want separate IRNs for two major reasons: greater autonomy and greater accountability. With separate IRNs, each small school will have its own "report card" featuring information on graduation rates, test results, money spent on staffing, etc., and each school will be held accountable for meeting both state and federal performance targets. Some stakeholders reported that they have been unable to secure separate IRNs for their new small schools, while others reported no difficulty at all. In fact, all the Ohio Revised Code has to say about

IRNs is this: "'School building' means any individual public school as identified by the information retrieval number (IRN) within the discretion and authority of the board of education of a chartered school district."[15]

- **A culture that mistrusts and resists change.** Educators' discomfort with change—often seen in fundamental cultural and "mindset" differences—was highlighted in the early parts of this section, and it stands out as one of the barriers to the creation of small learning environments. Nowhere is this attitude better reflected than in school districts' response to the availability of waivers as a tool for facilitating change.

  One individual interviewed for this report observed that "the state will grant waivers for just about anything these days," but went on to explain that a lot of school districts do not go after waivers, "in part, perhaps, because as educators we don't feel comfortable with change. We didn't get into the field of education to be entrepreneurs."

  To be sure, there are other explanations, including the time-consuming administrative burden of applying for waivers yearly. In one stakeholder's words, "The time spent on waiver applications could be spent helping students learn math."

  Suggesting that school districts' caution is grounded in concerns about rationale and results, another interviewee said, "We want to encourage thoughtful change and want districts to do things that make sense, that are research-based and data-driven. We shouldn't do something different just for the sake of doing something different." Still others raised questions about the use of waivers as instruments of reform, suggesting that "policy by exception" is less credible and sustainable than "policy by design."

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that Ohio's "conversation" about the value of small learning communities has not ended. While many stakeholders are convinced that this organizational fix has merit and that it holds substantial promise for students and communities, others are not yet convinced. So educators, parents and families, and policymakers are continuing to talk; and it is premature to speculate about where this conversation will lead in the months and years to come.

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15. *Ohio Administrative Code,* sec. 3301-19-01(J).

But one conclusion can be drawn from this conversation about the value of small learning communities: to focus on matters of size and structure is not enough. Meaningful reform must reach far beyond this organizational fix. It must have consequences for what students are expected to know and be able to do, how they are being taught and by whom, and what supports are being provided to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn at higher levels.

Charter Schools

Charter schools (known as "community schools" under Ohio law) are another example of innovative efforts to transform conventional thinking about public schools. Ohio has one of the largest charter school programs in the nation. Launched by enacting legislation in 1997, the state's charter school program has grown from 15 schools serving more than 2,000 students in 1998-99 to more than 300 schools serving more than 70,000 students in 2005-06.[16] At the same time, charter schools have been a lightning rod for criticism and a source of great controversy in Ohio.

Some charter school opponents object on the grounds that charter schools are bad public policy—an unjustified siphoning off of taxpayers' (and traditional public schools') money that has the effect of creating an illegal separate system of public education. Other opponents base their objections on the grounds that too many charter schools are performing at low levels as measured by students' achievement or fiscal problems—and that diverting money to charter schools is a waste of limited state resources. In October 2006, the Ohio Supreme Court resolved the first of the two grounds for objection by ruling that the state's charter school policy passes Constitutional muster.[17]

Despite this judicial affirmation, there are barriers to expanding and maximizing charter schools' potential in Ohio for improving student achievement:

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16. Office of Community Schools, *2005-2006 Annual Report on Ohio Community Schools*, Office of Community Schools, Ohio Department of Education, p. 29.

17. *State ex rel. Ohio Congress of Parents & Teachers v. State Bd. of Edn.*, 111 Ohio St.3d 568, 2006.

- **Inequitable operational funding and economies of scale.** According to a 2005 study, the state's charter schools on average receive 31 percent less per-pupil funding from the state than traditional district schools.[18] Small charter schools have a hard time when limited to the per-pupil funding amount. This is particularly true for high schools, because they need to offer a range of courses but cannot count on having 25 students in every class (and are thus limited in terms of staffing and course offerings).

- **No facilities funding and huge start-up challenges.** Charter schools do not receive any direct funding from the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC). There is an OSFC-administered loan guarantee fund for charter schools, but this is an enhancement opportunity designed more for existing schools than for emerging schools. OSFC loan funding is based on enrollment projections, and the funding model assumes a school of a particular size (e.g., a 300-student school). Because charter schools are schools of choice, it is difficult for OSFC to do an initial estimate of charter school enrollment for funding purposes.

  Furthermore, to receive OSFC funding, a charter school must agree to OSFC project management requirements, as well as to the OSFC enrollment model—which can be problematic for stand-alone, innovative pilot models. While traditional high schools can reliably predict year-by-year enrollment levels—using current population trends and known catchment areas—charter school enrollments can vary widely from year to year, particularly during their start-up years. For these innovative organizations, traditional enrollment models simply do not work.

  Finally, there are issues regarding the propriety of using public money for charter schools, some of which are operated by private entities, as well as questions regarding ownership of the assets in these cases. The bottom line is that start-up costs for new charter schools are a significant barrier, and both state and federal facilities regulations make it difficult for districts to pursue creative approaches to facilities funding. This is a particular challenge for high schools, because they typically have greater facilities needs than elementary schools.

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18. Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *Charter School Funding: Inequity's Next Frontier*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Progress Analytics Institute and Public Impact, August 2005, p. 106.

- **Caps and other limitations.** State policymakers have enacted a number of restrictions on the growth of charter schools in Ohio.[19] There is a complex, multi-faceted series of caps on the number of charters in the state, and there are limitations on where new charter schools can be opened. Currently, new charter schools that are permitted under the state cap may be located only in Academic Watch or Academic Emergency school districts, as rated by the state's accountability system.

- **Limitations of current state assessments.** Currently, the state assessment system offers a snapshot of where a student is at a given point in time, which may not provide an accurate picture of charter school quality. For example, many charter schools limit their mission and focus to serving at-risk students (e.g., dropout recovery students), many of whom come to a charter school from failing situations elsewhere. The charter school may have had these students for only a few months at the time of state assessments, so the performance of these students may not be an accurate indicator of how the charter school is doing, but rather an indicator of how poorly prepared the students were coming into the school.

  In fairness, it should be acknowledged that some of these conditions also apply to traditional public schools; and for all of these schools, soon-to-be implemented value-added assessments will add a useful new dimension. In the meantime, as one stakeholder put it, "How do you allow for creativity and innovation while still being able to measure quality according to some type of standards-based measurement?"

- **Political barriers.** In some communities, there has been significant reluctance by the educational establishment to use charter schools as part of the redesign strategy because of the politics surrounding the charter school issue.

Applied Learning: The Case of Career and Technical Education

Changing the ways in which instruction is delivered presents similar challenges. Nowhere is this clearer than in the field of career and technical education (CTE)—and more broadly, in the area of providing students with more applied learning opportunities outside the classroom.

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19. *Ohio Revised Code,* sec. 3314.013 and sec. 3314.02.

There is a certain irony here in that many of the high school redesign strategies explored in this report appear to be based on practices long accepted in vocational education. For decades, vocational education's traditional delivery systems have emphasized standards-based instruction and contextual learning. They have been structured around small learning communities designed for students with common interests, not unlike today's emerging career academies.

As one of our interviewees observed, traditional vocational education, as the forerunner of today's CTE programs, put a priority on effective advisory systems and mentoring. They were pioneers in community engagement, project-based learning, and the provision of instructional supports, as well as early, regular, and authentic assessments. In fact, some of the physical design and classroom structures found in new high school models are rooted in historical approaches to vocational education.

But something *has* changed. According to one interviewee, "Traditionally, vocational education content operated at the fringe of education. Unlike the core academic content areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies, vocational content was developed by practitioners from the business world with varying degrees of 'educational experience.' And since content tended to be task-oriented and work-related, many in the education profession viewed vocational education as skill training rather than knowledge attainment."

That perspective is being changed, and a new attitude about career and technical education is reflected in the recommendations of the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools. The Task Force urged the State Board to:

- ✓ Structure CTE programs around already-proven instructional models, such as High Schools That Work and College Tech Prep, which feature quality college and career readiness curricula and emphasize the need for learning beyond high school.

- ✓ Strengthen the relationship between CTE programs and the state's adult workforce education service centers, as well as the state's two-year public colleges, university branch campuses, and other regional workforce development entities.

- ✓ Make greater use of industry-based testing and certification systems to ensure that students acquire the skills that will make them fully competitive for real jobs.

- ✓ Develop a statewide system for certifying high school CTE programs that contribute to the achievement of Ohio's academic and technical standards; prepare students for postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship; and align model core curricula to current and future workforce development needs.[20]

The Task Force also recommended that the Ohio Department of Education:

- ✓ Encourage school districts to work with their communities to identify and promote best practices associated with internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, service learning projects, and similar applied learning experiences that help students see the relevance of their high school education, just as they give students alternative ways to meet the state's rigorous academic standards.

- ✓ Develop a statewide policy that allows students to earn required (not just elective) credits for hands-on, vocational learning experiences.

- ✓ Work with the Ohio Board of Regents to ensure that new course designs for nontraditional learning experiences meet college and university standards, and that institutions of higher education accept community-connected curriculum design and implementation.

- ✓ Capitalize on the capacity of two-year community colleges to better prepare, recruit, retain, and renew CTE teachers to ensure that all students have teachers who know their subjects and know how to teach them.

- ✓ Assist high schools, through the state's regional service centers, in the recruitment and training of people from the community to provide and support internships, mentorships, and other applied learning experiences, with assurances that these volunteers acquire a full understanding of Ohio's expectations for all students as they are articulated in the state's academic content standards.[21]

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20. *High-Quality High Schools,* p. 21.

21. *High-Quality High Schools,* pp. 14–16.

These are all worthy purposes, but not all of them are supported by stakeholders who were interviewed for this report. For one thing, there is a tension between differing philosophies, with some advocating for high schools structured around a rigorous core curriculum and rooted in Carnegie Units, while others point to the need for innovative, interdisciplinary approaches that include applied learning outside the classroom.

This tension was reflected in several comments. One interviewee said, "We're being more and more specific regarding course credits and teacher certification, while at the same time we're emphasizing innovative approaches that involve interdisciplinary courses, learning in the community and the like." A second stakeholder was more direct: "If we increase the number of Carnegie Units required for the core curriculum, then there will be less time and opportunity for applied learning outside the classroom." (It should be noted that the Ohio Core initiative, which will be discussed in the next section of this report, establishes a more rigorous core curriculum as the "default standard" for the state's high school students, but it does not increase the number of Carnegie Units required for graduation, nor does it preclude applied learning opportunities.)

Yet, not all of the barriers to change are matters of philosophy. Some involve money, since funding typically follows the student when he or she participates in a CTE program. For this reason, traditional high schools have little or no incentive to send students elsewhere, unless they are dealing with the most troubled students whose special needs drive up the cost of educating them. So there is often a tension between what is in the best interests of students—both academically and personally—and what is in the best financial interests of the school district.

Given the added costs of facilities, technology, and personalized instruction, CTE programs often cost more. But the issue here is not just money. Several of our stakeholders confirmed that home schools do not want to send their best and brightest students to an affiliated CTE program. Doing so changes the culture of the school; even though the students' test results remain credited to the home school, allowing them to participate in a CTE program limits schools' ability to offer advanced courses. So their solution seems clear: Hold on to the best and brightest, while sending the most troubled and difficult-to-teach students elsewhere.

Changing the Teaching Profession

No matter how much energy is focused on changing the way schools are organized or instruction is delivered, such efforts will fail to reap the desired improvements in student learning if policymakers do not allocate equal attention to improving the way Ohio prepares and supports its teachers in the classroom.

The most critical variable impacting students' academic performance is teacher quality. Acknowledging that dynamic creates a powerful imperative for doing whatever it takes to get a knowledgeable, skilled, and caring teacher into every classroom. And "whatever it takes" means looking closely at all stages of the spectrum of experiences that shape the teaching profession, from teacher preparation and licensure to induction experiences and teacher professional development. It also requires an honest discussion of the realities of collective bargaining.

To Ohio's credit, state leaders have recognized the need to improve the quality of teaching and have begun to take action. In 2001, Governor Taft convened a **Commission on Teaching Success**, charging the group to develop recommendations for building the capacity of Ohio teachers to perform at consistently high levels. The Commission issued a series of recommendations dealing with teacher preparation, licensing, recruitment and retention, and professional development, many of which were enacted into law with the signing of Senate Bill 2 in March 2004.[22]

One of the major provisions of the legislation was the creation of an **Educator Standards Board**, which is working to promote quality, professionalism, and accountability in the teaching profession. Chief among the Board's early achievements has been the development of professional educator standards for teachers at all stages of their careers, as well as standards for teacher professional development.

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22. Commission on Teaching Success, *Achieving More: Quality Teaching, School Leadership, Student Success*, Ohio Governor's Commission on Teaching Success, February 2003.

On a separate track, the **Teacher Quality Partnership**, a consortium of Ohio's 50 colleges and universities that offer teacher preparation programs, was launched in 2003. The Partnership is in the midst of a five-year research study designed to identify how the preparation and development of new teachers affect their success in the classroom as measured by the academic performance of their students.

While these and other efforts represent welcome steps toward improving the quality of teaching in Ohio's schools, much more work needs to be done to address issues of special interest to reformers leading high school redesign efforts in the state. Barriers to changing the teaching profession can be found in all three areas of teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development:

- **Teacher preparation.** As noted above, Ohio has 50 colleges and universities—public and private—that offer teacher preparation programs. The quality, depth, and effectiveness of those programs vary from one institution to another, but currently Ohio lacks any reliable body of data to demonstrate linkages between specific approaches to teacher preparation and development, and to subsequent levels of student academic performance. This knowledge gap is a barrier in its own right and is one reason the work of the Teacher Quality Partnership is welcome.

  Stakeholders interviewed for this project noted additional shortcomings in existing teacher preparation programs generally. One individual observed that current programs do not prepare teachers to deal with systems change and systemic reform: "We tend to prepare teachers as independent contractors rather than as people who will be part of a larger system. Our teacher and administrator preparation programs and professional development must be aligned with where we want the system to go."

  Others suggested that teachers do not receive adequate training for how to work collaboratively—both as teachers, in interdisciplinary teaching teams, and as school leaders, in navigating the issues that arise as a

> *"Our teacher training programs don't prepare teachers to deal with system change and systemic reform. We . . . prepare teachers as independent contractors rather than as people who will be part of a larger system."*

result of the conversion of one large comprehensive high school to several smaller schools. Ohio law requires every school to have a principal, but many good teachers do not want to become principals, for a variety of reasons ranging from inadequate financial incentives to do so, to a lack of interest in administrative duties, to a simple desire to stay in the classroom and work directly with students.

- **Teacher licensure.** Ohio's requirement that a teacher be certified in the subjects he or she teaches is viewed by some school reformers as a barrier to innovative efforts to provide more personalized, applied learning experiences and interdisciplinary approaches to instruction. From their perspective, the pedagogical rationale for "generalist" or interdisciplinary teachers is compelling.

  Yet, Ohio's policy reflects an emerging consensus—grounded in research that documents the value of subject matter specialization—on the question of content-area preparation. Most national studies of teacher quality use the academic major as an essential benchmark for teacher quality. And, in many countries around the globe, a discipline-specific approach to teacher credentialing extends into the middle grades and as far down as grade 4.

  The merits of the policy notwithstanding, it still serves as an obstacle for small schools that often require their teachers to take on broader teaching responsibilities than teachers in larger, traditional high schools. Sometimes this is a function of a school's interdisciplinary approach to providing instruction, while other times it may simply be a function of a smaller team of teachers and fewer specialists. More broadly, a number of individuals interviewed for this report expressed a desire for, in one person's words, "alternative teacher licensure provisions that would allow greater flexibility in staffing."

  To Ohio's credit, the state has taken action to reflect and respond to the growing interest in interdisciplinary approaches to instruction. An "integrated" teaching license is now available in each of the four major content areas—science, mathematics, language arts, and social studies. Teachers holding these integrated licenses can teach interdisciplinary courses or specific courses within the broad field. Additionally, in response to a recommendation from Governor Bob Taft's Commission on Teaching Success, Ohio implemented a **Credential Review Board** in 2005. Mid-career professionals, native language speakers, and others who clearly have the necessary expertise but do not fit neatly within the state's licensure standards are able to present their credentials to the Credential Review Board for consideration.

Finally, the federal *No Child Left Behind* requirement for a "highly qualified" teacher in every core subject classroom is a factor; but as several individuals noted, that is no guarantee of successful learning outcomes. One person observed, "'Highly qualified' does not always mean 'highly effective.'" In fact, as another person pointed out, educational best practices might suggest one model, such as using a team teaching approach with a group of students, but state and federal regulations often inhibit a school's ability to use such innovations. As one interviewee put it, "How do you expect us to create really different-looking high schools given the tightened traditional requirements?"

> *"The State has tightened teacher licensure requirements, but some districts are asking, 'How do you expect us to create a really different-looking school given the tightened traditional requirements?'"*

Ultimately Ohio's policymakers must determine how best to navigate the tricky waters at the confluence of the importance of content-area specialization for effective teaching, the pedagogical rationale for interdisciplinary approaches to instruction, and the value of increased personalization that is at the core of the small-schools philosophy. The bottom-line question policymakers must consider is akin to the central question they have asked with regard to charter schools: Is it worth relaxing certain regulatory requirements (in this case, teacher certification requirements) to foster greater innovation in school design and instructional delivery?

- **Professional development.** The key to implementing effective professional development is to view it as an ongoing process linked to daily practice, rather than a set of isolated activities. Effective professional development must be approached systematically, creating a continuous and reflective program that involves educators in planning, implementing, and sustaining professional growth experiences. The two biggest barriers to providing the high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is so critical to improving teacher quality—whether in a traditional high school or a redesigned high school—are time and money. State Carnegie Unit and seat-time requirements, as well as local collective bargaining agreements, make it difficult to carve out the necessary time for effective professional development. And when budgets are limited, professional development funds often are among the first places schools look to cut costs.

Collective Bargaining Issues

One other area that must be included in any discussion of changing the teaching profession is **collective bargaining**, which often presents local issues—not state issues—that become barriers to reform. Views of the impact collective bargaining has on such efforts are wide-ranging. At one end of the spectrum is the view that "union contracts are sacrosanct in Ohio, so if you don't have a good working relationship with the teachers union, you won't get things done." At the other end is the perspective expressed by one district leader who observed, "We look at collective bargaining as a tool for change and reform."

Somewhere in the middle is the view of collective bargaining agreements as "double-edged swords" that hinder reforms but also "keep the central office in check" through the threat of grievance procedures. However, many respondents shared the pragmatic view expressed by one stakeholder who observed, "I have worked in states without collective bargaining, and states with strong collective bargaining laws—and either way, a good leader makes sure that labor is with them, whether forced to by law or not."

Some interviewees indicated that Ohio allows school districts a great deal of autonomy in negotiating collective bargaining agreements, noting that such agreements can supersede certain provisions of state law. Traditionally, bargaining in Ohio is limited to the impact or effect of policies on wages, work hours, and terms and conditions of employment, rather than on the impact of policies on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. "Unions are used to talking about the impact or effect of certain policies, but not talking about the wisdom of the policies themselves," explained one stakeholder. "So there is often a lack of experience on the part of the unions when it comes to collaborating and partnering with districts in some of the policy issues related to the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative." Another person noted, "We're using an industrial model of collective bargaining in education. Teachers are professionals, and yet they must bargain like an industrial labor union."

> *"Ohio places a huge amount of autonomy on local districts to bargain—for example, provisions of collective bargaining agreements can supersede certain provisions of state law."*

> *"Collective bargaining provisions can inhibit flexibility, but some districts use this as an excuse for an underlying unwillingness to change."*

The current collective bargaining model makes it very difficult to transform the teaching profession through innovative uses of teacher evaluation and compensation to improve student performance. Under collective bargaining, the most effective teachers—those who are most successful at raising student achievement—are treated exactly the same as those teachers who are not effective in the classroom. As one interviewee put it, "A collective bargaining agreement can end up being very obstructionist from the perspective of an innovative school because everyone gets treated the same." It bears noting, however, that some small headway is being made in Ohio on this front. With local teachers union support, four of the state's eight major urban school districts (Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Toledo) have agreed to permit alternative compensation systems that are at least partially based on student performance.

In functional terms, collective bargaining agreements have their greatest impact in the areas of teacher assignments and scheduling. For example, principals in redesigned high schools need greater freedom in making teacher assignments than traditional collective bargaining agreements typically allow, where assignments often are based simply on teacher seniority. According to one stakeholder, "We are trying to make sure that we have the right teachers in the right places in order to best help students." Unfortunately, collective bargaining agreements that limit scheduling and assignment flexibility are a barrier to achieving such an objective. As noted previously, in some districts, new schools are allowed to select their teachers; in others, seniority provisions in collective bargaining agreements do not allow input on staffing, so a new school may end up with teachers who are not well suited for the school's philosophy or approach.

For their part, teachers in small schools often have to take on more preparations and teach more classes than teachers in traditional high schools. They need time for the increased planning and collaboration required by the interdisciplinary approach to instruction used in many redesigned high schools. They need increased time for on-the-job professional development. Schools seeking to implement innovations involving new views of teacher

time and/or new approaches to scheduling often must do so by seeking some kind of waiver from the district's collective bargaining agreement.

For many schools, the answer—at least temporarily—is a **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) agreement with the teachers union that specifies alternative work practices and policies. For example, such agreements might stipulate that teachers will not be assigned based on seniority, or that they will be granted periodic sabbaticals to pursue extended professional development opportunities, or that they will be given flex time for working more hours than teachers in a traditional school. While MOUs can help to enable innovative changes, they can be obstacles as well. They often are time-consuming and difficult to negotiate; sometimes inefficient in that they cannot always anticipate all the issues that will arise once a new school is up and running; and, as limited-term trials, are subject to change.

A Final Comment on Carnegie Units

Of course, all of the scheduling and job expectation issues just described also are impacted by state Carnegie Unit and seat-time requirements (minimum 20 Units and 180 days, respectively). To the extent that *any* unique new approaches employed by redesigned high schools alter the traditional concepts of a class period or the school day, or change the number of days school is in session or the amount of time students spend in class, therein lies a potential problem that could derail any effort to be innovative. Moreover, to whatever extent existing Carnegie Unit requirements can be relaxed, another potential problem awaits—i.e., the question of whether or not Ohio's colleges and universities will accept students whose transcripts include alternative, applied-learning courses and instructional programs that may not be based on Carnegie Units.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Changing the Way Schools Are Organized

Academic achievement in the four core content areas—English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies—ultimately will determine the success or failure of Ohio's high

school reform efforts. So changes in the way schools are organized will be measured against this standard, which also is the basis for the recommended actions that are advanced here.

- ✓ Consider granting "time-off-the-clock" accountability waivers to schools and school districts during the first year of a high school transformation initiative. These waivers would still require schools and districts to do everything that the state's accountability system requires them to do (i.e., testing students and filing reports), but would stipulate that they will be held harmless during the initial transition year.

- ✓ Use the policy recommendations advanced in the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's October 2006 report, *Turning the Corner to Quality: Policy Guidelines for Strengthening Ohio's Charter Schools,* to bolster the state's charter school program. Blend stepped-up accountability measures with the targeted removal of restrictions on the formation of high-quality charters, and ensure that charter schools receive more equitable funding.

    - Take action to close low-performing charter schools and hold sponsors more accountable for the schools they oversee, while at the same time helping more high-performance schools to open and succeed.

    - Develop a mechanism for providing state funding for facilities for charter schools. Currently, charter schools receive no state funding for facilities.

    - Push charter school funding closer to parity with traditional district schools by providing the same level of operational funding on a per-pupil basis. Currently, charter schools receive 31 percent less than traditional district schools on a per-pupil basis.

    - Remove or modify the state cap on charter schools and eliminate geographic restrictions on where new charter schools can be located. Currently, new charter schools may be opened only in Academic Watch or Academic Emergency districts.

- ✓ Devise additional measures of quality for alternative education programs to supplement the state's achievement tests as accountability tools.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Applied Learning

If career and technical education (CTE)—and more broadly, applied learning opportunities outside the classroom—are going to be part of Ohio's high school reform efforts, instruction and the resources required to deliver it must be concentrated on producing high levels of student achievement in the core academic areas identified above. This assertion reflects the reality of the state's high school redesign agenda. It also confirms that in today's economy, these educational enterprises must focus more of their resources on academic preparedness.

As one of our interviewees said, "In today's rapidly changing workforce environment, employers are not as interested in those who have appropriate attitudes and expectations about work than in those who have the knowledge and skills needed to get the job done." In this context, specific recommended actions include the following:

- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of the High Schools That Work model—and of other instructional models such as College Tech Prep—in raising both academic achievement and career-related technical skills.

- ✓ Review the curriculum within each of Ohio's 16 CTE career fields to ensure that all technical content standards are fully aligned with the competencies that are needed for success in the workplace as well as the state's academic content standards.

- ✓ Develop a 9th and 10th grade technology program model—based on technology standards needed across the 16 career fields—that provides a contextual learning environment curriculum for Ohio students; and ensure that this model designed specifically for schools participating in the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative is aligned to the state's mathematics and literacy standards.

- ✓ Expand the Tech Prep High School initiative, which blends high-level academics with advanced career technology education, and work to make the program more inclusive of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth.

- ✓ Work to improve teacher quality and review certification requirements for CTE teachers, and give schools more flexibility in utilizing high-quality teachers to improve the academic performance of CTE students.

- ✓ Ensure that the accountability measures applied to CTE programs operated by career technical centers, joint vocational schools, and comprehensive high schools are the same as those used for all high schools; and begin development of value-added assessments for 11th and 12th grade CTE students based on the state's academic standards.

- ✓ Review state CTE weighted funds as part of the FY 2008-09 budget process and ensure that all state funds are leveraged to improve students' achievement in the four core academic areas. (In addition, the state should require school districts to revise their applications for federal Perkins CTE funding to ensure that their instructional programs support improved achievement in the core academic areas.)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Changing the Teaching Profession

In its 2003 report to Ohio's education policy leaders, the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success acknowledged that today's teacher- and principal-preparation programs are not the same programs Ohio had 20 or even 10 years ago. The Commission recognized that much progress has been made in redesigning preparation programs so they are more reality-based. It applauded the efforts of the institutions that prepare Ohio's teachers to increase the amount and improve the quality of clinical and field experiences for aspiring teachers and principals. At the same time, the Commission concluded that Ohio must do a better job of preparing teachers and principals to help students succeed.

The Commission was right, and here are some specific recommended actions intended to improve the preparation, licensing, and professional development of Ohio teachers:

- ✓ Authorize the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR)—working in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE)—to undertake a comprehensive review and evaluation of Ohio's teacher preparation programs, and to make recommendations for ways to streamline and improve the quality of both pre-service and in-service training for Ohio teachers. These

agencies should be directed to work collaboratively with local school districts to assess how Ohio's colleges and universities—across all academic disciplines, not just within their colleges/departments of education—are preparing teachers and school leaders for the challenges they will face in the classroom and school, including the challenges they may face working in redesigned high schools.

- As a coordinating body, as opposed to a policymaking authority, the OBR presently lacks the statutory authority to act in this area. However, in the mid-1990s, state legislators authorized the Board to conduct a similar assessment—a critical and comprehensive review of doctoral programs across the state. The OBR also was given statutory authority to decide which programs would continue to receive funding and under what conditions. Focused in nine academic disciplines, this review resulted in profound changes and substantial improvement in the state's doctoral programs. In 2002, the Regents estimated that the total amount of money redirected from weak and/or unneeded doctoral programs toward investments of higher priority had reached $78.6 million.[23]

- While the state's review could result in recommendations for the discontinuation of state funding for certain teacher preparation programs, it also could lead to new incentives for driving greater interdisciplinary collaboration within individual institutions, and/or the development of proposals for the creation of regional teacher preparation and/or professional development schools.

- The need for a collaborative initiative cannot be overemphasized, since the OBR's authority to approve overall degree and general teacher education programs must be aligned with ODE's responsibility to approve specific teacher education programs that lead to teacher licensure.

✓ Apply a similar kind of regulatory flexibility to Ohio's credentialing process for new small, redesigned high schools that the federal *No Child Left Behind* law offers to small, rural schools in meeting "highly qualified teachers" requirements.[24]

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23. Ohio Board of Regents, *The Issue: Doctoral Review*, May 2005.

24. See *Letter to Chief State School Officers re: Opportunities for Flexibility in Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act*, U.S. Department of Education, March 31, 2004.

- ✓ Provide more funding for e-learning and distance learning resources to give rural and other low-income schools increased access to state-of-the-art professional development for teachers (and specialized content for students).

- ✓ Develop a "clinical service" role for Ohio's 2,500-plus National Board Certified teachers—such as deploying them as adjunct faculty in college and university teacher preparation programs—to assist in strengthening professional practices of Ohio's teaching force.

- ✓ Engage Ohio's teachers unions in an ongoing, collaborative search for ways to enhance collective bargaining's capacity to facilitate and support innovative practices that promote student success. While acknowledging that responsibility for negotiating collective bargaining agreements rests at the district level, the state should join with union leaders to answer several questions, including but not necessarily limited to the following:

    - How can innovative approaches to organizing schools and delivering instruction best be developed in a collective bargaining environment?

    - What steps should be taken to get teachers more involved in decisionmaking and to define new roles for teacher leaders?

    - How can teacher compensation be restructured to reward teaching excellence, based in part on student results, and to ensure that high-quality teachers are placed in hard-to-staff schools and subject areas?

    - How can Ohio transform its teaching profession through better preparation, support, and professional development; and how can teacher evaluation be used to improve student achievement?

    - How can Ohio's collective bargaining process be modified to ensure that teacher assignments are not based simply on seniority?

BARRIERS TO ENSURING THAT ALL STUDENTS HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE A CHALLENGING CURRICULUM

The need for a more rigorous curriculum for all high school students is one of the major focal points of most discussions around high school redesign. Indeed, rigor arguably is the linchpin of today's new 3 Rs—rigor, relevance, and relationships—a trinity that has become a kind of mantra for redesign efforts across the nation. The rationale is as simple as the data are clear: If we expect more of our young people, they will achieve more.

A focus on rigor is central to Achieve's American Diploma Project, which seeks to ensure that a high school diploma "means something." For the business community—which was the major driver of the previous decade's efforts to establish clear standards for what students should know and be able to do in core subjects—the imperative for a high school diploma to mean something is a competitiveness issue. In a knowledge economy, brain power is real power. It is the key to innovation, which is the key to competitive advantage, which in turn leads to economic growth and prosperity.

The bottom line: Too many of Ohio's young people are graduating from high school unprepared for what will be required of them to succeed in college and in the workplace. A recent publication from the Ohio Business Roundtable, *The Talent Challenge: What Ohio Must Do to Thrive, Not Merely Survive, in a Flat World*, refers to this problem as "the expectations gap."[25]

The dimensions of the gap are substantial. According to the Ohio Board of Regents, just 24 percent of high school students in Ohio take a rigorous core curriculum.[26] That is one reason that 41 percent of Ohio high school graduates enrolled as first-time college

25. Ohio Business Roundtable, *The Talent Challenge: What Ohio Must Do to Thrive, Not Merely Survive, in a Flat World*, Ohio Business Roundtable, 2006, p. 8.

26. Ohio Board of Regents, *Making the Transition from High School to College in Ohio*, Ohio Board of Regents, December 2005, p. 14.

freshmen take remedial coursework in math or English.[27] It is no wonder that just 21.9 percent of Ohio citizens have earned an undergraduate degree or higher, ranking the state 39th nationally.[28] This unfortunate pattern is a prescription for economic irrelevance in a world where two-thirds of all new jobs being created require some level of postsecondary education—and it presents significant challenges to Ohio's school districts to do more, and achieve more, with only moderately increasing resources.

Despite a number of formidable barriers—including Ohioans' prevailing attitudes and low expectations about the need for some form of postsecondary education, the fragmentation that permeates public education, and the limited resources available to education—efforts to close Ohio's expectations gap are well underway and in various stages of thought and action:

- ✓ **Academic content standards.** Based on recommendations from the Governor's Commission for Student Success, Ohio developed clear and rigorous academic content standards for what students must know and be able to do in all core subjects in grades K-12. While it's true that Ohio does not have a mandated statewide curriculum, the state's strong system of assessments aligned with the academic standards serves as a powerful incentive for school districts to develop and offer curricula based on the standards. It should be noted, however, that the Ohio Graduation Tests, which students must pass in order to earn a diploma, cover 10th-grade knowledge and skills.

- ✓ **Model curricula.** The State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools was charged with developing recommendations for policy changes required to ensure that all students in Ohio receive an education that prepares them to succeed in college, careers, and citizenship. One set of the Task Force's recommendations dealt broadly with the issue of raising expectations. The recommendations sought to balance the need for increased rigor with a need to respect Ohio's deep-rooted tradition of local control and parental prerogative.

  The Task Force stopped short of calling for a uniform statewide curriculum; instead, the

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27. *Making the Transition*, p. 15.

28. *Ohio Rankings in Education*, August 2003.

group recommended creating multiple model core curricula that blend rigorous coursework with hands-on technical training, giving individual communities the flexibility to develop curricula that meet local needs. The Task Force adopted a similar compromise position when it recommended that every Ohio school district offer a high school curriculum that ensures all students are taught the state's academic content standards through grade 12, but provide local boards of education the discretion to allow parents to permit their children to opt out of the more challenging core curricula.

Characterized by the Task Force as "uniquely Ohio solutions," these proposals are testimony to the challenges of imposing any kind of statewide, top-down, externally driven reforms.

✓ **Ohio Core.** In December 2006, the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation to establish a rigorous curriculum—called the Ohio Core—as the "default standard" for all of Ohio's high school students, beginning with the class of 2014.[29] The Ohio Core curriculum would include four years of math, including algebra II; three years of lab-based science, including physical science and biology and one year of either chemistry, physics, higher-level biology, engineering science, or biomedicine; four years of English; three years of social studies, which can include financial literacy courses; and two credits from foreign languages, fine arts, and several other choices.

Starting with the Class of 2014 (i.e., students entering high school in the fall of 2010), the legislation would:

- make completing the Ohio Core a condition of admission to most of Ohio's public four-year colleges and universities;
- require all students to take a college- and work-ready assessment during their junior year in high school to help determine if they are on track to succeed in college and work; and
- add a measure to the state's Local School Report Card to indicate how well high schools are preparing students for college and work.

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29. Amended Substitute Senate Bill Number 311, as passed by the 126th Ohio General Assembly, 2006.

Conspicuous here, and frequently misunderstood by the public, is the fact that the Ohio Core would *not* be—at least initially—a new set of high school *graduation requirements*, but in fact would be a new set of requirements for admission to most of the state's four-year, state-supported universities. Moreover, like the previously mentioned Task Force recommendations, the Ohio Core includes an "opt out" provision for parents and their children through the class of 2014. But two details about this provision merit comment.

- First, parents and their children would not be permitted to "opt out" until the students' junior year. Therefore, all freshmen and sophomores would be required to "get started" on the more rigorous curriculum.

- Second, when the "opt out" provision lapses with the class of 2014, the Ohio Core would become, in effect, a new high school graduation requirement.

One additional implication of the Ohio Core, for some stakeholders, is the need to raise expectations for those students who already have high aspirations for themselves. One interviewee suggested that if the Ohio Core becomes the default curriculum for all high school students, the requirements for earning Ohio's Honors Diploma, which are set in statute, would likely need to be toughened.

Both the High School Task Force recommendation for model curricula and the Ohio Core default curriculum are characterized by innate tensions between statewide directives and local control, and between a standardized set of expectations and parental choice. Additionally, individuals interviewed for this project described a "tension between differing philosophies"—i.e., the tension between a highly structured curriculum based on traditional Carnegie Units and a desire for more innovative approaches to teaching and learning that involve interdisciplinary courses and applied learning.

It should be noted that the Ohio Core curriculum would not increase the total number of Carnegie Units required for graduation from high school—rather, it would simply be more prescriptive about what those units should be. But it could, in some cases, give students less time and opportunity for applied learning outside the classroom. And in contrast to the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative, it could run counter to efforts to develop a more innovative, interdisciplinary curriculum. And that is what the "tension between differing philosophies" is all about.

All that being said, one person interviewed for this project raised an intriguing, bottom-line question about the very nature of a "rigorous" curriculum:

> Is it more rigorous to require more courses for graduation? Or could it in fact be *less* rigorous? Compared with our international competitors, our curriculum may be too broad—a mile wide by an inch deep. If we were to reduce the number of courses required for graduation, we could perhaps make the curriculum more rigorous *and* less expensive. You'd need fewer teachers, and/or each teacher would have a smaller teaching load, so you could increase rigor without having to increase funding.

Certain fiscal obstacles also must be noted here. In many instances, the fact that some students are not taking rigorous courses in high school is more a function of lack of availability of challenging, advanced courses than it is a matter of lack of aspiration or expectation. The fact is, not all schools have the resources to pay for the additional teachers needed for schools to be able to offer higher-level courses, not to mention the shortage of qualified individuals to teach such courses—a shortage that will only become more acute with the adoption of the Ohio Core curriculum. Recognizing this fact, the Ohio Core legislation, as enacted, provides $30 million over five years for teacher training and retention.

Additionally, not all schools have the resources needed for the labs and instructional materials required for some of those courses, or the technology to access such courses through distance learning. In some cases, schools simply may not have the resources to offer those courses to any more than a small percentage of their students.

Some interviewees suggested that providing college scholarship support for students who complete a prescribed rigorous core curriculum (an idea consistent with one of the High School Task Force recommendations) could be an effective incentive for students to take more challenging courses while also helping to keep Ohio's "best and brightest" young people in the state. The primary barrier to this idea, of course, would be funding it.

Finally, one of the major barriers to raising expectations for all high school students is what can only be described as ambivalent public opinion, which is reflected in polling data presented in the first section of this report.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Ensuring That All Students Have an Opportunity to Take a Challenging Curriculum

To overcome existing barriers to raising academic expectations for all high school students, Ohio should move forward with efforts to add rigor to the high school curriculum in ways that raise expectations for all students without unnecessarily restricting innovative approaches to school design and instructional delivery. Specific recommended actions include the following:

- ✓ Fully implement the Ohio Core legislation. Ensure that this new curriculum can be delivered—without compromising its integrity—not only in college-prep classes but also via career-technical programs, College Tech Prep programs, Early College experiences, and other innovative delivery models.

- ✓ Expand Ohio's assessment and accountability system beyond 10th grade. Currently, the Ohio Graduation Tests that all students must pass to earn a diploma cover 10th-grade knowledge and skills.

- ✓ Continue to allow school districts to seek waivers from Carnegie Unit requirements for graduation.

- ✓ Ensure that schools have adequate resources for supporting a more rigorous curriculum—e.g., training and recruiting teachers in science, math, and foreign languages; labs and other instructional materials required for upper-level courses; technology to access distance learning and online instructional opportunities; etc.

BARRIERS TO PREVENTING AND RECOVERING DROPOUTS

Students leave school for a variety of reasons; but in Ohio, three in ten students who start 9th grade leave school before they graduate.[30] This is unacceptable in the 21st century economy, where education is the fault line between those who will prosper and those who will not.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the most frequent explanations for leaving school early are *school-related*—students do not like school, cannot get along with their teachers, or are failing their classes. In some cases, the explanations are *job-related*—students cannot go to school because they are working, and their job is more important to them than going to school. And still other reasons are *family-related*—students get married, get pregnant, or become parents.[31]

Whatever the reason, dropping out of school has severe consequences for students and for the state of Ohio. Students who leave school without a diploma are deprived of needed knowledge and skills, and they will have fewer good choices throughout their lives. They are more likely to have low lifetime earnings and higher incarceration rates, and there is a higher likelihood that their children will, years from now, become the victims of what some observers have called the "silent epidemic" of school dropouts.

The consequences of school dropouts are equally clear for the state. According to the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools, each year's class of dropouts—about 40,000 students—costs Ohio's economy $8 billion. It should not be surprising, then, that the Task Force advanced a number of recommendations to reach potential dropouts early, prevent students from dropping out, and "recover" those who do drop out and get them back into school or alternative programs.

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30. *High-Quality High Schools,* p. 6.

31. *High-Quality High Schools,* p. 27.

But the implementation of these initiatives, which range from early intervention services and counseling/advisory services to innovative dropout recovery programs, will not be easy. A number of serious barriers can be anticipated.

- **Low aspirations and expectations.** Once again, the issue here is not legal or policy barriers; it is attitudes, aspirations, and expectations. In part, dropout prevention and recovery efforts are handicapped by the fact that many Ohioans simply do not believe that all students need to succeed in the classroom or that they must be prepared for some form of postsecondary education. Even more troubling, many students and families do not aspire to be successful in the classroom, much less pursue learning opportunities beyond high school. Very simply, they do not value education and/or they do not perceive that learning can be an integral part of their lives.

- **Collective bargaining agreements and resource limitations.** According to some interviewees, helping students and their families see the value of a good education—and aspire to higher levels of academic achievement—is a critical component of any dropout prevention and recovery program. In part, this is the purpose of Ohio's college access and success initiatives, which will be explored in the discussion of the state's P-16 agenda. But it also is the rationale for the Task Force on Quality High Schools' call for strengthened counseling and advisory programs in all Ohio school districts.

  Several people interviewed for this report identified potential barriers to these programs. Some talked about collective bargaining agreements that define advisory periods as an additional preparation for teachers, and they suggested that expanded counseling and advisory programs could require additional compensation for teachers—and added costs for school districts that already are financially strapped. Others pointed to the resources that will be needed to develop high-quality professional development programs for school counselors and advisors, and for teachers who are involved in delivering these services.

- **Elements of the state's accountability system.** Presently, the state's accountability system creates substantial disincentives for school districts that enroll "failing" students or that persist with students who take longer than four years to graduate. While dropouts negatively affect school districts' graduation rates, the accountability system offers few incentives for districts that seek to recover students who have left before earning a diploma. At the same time, the system rewards "push-out" practices that encourage students to leave school before

their poor performance on state-mandated achievement tests does more damage to a district's accountability scores.

For this reason, the Task Force on Quality High Schools called upon the State Board of Education to, among other things, (1) ensure that the state's accountability system does not penalize high schools and school districts more than once when a student drops out, even if that student returns to school and drops out multiple times; (2) make sure that dropouts are counted for state accountability purposes in ways that discourage "push-out" practices and encourage schools and school districts to reach out to recent dropouts and help them pursue graduation; and (3) give high schools and school districts credit in the state's accountability system for students who graduate in six years or less.

The State Board and Ohio Department of Education have launched and/or expanded several initiatives in response to these proposals. One such program is Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW), which is the Southern Regional Education Board's middle grades initiative. It is designed to help states, districts and schools look at what they expect, what they teach, and how they teach young adolescents to prepare for success in further education. Through this initiative, the state is working to reduce dropouts by having 9th graders better prepared to meet the new challenges that face them in high school.

In addition, the state is funding dropout recovery programs in a number of school districts, as well as charter schools, throughout Ohio. And through a 9th and 10th grade transition initiative, the state is providing financial incentives to schools and school districts that decrease their percentage of dropouts and increase the proportion of students who meet the OGT standard in a timely fashion.

Some of these programs—particularly those that direct public dollars to dropout recovery schools—became the topics of considerable discussion as state legislators debated the merits of the Ohio Core initiative. Under current law, dropout recovery programs are excluded from the state's accountability system, and the more rigorous curriculum provisions of the proposed Ohio Core plan do not apply to such programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Preventing and Recovering Dropouts

Ohio law defines the state's "compulsory school age" as 6 to 18.[32] Without the school superintendent's sign-off, it is illegal for a student younger than 18 to drop out of school. But students are dropping out in large number. As one interviewee said, "Ohio has a adopted a *de facto* policy of allowing students to leave high school early—when they want to drop out, superintendents automatically sign off. It's that simple."

In spite of this fact, research tells us that Ohio's graduation rate is steadily increasing, and that its dropout rate is slowly going down. But Ohio's dropout rate is still too high. That is why the following actions, most of which were initially advanced by the Task Force on Quality High Schools, are needed:

- ✓ Develop a statewide strategy for high school advisory and counseling programs to include, but not be limited to, the following tactics:
  - Support and mobilize the capacity of college access and success programs, as well as community and youth service groups and faith-based organizations, to provide high-quality advising and counseling services both within and outside the high school.
  - Work collaboratively with postsecondary education institutions, education service centers, and the business community to develop high-quality preparation and professional development programs for high school advisors and counselors.
  - Work with Ohio's teachers unions to modify provisions of collective bargaining agreements to allow for advisories.
- ✓ Ensure that the state's accountability system gives school districts incentives to persist with students who take longer than four years to graduate, actively pursue and recover students who have left before earning a diploma, and make sure that all disincentives for dropout prevention and recovery programs are eliminated.

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32. *Ohio Revised Code,* sec. 3321.01(A).

BARRIERS TO BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Historically, Ohio has operated two education systems—K-12 and postsecondary. Over the years, there have been some attempts to establish cross-system collaborations. But it is fair to say that these two systems have typically acted independently, and sometimes at cross-purposes.

In its 2004 report, the State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools acknowledged that the divisions between the two educational systems are inefficient, unhealthy, and even harmful to those who are being served by the state's schools, colleges, and universities. And it explained the "disconnects" between K-12 and postsecondary education in simple terms—the agencies responsible for education policy in Ohio have different missions, different constituencies, and different histories.

This is hardly a unique situation; rather, it is typical of the way that states have connected K-12 preparation with college success. Very simply, they have not.

But that is changing today in Ohio and across the nation. A growing number of states are "doing P-16"—working to eliminate the disjuncture between K-12 and postsecondary education. In fact, they are seeking greater coherence among all three levels of public education: early learning, K-12, and postsecondary.

In Ohio, the determination to bridge these gaps is reflected in many initiatives, and the Task Force on Quality High Schools called for the expansion and acceleration of these efforts. It also can be seen in the 2005 creation of the Partnership for Continued Learning, composed of 18 leaders from education, business and industry, economic development entities, government, and local communities. Established by then-Governor Bob Taft, the Partnership is working to integrate Ohio's educational systems and to create a seamless, lifelong learning experience that prepares all Ohioans for success in the 21st

century global economy. This purpose is captured in the words of the Partnership's initial chairman, Governor Taft:

> The Partnership for Continued Learning is dedicated to fulfilling an important promise to each and every Ohioan. To equip our children with the tools they need for a successful future, we must guide them from their first steps into the classroom as preschoolers to the time they enter the workforce and contribute to Ohio's overall economy.[33]

While the Partnership has not yet established a comprehensive, long-term action agenda, it has embraced the work of Achieve's American Diploma Project and established itself as a leading advocate for the Ohio Core initiative, which calls for a curriculum that is fully aligned with documented postsecondary education and workplace knowledge and skill expectations.

Ohio's P-16 Agenda

Essentially, Ohio's P-16 initiatives are defined by three purposes. First, state policymakers and local education stakeholders are working to raise student aspirations and bring greater rigor to academic expectations for all students. Both of these purposes were explored earlier in this report. Second, efforts have been launched—again, at both the state and local levels—to build an integrated system that reaches across and aligns the activities of all levels of public education. Third, several tactics are being employed to improve students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education.

Significant steps already have been taken, and there are encouraging signs of progress. But efforts to bridge the gaps between high school and postsecondary education face a number of barriers, and not all stakeholders have embraced the tactics that are being used.

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33. Governor Bob Taft, "Governor Taft Announces Launch of Major Education Initiative," news release, September 12, 2005.

College Access and Success

Today, fully three-quarters of Ohioans do not have a college degree, and the state ranks 39th among the 50 states in the number of adults attaining bachelor's degrees or higher. This poor ranking, which represents a gap between the state's baccalaureate attainment rate of 23 percent and the national average of nearly 27 percent, along with the per capita income gap that accompanies it, signals threats to Ohio's competitiveness in a knowledge- and innovation-driven economy.[34]

Ohio has narrowed its education gap in recent years, in part through the continuing implementation of the state's K-12 standards-based reforms. The state's college participation rate for recent high school graduates rose from 55 percent in 1996 to almost 58 percent in 2002, which is slightly higher than the current national average.[35] But this rate of progress will not close Ohio's educational attainment gap for many years, and approximately 40 percent of Ohio high school graduates attending the state's public colleges and universities need at least one remedial mathematics or English course in their first year of college.[36]

To be sure, enhancing students' academic preparation is part of the answer, but a broader response is needed. Improved levels of college readiness require that young people and their families—particularly those with little or no experience with college participation—increase their awareness of the value of education and continuous learning, and that they raise their aspirations for learning beyond high school. College readiness also demands that more students understand what it takes to fulfill their aspirations and to succeed in postsecondary education—and that they realize that college is within their reach.

This is the purpose of Ohio's college access and success initiatives, which are rooted in an ongoing collaboration among a number of public and nonprofit organizations dedicated to the idea of increasing the number of Ohioans who aspire to and successfully complete

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34. Ohio Board of Regents, *The Performance Report for Ohio's Colleges and Universities, 2006*, Ohio Board of Regents, January 18, 2007, p. 4.

35. *Making the Transition*, p. 4.

36. *Making the Transition*, p. 15.

a postsecondary education. These initiatives are led by the Ohio Board of Regents' Student Access and Success Coordinating Council of Ohio (SASCCO), which includes but is not limited to the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio College Access Network (OCAN), federal TRIO programs, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE), Ohio Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (OASFAA), Ohio Urban League, and many others.

> *"Right now, there's a pretty solid wall between K–12 and the higher education system. We're asking, what does an aligned system look like? How does funding flow through the P–16 system? What does a performance-based P–16 system look like and how does it function?"*

According to some interviewees, helping more students and families see the value and opportunities that college can provide, through a comprehensive system of school- and community-based services (e.g., tutoring, after-school programs, Ohio Graduation Tests preparation, career and college counseling, learning technology assistance and teacher professional development, and college and financial aid advising), is not just about removing legal barriers or changing laws. Instead, it is about confronting established bureaucracies at both the state and local levels. It is about breaking down boundaries and creating partnerships that transcend organizations, which is something that intermediaries like the KnowledgeWorks Foundation and the Stark Education Partnership can help accomplish. It is about providing financial and other incentives that can spur organizations to find common ground and get past what are essentially territorial issues.

A few interviewees focused their comments on another aspect of this issue. They suggested that Ohio's lack of end-of-course or end-of-program exams, or any other statewide assessment in the 11th and 12th grades, is a critical barrier to improving students' preparation for postsecondary work and for success beyond high school. They talked about the absence of any real college readiness standard and they zeroed in on two possible solutions.

First, some stakeholders called for action to identify and eliminate gaps between high school expectations (i.e., the state's academic content standards) and college expectations, to ensure that students who master the content reflected in the state's high school curriculum have the knowledge and skills required for success in college without remediation.

Second, others pointed to the need for better and more accessible college readiness assessments. Their comments paralleled the recommendations of the Task Force on Quality High Schools, which urged the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) to work together to develop low-stakes, online assessments that students can take to know whether they are ready for college or the workplace.

A Coherent P-16 System

One interviewee summed up his thinking in this area—and his thoughts about the state's current situation—this way: "Right now, there's a pretty solid wall between K-12 and the higher education system. We're asking, what does an aligned system look like? How does funding flow through the P-16 system? What does a performance-based P-16 system look like and how does it function?"

These and other questions must be addressed before Ohio can hope to bridge the gaps between high school and postsecondary education. In part, it is a state-level issue, and a number of interviewees talked about the need for a P-16 data system—one that promotes rigorous curriculum alignment and program collaboration among high schools, colleges, and universities. They pointed to the need to align the ODE's Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the Higher Education Information (HEI) system, as well as the state's workforce system databases. They confirmed the need for a single, unified data system that maximizes the reliability of the data and provides access to all stakeholders, consistent with state and federal laws as well as appropriate privacy considerations. In the words of one interviewee, "The lack of a unified system makes tracking long-term outcomes difficult. As a result, we continue to struggle with what information we can get out of the student data system and how useful that information is."

Another stakeholder agreed, saying, "Privacy issues are important in Ohio, but we also need to deal with the issue of competing bureaucracies." Reflecting a systems perspective, other interviewees talked about the need for better rules and regulations governing the operations of collaborative programs, such as College Tech Prep and dual-enrollment initiatives.

But several people emphasized that the building of an integrated P-16 system is not merely an issue of state policy. Systemic change, they argued, must also be rooted in local P-16 compacts: community-based alliances driven by a determination to increase college-going rates in their communities or regions. In other words, effective system redesign will require "bottom-up" changes as well as "top-down" reforms.

One stakeholder was particularly vocal on this topic. "We are creating P-16 entities all over the state," he said. "But they are not well connected—neither to the state's Partnership for Continued Learning nor to each other. If our P-16 agenda is going to work, people need to work together and everything needs to be connected to the statewide partnership. This cannot be a matter of top-down control. Instead, local compacts need to have a seat at the Partnership table, and they need to help us develop the synergy that will lead to lasting change."

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Getting a Jump on College

Two Ohio programs have been developed to give students a true college experience—to prepare them for the academic rigors of college while they are still enrolled in high school. One involves a number of Early College High School pilots, while the other is the Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO).

Early College High Schools. Ohio's Early College High Schools bridge the state's K-12 and higher education systems, giving students an opportunity to graduate from high school with not only a high school diploma, but also an associate's degree or 60 hours of college credit.

The state's first Early College High School was launched in Dayton in 2003, and today it is giving more than 100 disadvantaged students the opportunity to graduate from high school and pursue a college degree. Supported by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, in collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, two additional pilots—the Youngstown Early College and the Lorain County Early College High School in Elyria—have been launched. Additional Early College High Schools are being developed in Canton, Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland.

According to our interviewees, the power and potential of these schools is that they will demonstrate that students who have been labeled and even dismissed as "not college-going material" can in fact not only graduate from high school, but also succeed in postsecondary education. But these Early College High Schools face serious challenges, and a number of operational issues need to be addressed.

Funding continues to be an issue, particularly when pilots involve private colleges and universities that do not have traditional state subsidies, which means that innovative financial relationships need to be established. Stakeholders are exploring a variety of funding sources to ensure and sustain students' success in these innovative environments.

Here, KnowledgeWorks has been able to work with the OBR, the State Board of Education, and legislative leaders to figure out how to use supplemental funding that was incorporated in the state's FY 2006-07 budget. No specific legal or policy changes were required because the participating state agencies worked together to develop an innovative funding strategy. Yet, it is likely that a more permanent regulatory fix—and more viable funding stream—will be required to ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of Early College High Schools, as well as PSEO, given the dangers of relying on unpredictable supplemental funding.

Dual-enrollment issues still need to be resolved, which may require changes in state policy and regulations. Among the questions to be answered are:

- Can college credits earned for college courses also be credited toward high school graduation? Presently, the answer is yes, but this is a local decision that can vary from district to district.

- Can Early College High Schools' college courses count toward high school minimum day/minute requirements? Again, the answer is yes, but this is a local decision that can vary from district to district.

- Do eligibility requirements for college courses include measures of academic readiness while not excluding students based on "all-or-nothing" criteria? The answer here depends on the class offering. The current "rules" are based on the credit-granting institution's policies and procedures.

- Can college course credits earned while a student is in an Early College High School be transferred to meet general education and academic major requirements for associate's and bachelor's degrees? Presently, college course credits can be transferred, but in practice it depends on the agreements in place between and within the credit-granting institutions.

Dual-Enrollment Programs. One of Ohio's key initiatives for giving students a jump on college is PSEO, which is designed to promote rigorous academic pursuits and provide qualified high school students with opportunities to experience coursework at the college or university level. The program is not intended to replace coursework available in high school or to offer students a full-time college course load.

Established in 1989, the program was originally available to students in the 11th and 12th grades. Today it has been expanded to include students in public, nonpublic, and nonchartered schools in grades 9 through 12.

Ohio law says that high schools continue to be responsible for providing a comprehensive, challenging college preparation curriculum, including Advanced Placement and other

advanced-level courses for students enrolled in PSEO. So college courses are meant to supplement, not replace, the broad academic preparation needed by high school students.

During FY 2004, only 9,666 Ohio public school students from 665 school districts (including joint vocational districts) participated in PSEO, either at a postsecondary institution or by taking college-level courses offered at their high schools. Another 1,144 nonpublic school students participated in the program. Some of the people interviewed for this report voiced disappointment with these enrollment numbers, suggesting that they confirm that far too many students have missed out on the opportunity to get a more realistic understanding of the academic and social skills they will need to succeed in college, and that too few students have been exposed to the type of intensive curriculum that researchers say promotes bachelor's degree attainment. Viewing the same numbers, other interviewees choose to point out the limitations and flaws in this program.

Virtually all interviewees agreed that there is nothing in the law itself that prevents participation in PSEO. They also confirmed that funding is a significant problem—that it stands as a powerful disincentive for school districts to promote PSEO and to open their doors to more dual-enrollment opportunities for their students. Very simply, when a student enrolls in a PSEO course, a portion of his or her state subsidy dollars is shifted from the high school to the college or university that provides the instruction. So when a school district "loses" a student for part of the school day, it also loses money, even though its operating costs may not have been reduced.

Stakeholders speculated about ways to provide dual funding, or to redefine (in the law) ways to calculate average daily membership. Some pointed to the recommendations of the Task Force on Quality High Schools, which called for additional weighted funding to school districts for students who participate in the PSEO program. In the Task Force's words, "The additional weight should be sufficient to reduce the extent to which schools perceive a financial disincentive for participation. The state should limit this funding to quality col-

lege courses that meet criteria established by the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents . . . . "[37]

Other interviewees pointed to additional barriers to a sustainable PSEO program. Some lamented the absence of summer coverage for state per-pupil funding, which has the effect of cutting students off from summer PSEO courses. Others pointed to perplexing union issues. For example, to what extent do PSEO courses taught by college professors displace a high school teacher, or how does PSEO affect teachers in small schools who may have to prepare for a larger number of courses (given changes in enrollment and where students are taking courses)? Also, what requirements must be satisfied before a university professor can teach in a high school?

For some interviewees, the latter question raised a broader set of concerns. What are the legal and regulatory implications—based on the *No Child Left Behind* Act's "highly qualified" teacher requirements—of using college or university faculty to teach PSEO courses in a high school? This question may have already been answered by the U.S. Department of Education, which said in a 2005 guidance document, *Highly Qualified Teachers and Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Non-Regulatory Guidance*, that college professors are not subject to NCLB "highly qualified teacher" requirements if they are not employed by school districts.

Stakeholders also stressed the need for effective articulation and transfer agreements among Ohio colleges and universities—both two- and four-year institutions. Without state policies and institutional practices that make it easy—and predictable—for students to transfer credits from one institution to another, a dual-enrollment program will have only a limited impact on students' ability to get a jump on college and to complete associate's and baccalaureate degrees.

To address this potential barrier, state officials and education leaders have been working for more than a decade to develop such policies and practices. And today, a new articulation

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37. *High-Quality High Schools,* p. 31.

and transfer policy—built around a more consistent set of college placement policies and "transfer modules" for institutions' general education curriculum—is being implemented.

The new policy means that students in similar courses at disparate institutions will have comparable and compatible learning experiences and expectations, at least during the first two years of their collegiate education. It is a much-needed advance in an education system where students are moving from institution to institution in unprecedented numbers, and where a growing number of students are beginning their college experience while they are still in high school.

Finally, some interviewees noted other barriers to the development of a sustainable PSEO program than were identified by the Task Force on Quality High Schools. Specifically, they raised questions about:

- The quality of instruction. How can we ensure that all PSEO courses are being taught uniformly at a college level?
- The accountability of PSEO programs. How can we ensure that school districts are not penalized from an accountability perspective if their high-achieving students pursue PSEO?
- Administrative concerns. How can we open PSEO opportunities to students without requiring them to apply for admission six months (or a year) before the beginning of the school year?
- The matter of awareness. How can we make sure that students and parents have greater awareness of PSEO?

Next Generation Pathways from High School to Postsecondary Education or Careers. In recent months, representatives of several state agencies with responsibility for education and adult workforce training programs have been exploring other new pathways from high school to either postsecondary education or the workplace. The most promising proposals under review recognize that adult workforce education and training does *not* exist in isolation from the state's K-12 system or baccalaureate degree system. They also acknowl-

edge that the multiple service providers in this area—which include two-year technical and community colleges, four-year colleges, the regional campuses of public universities, comprehensive adult centers, career centers, and other community-based organizations—often have not done a good job of coordinating their products and services.

As a result, many students have found themselves entangled in a labyrinth of often-conflicting institutional rules; and employers have voiced frustration with the lack of a system—or at best, the existence of a dysfunctional system. With the search for new pathways still in the discussion stage, it is too early to predict what kind of innovative, customer-focused strategies for teaching and learning will be generated. But it is likely that there will be new strategies.

One idea presently being studied involves the distribution of public funds among service providers based on performance, which could build the state's capacity to provide just-in-time workforce education and training to support both regional business growth and statewide economic development initiatives. Another proposal calls for the creation of a system of "stackable certificates" to ensure that workforce education and training is valid, documented, transferable, and valuable to the customer. With such a system, individuals could be assured that their training and education would be recognized throughout the state by all institutions of higher education. In addition, all of their education and training could lead, if they choose, to a pre-college certificate or a college degree.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Bridging the Gap Between High School and Postsecondary Education

For generations, the K-12 and postsecondary systems have had a tentative and often uncomfortable relationship. That is still the case today, but the situation is beginning to change. To remove existing barriers to effective collaboration and transform public education into a truly P-16 enterprise, several actions are recommended:

- ✓ Ensure that Ohio's academic standards for K-12 education are fully aligned with the admissions, placement, and academic requirements of postsecondary institutions; and ensure that

Ohio's exit-level high school exams accurately predict success in postsecondary education and/or the workplace.

- ✓ Align the Ohio Graduation Tests with the assessments used by colleges and universities to assign students to remedial courses.

- ✓ Develop low-stakes, online assessments that students can take to know whether they are ready for college and the workplace; and make these assessments available in grades 7 through 10 so students will have time to take additional courses in areas of identified weaknesses.

- ✓ Give all students an opportunity to assess their preparation for postsecondary education by requiring them (in grades 10 and 11) to take the Early Mathematics Placement Test (EMPT), or a similar end-of-course assessment, as a requirement for financial aid eligibility and as a means of addressing readiness for college algebra. The EMPT is available online and at no cost to students, families, and schools. The assessment is a guide for students, and performance on the EMPT can help students identify areas for improvement while still in high school. (A similar assessment of writing is being developed to provide guidance for high school students and returning adults.)

- ✓ Increase public funding for college access and success programs to ensure that local services are available to every middle- and high-school student in the state. Funding priorities should favor regional collaboratives and community-based initiatives that promote alliances among programs (e.g., OCAN, the Urban League, GEAR UP, Jobs for Ohio Graduates, the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, and faith-based organizations). Also, state funding strategies should support the OCAN philosophy of transitioning local college access programs to financial self-sustainability by requiring local/regional matching funds. In addition, these strategies should stipulate that state funding will be phased out to a level of no more than 10 percent after ten years.

- ✓ Align higher education's financial aid policies and practices with the Ohio Core curriculum by awarding Ohio Instructional Grants only to those high school graduates who complete the new curriculum requirements and who take the ACT/SAT.

- ✓ Continue to support and fund dual-enrollment and Early College programs; and work to resolve funding and other regulatory issues guided by what makes sense for students, not what serves the needs and interests of educational institutions.

- ✓ Develop a fully integrated P-16 data system that is compatible with the EMIS and HEI systems, and mandate regular information sharing between Ohio's secondary and postsecondary education systems.

- ✓ Ensure that the policy revisions advanced by the Articulation and Transfer Advisory Council in 2004, and further codified by the Ohio General Assembly in House Bill 95, are fully implemented; and ensure the positive impact of these policy changes through more precise advising and the assurance of credit transfer and the application of credits to academic degree/program requirements.[38]

- ✓ Create a new pathway from high school to postsecondary education by giving students—both traditional students and adults—the opportunity to build toward a college degree through a suite of "stackable" competency-based certificates beginning with mathematics, writing, and information technology; and ensure that Ohio's high school curriculum, particularly in career and technical education programs, is aligned with this initiative and that students are prepared to take full advantage of this alternative pathway.

BARRIERS TO PROVIDING SCHOOLS WITH THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO SUCCEED

During the last decade, few policy issues have engaged the collective attention of Ohio's education community as powerfully as the challenge of providing schools with the resources they need to ensure student success. Ten years after the filing of an historic lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Ohio's funding system for K-12 education—and after multiple Ohio Supreme Court rulings affirming that the system was indeed unconstitutional—questions of "equity" and "adequacy" continue to permeate education policy discussions in Ohio.

38. Amended Substitute House Bill Number 95, as passed by the 125th Ohio General Assembly.

In the words of one stakeholder, "School finance is an overwhelming issue that colors all conversations surrounding reform. The focus is on where the new dollars are going to come from, not whether the current system can be redesigned." Another individual put it more bluntly: "Many people are saying, 'reform, reform, reform,' but the reform issue is tied up with the resource issue."

Education funding in Ohio is complicated, confusing, and divisive. The specifics of the successful legal challenge to the constitutionality of the system are more complex than need to be discussed here, but at its core the *DeRolph* case challenged the funding system's heavy reliance on local property taxes to fund public education. In Ohio, K-12 funding has historically been split in a more or less 50-50 fashion between state and local funding. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit claimed—and the Supreme Court agreed—that because property values vary widely from one community to another and from one part of the state to another, the funding system's reliance on local property taxes inevitably results in funding inequities—and thus also in educational inequities.[39]

To be fair, substantial progress has been made since the first *DeRolph* case was filed. During the eight-year tenure of former Governor Bob Taft, the state of Ohio has directed a substantial infusion of new dollars to elementary and secondary education:

- Since 1999, state aid for K-12 education has increased by $2.2 billion, or 56 percent.[40]
- In 1999, Governor Taft announced a 12-year, $10 billion school construction and renovation program; to date, more than $4.84 billion has been spent on school facilities, with priority being given to the state's poorest school districts.[41]
- In 2003, Governor Taft convened a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Financing School Success, which ultimately recommended the "building blocks" approach partially in use today

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39. See *DeRolph v. State* (1997), 78 Ohio St.3d 193 ("*DeRolph I*"); *DeRolph v. State* (2000), 89 Ohio St.3d 1 ("*DeRolph II*"); and *DeRolph v. State* (2001), 93 Ohio St.3d 309 ("*DeRolph III*").

40. *The Taft Years*, p. 13.

41. *The Taft Years*, p. 11.

that recognizes student differences and targets supplemental funding and poverty-based assistance to help schools effectively address those differences.

Nonetheless, many in the education community still do not believe that the state has satisfactorily "fixed" the fundamental inequities inherent in the property-tax-based system. And leaders in *all* Ohio school districts are quick to point out the massive drain on district resources—time, energy and dollars—involved in having to make frequent appeals to local voters for school levy tax support.

As a practical matter, regardless of one's perspective on the state's response to the *DeRolph* case, many of the issues raised in this report cannot be fully addressed without some measure of action on the school funding front. Funding for K-12 education in Ohio is determined by counting students; wherever the student is located, the funding follows. Within such a system, districts naturally want to know if dividing one large high school into several smaller schools will cost them money in terms of their per-pupil funding. However, due in part to Ohio's highly complex school financing system, the exact financial implications of small-schools transformation efforts are not entirely clear. As one stakeholder told an interviewer, "The result [of the fact that school funding is based on counting students] is that many new, redesigned high schools end up looking a lot like old, traditional schools."

Many of those interviewed acknowledged that innovative, break-the-mold high schools are always going to cost more than traditional schools on a per-student basis—though, as KnowledgeWorks Foundation and other studies have documented, small schools are less expensive on a *cost-per-graduate* basis—because of lower student-teacher ratios, higher transportation costs, facility conversion costs, extra staff to arrange internships, and so on. Others emphasized the transition costs involved in converting a large comprehensive high school to small learning communities. For example, a school may start the transition to small schools with the incoming 9th-grade class while still shepherding the upper three grades through the old

> *"Small schools may be more cost-effective per graduate in the long run, but they still need a reliable funding stream to get started."*

system. This may result in additional staffing needs, at least initially.

Another cost premium incurred by redesigned schools is a function of Ohio's statutory requirement that every school building have a principal. As a result, a redesigned high school may have to hire four small school principals as school leaders, instead of one principal and three assistant principals that typically would be found in a single large, comprehensive high school. Administrative positions eat up budgets, creating an additional and unhelpful dimension of financial strain—on top of which, the schools may not end up with the kind of instructional leadership they really need.

> *"Funding is generated by counting students—wherever the student is located, that is where the funding flows. When you talk about stifling innovation, you start with this issue... Many new, redesigned high schools end up looking a lot like old, traditional schools largely because funding is based on counting students."*

It was noted in the interviews that many innovative, redesigned high schools receive foundation grant funding on top of their state per-pupil funding. As welcome as such support is, for some people it raises questions about replicability—i.e., will the new schools be able to operate at the state per-pupil funding level once the initial foundation grant dollars disappear? Many stakeholders acknowledge that sustaining reforms financially will be a challenge. Such concerns led one individual to observe, "There needs to be broad-based agreement that reform is a multi-year venture and requires resources to sustain implementation over time even after the initial grant money is gone. Once you get the ship turned around, you need enough gas to move forward."

Finally, it is important to emphasize here that concerns about the financial consequences of a funding mechanism that causes dollars to follow the student should not be seen as a call for a new resource system that moves away from counting students. To the contrary, allowing dollars to follow the student is consistent with the notion that taxpayers should be paying for the education of students rather than for the operation of schools.

What it does suggest, however, is that more needs to be learned about how such a finance system affects redesigned, break-the-mold schools—and that policymakers need to be sensitive to this issue, particularly during the early stages of a school conversion or transformation effort. To be sure, this issue needs to be part of Ohio's ongoing conversation about the value of small learning environments.

Furthermore, this conversation should look beyond state formula issues to school districts' budget allocation practices among buildings. Specifically, the University of Washington's Marguerite Roza and others have suggested that there can be actually more within-district inequity in resource allocation among buildings than inequity in state allocations among districts.[42] Understanding these inequities—and the allocation practices that produce them—will give state and local policymakers a better grasp of the barriers to providing schools with the resources they need to succeed.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Removing the Barriers to Providing Schools with the Resources They Need to Succeed

It is highly likely that Ohio's new governor, who took office in January 2007, will make school funding reform a major policy focus. The following recommendations would serve Ohio well as potential focal points for the public debate and policymaking that will ensue:

- ✓ Resolve Ohio's school funding crisis by changing funding formulas that predictably lead to funding and educational inequities, and that historically have left schools without the resources they need to succeed. Yet, as this is done, ensure that funding is tied to results, and develop resource strategies that target programs with the greatest likelihood of success.

- ✓ Increase the state's share of total education funding and rework funding formulas that rely heavily on local property taxes to finance public education.

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42. See Marguerite Roza and Paul T. Hill, "How Within-District Spending Inequities Help Some Schools to Fail," in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2004*, ed. Diane Ravitch (Washington, DC: Brookings Press, 2004), pp. 201–218.

- ✓ Simplify and make the formulas that are used to allocate state resources for public education more transparent.

- ✓ Clarify for school districts the impact on per-pupil funding of decisions to participate in high school conversion initiatives.

- ✓ Develop templates and guidelines to help schools understand how to make the transition to small learning communities cost-effectively with tight budgets and limited resources.

CREATING BREAKTHROUGH HIGH SCHOOLS: IT'S TIME TO MAKE TOUGH CHOICES

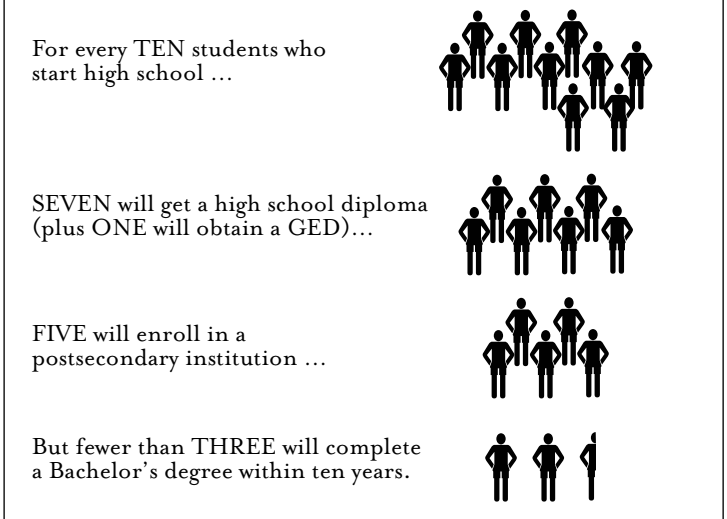
As members of the Task Force for Quality High Schools prepared to craft their final recommendations, they visited high schools in all parts of the state and talked with experts from Ohio and around the nation. They reviewed the most current research on high school redesign and debated issues among themselves.

Throughout their deliberations, Task Force members worked to clarify the problem they were trying to solve. As they struggled with this issue, the group's members were struck by data that Jobs for the Future's Hilary Pennington shared with them. First, she pointed out that many of the gaps in academic achievement are caused by serious leakages at critical points along the state's education pipeline—and that the cumulative effect of those leakages is massive. Very simply, for every ten students who start high school in Ohio, fewer than three complete a bachelor's degree within ten years.[43]

Second, Task Force members learned that these leakages are worse for some students than for others. They are most serious for minorities; and as the data presented here confirm, they are worse for young people living in families with low incomes.

With this understanding, the Task Force agreed that the creation of breakthrough high schools would require creative thinking, solid exe-

OHIO IS LOSING TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ALONG THE EDUCATION PIPELINE

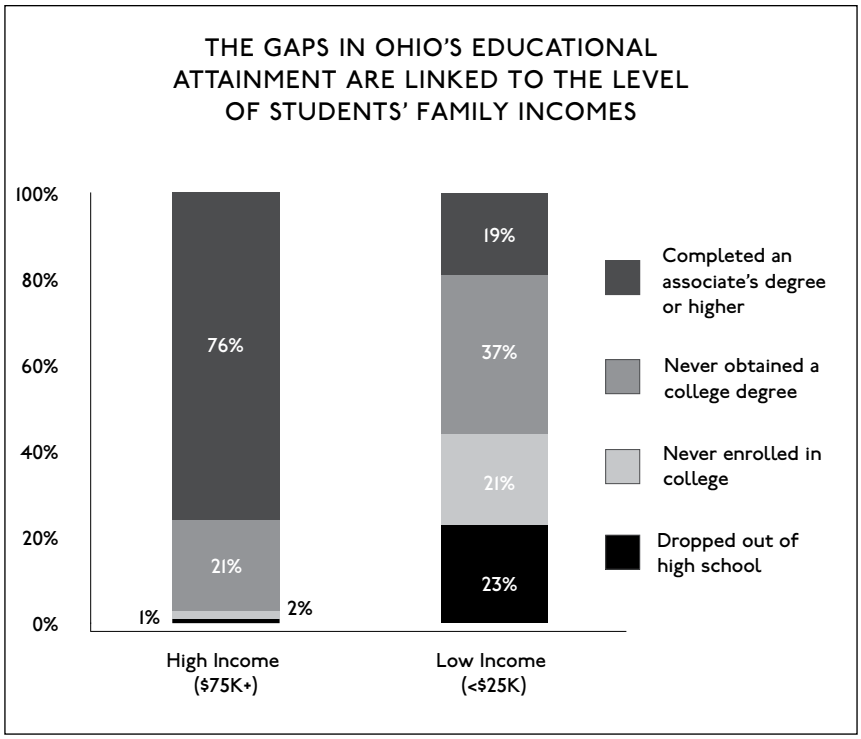


Source: Ohio Department of Education

43. *High-Quality High Schools*, p. 6.

cution, and a persistent focus on results. In other words, no quick fixes would be possible.

The Task Force also concluded that the surest way to improve the performance of the state's high schools would be to (1) improve the transitions between middle schools, high schools, and postsecondary education; (2) enhance the learning conditions in the state's high schools; (3) prevent dropouts and reconnect with students who leave without graduating; and (4) build an effective P-16 system for the state's children and young people.



Source: Ohio Department of Education

The interviews conducted as part of this study confirmed broad support for the kinds of changes envisioned in the Task Force's final report. Yet, they also reminded us that creative, outside-the-box thinking has little value if policymakers—and in this case, educators—are not committed to turning clever strategies into measurable results. Very simply, it is execution—not strategy—that will define Ohio's success in creating breakthrough high schools.

The job of turning strategies and recommendations into action—of achieving sustained, breakthrough performance—is a significant challenge. As this analysis reveals, it will require identifying and overcoming substantial legal and policy barriers. But there is

more. It also will demand changing attitudes and creating new cultures, and its success ultimately will be shaped by the efforts of talented, motivated people clearly tasked to get the job done and properly supported and empowered to do so.

If creating breakthrough high schools in Ohio is about translating strategy into operational terms, the keys to success will be sharpening focus, aligning resources, and changing the way people do business. Expectations for all students will need to be higher, and the struggle to raise student aspirations will have to be successful.

Breaking down the barriers to redesigned high schools will be dependent on the development of innovative approaches to school organization and to new ways of delivering instruction. Similarly, the barriers to recruiting, preparing, licensing, retaining, and developing high-quality teachers will need to be minimized, if not eliminated.

Ohio's leaders will need to build a coherent, aligned P-16 education system. The barriers to providing schools with the resources they need to succeed must be overcome, and Ohio's education policy leaders will have to find the political will to resolve the equity and adequacy issues that have dominated education policy discussions for decades.

It will be incumbent upon state officials, in collaboration with school districts and communities, to develop accountability systems with appropriately balanced rewards, incentives, and sanctions designed to spur change and improve student learning. And policymakers and educators alike will have to be sensitive to, and skillfully maneuver within, a complex educational landscape shaped by powerful historical, political, and social realities.

A challenging agenda, to be sure, and certainly not for the timid. But it is one that Ohio must embrace because higher levels of academic achievement—and the improved performance of Ohio's high schools—go hand-in-hand with the state's success in the 21st century's knowledge- and innovation-driven economy.

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