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For more information contact:
Aaron Churchill, Ohio Research Director
Phone: (412) 719-7643
Email: achurchill@edexcellence.net

Fordham Institute recommends simpler, fairer Ohio school report cards

New paper asks state legislators to revamp Ohio's report cards—suggests reducing number of school ratings and creating better balance between achievement and growth through an updated overall rating formula.

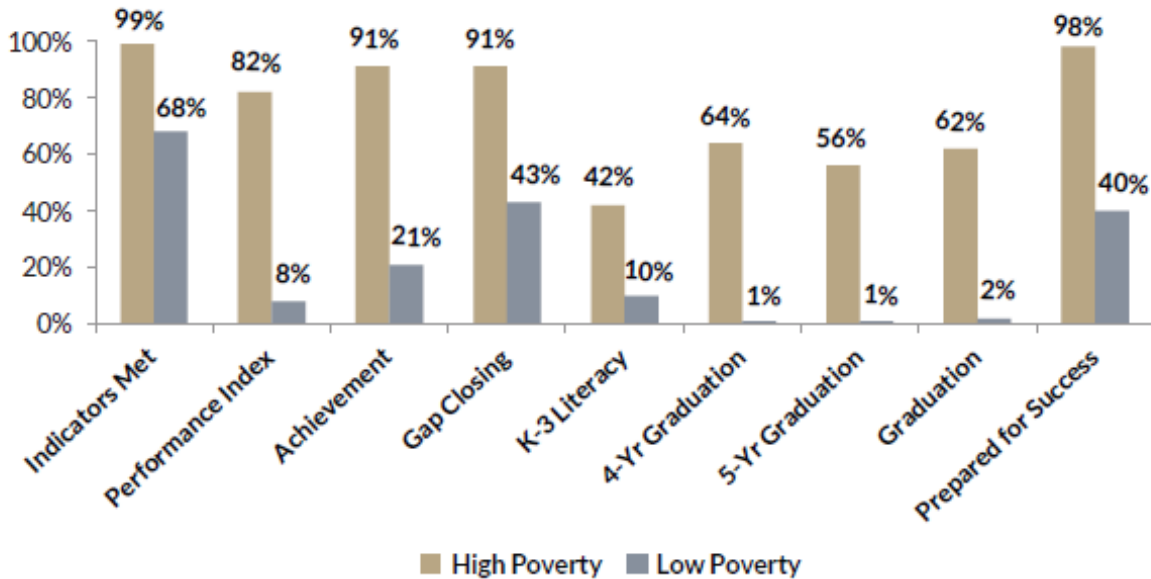
COLUMBUS (OH) – The Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a policy paper today called *Back to the Basics*. The paper analyzes in detail the report card that Ohio issues to schools and districts and calls for a number of changes.

“As a vital look at the performance of Ohio schools, report cards should make sense to Ohioans,” said Aaron Churchill, Ohio Research Director at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. “While well-intentioned, Ohio’s phase-in of new performance measures in recent years has made report cards increasingly unwieldy and harder to comprehend.”

To improve report cards, the paper offers three key recommendations:

- **Reduce the number of A-F grades.** Ohio report cards now include fourteen letter grades—and soon to be fifteen as an overall rating comes out in 2018. Legislators should reduce the number of ratings to six: an overall grade plus five component ratings—Achievement, Progress, Graduation, Prepared for Success, and Equity.
- **Overhaul the Gap Closing component and rename it Equity.** Gap Closing gauges the performance of subgroups, including students with disabilities, race/ethnic groups, etc. However, the current design of this component is unnecessarily complex and produces counterintuitive results. Ohio lawmakers should overhaul this component so that the public can see clearly whether all groups of students are meeting achievement and growth goals.
- **Create an overall school rating formula that better balances growth and achievement.** Almost all high-poverty schools receive low ratings on achievement-based measures that largely reflect proficiency gaps between low- and high-income pupils. As the state adds an overall rating next year, legislators need to enact a formula that is more evenhanded to all schools, regardless of the students they enroll, by placing greater weight on growth measures.

Figure 2: Percentage of Ohio schools receiving D's or F's by poverty level, 2016-17



Note: This table displays the percentage of D or F ratings for high- and low-poverty schools, based on Ohio’s report card components that tend to correlate with poverty. Though not displayed here, growth (or value added) ratings are not strongly correlated with poverty. High-poverty schools enrolled 66 to 100 percent economically disadvantaged students while low-poverty schools enrolled 0 to 33 percent ED students (results for mid-poverty schools are not displayed).

“By focusing so heavily on achievement measures, Ohio’s rating system unfairly labels high-poverty schools that are making big impacts on student growth as failures,” Churchill added. “With a prominent overall rating coming next fall, it’s critically important that legislators properly balance achievement and growth measures in this rating formula. If they fail to act, vast numbers of high-poverty schools will receive overall D’s and F’s, leaving families in these communities unable to distinguish dysfunctional schools from exceptional ones.”

To view the report *Back to the Basics: A plan to simplify and balance Ohio’s school report cards*, please visit www.edexcellence.net/ohio-policy.

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The Thomas B. Fordham Institute promotes educational excellence for every child in America via quality research, analysis, and commentary, as well as advocacy and charter school authorizing in Ohio. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and this publication is a joint project of the Foundation and the Institute. For further information, please visit our website at www.edexcellence.net. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.