OHIO

Overview

In the summer of 1997 the Ohio General Assembly passed Senate Bill 55, introducing Ohio's first state-level accountability system. Since then, the Buckeye State's system has continued to evolve, often in response to the push and pull of politics and funding. In 2011, for example, during a landmark legislative session that saw Governor Kasich try—and fail—to overhaul collective-bargaining provisions, the legislature took steps to strengthen Ohio's accountability measures. House Bill 153, the biennial budget bill, introduced stricter turnaround and closure requirements for schools, a pilot "parent trigger" option for parents with children in low-performing schools, and new teacher-evaluation requirements, among other elements.

Senior-level state education staff indicate that Ohio's existing accountability system has three primary objectives: (1) establishing and communicating to districts clear expectations about what students should know and be able to do; (2) informing the public about school performance through transparent school-level achievement data; and (3) providing school administrators and teachers with an objective set of data to drive decision-making and improvement planning. Each of these objectives has been met with varying levels of success, as explained below.

Below, we map Ohio's progress against six key components of strong state accountability systems.

1) Adoption of demanding, clear, and specific standards in all core content areas, and rigorous assessment of those standards

The quality of Ohio's reading and math standards markedly improved with the state's adoption of the Common Core in 2010. The Buckeye State would do well to refurbish its U.S. History standards in a similar manner and to tweak its science standards, which, though respectable, leave some room for improvement.[70] The Ohio Achievement Assessments annually assess reading and mathematics in third through eighth grade and again in tenth grade; science in fifth, eighth, and tenth grades; and writing and social studies in tenth grade. (In 2009-10, Ohio discontinued its fifth- and eighth-grade social studies tests and its fourth- and seventh-grade writing tests due to financial constraints.) The tenth-grade tests together comprise the overall Ohio Graduation Test (OGT).

[70] In a 2010 analysis by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Ohio's reading and math standards both received Cs, while the Common Core reading and math standards received a B-plus and an A-minus, respectively. The state received a D for its U.S. History standards in 2011, and a B for its science standards in 2012. See *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*, *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011*, and *The State of State Science Standards 2012*, at www.standards.educationgadfly.net/.

Unfortunately, Ohio does not set a high bar for its assessments. When mapped onto proficiency scales employed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Ohio's standard of proficiency on its fourth- and eighth-grade math and eighth-grade reading assessments only matches NAEP's *basic* level; its fourth-grade reading cut score only meets NAEP's *below basic* level.[71] As one district representative reported, this problem persists at the high school level: "There is a challenge [in] trying to move kids to a more demanding curriculum [when] they are assessed at a lower level with the OGT."

2) Reporting of accessible and actionable data to all stakeholders, including summative outcome data and other formative data to drive continuous improvement

Ohio reports school and district performance using a web-based interactive Local Report Card (iLRC). The database provides a level of transparency not typically found in most state reporting systems, and its interface is simple and intuitive. The system allows for quick comparisons of schools and districts on a number of indicators—such as test results, graduation rates, student discipline, mobility rates, grade-level promotions, and school and district ratings under the state accountability system, among other elements. Much of the data can be disaggregated by student subgroups—such as race, disability, and homeless status. Further, the proficiency data are presented by the percentages of students scoring at different proficiency levels, rather than by a single rate of proficiency.

3) Annual determinations and designations for each school and district that meaningfully differentiate their performance

To assign performance ratings to its schools and districts, Ohio measures schools based on both state and federal indicators and produces school and district report cards which assign each entity one of six designations:

- Excellent with Distinction
- Excellent
- Effective
- Continuous Improvement
- Academic Watch
- Academic Emergency

[71] National Center for Education Statistics, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Variation and Change in State Standards for Reading and Mathematics, 2005–2009* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, August 2011), http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011458. Ohio is a governing state of the PAARC assessment consortium and will likely replace its reading and math assessments with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PAARC) assessments in 2014-15.

Performance designations for schools and districts are based on the combination of the following four distinct measures:

State Indicators – The State Indicators report measures the percentage of all students scoring proficient or above on the Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). The passing standard for schools requires that 75 percent of their students pass each content area test, and that 85 percent pass the OGT by the end of eleventh grade. The State Indicators report also measures whether schools are meeting the required attendance and graduation rates, which are 93 and 90 percent of all students, respectively. (These data are not disaggregated by subgroup.)

Performance Index Score (PI) – Districts and schools earn points based on how well each student performs on the OAA and the OGT. The performance index score is a weighted average that includes student test results in all tested subjects and grades. The greatest weight is given to advanced scores; weighting decreases for each performance level and a weight of zero is given to untested students. This results in a scale from 0-120 points. The PI can be compared across years to show school achievement trends. Districts report the PI as a particularly valuable metric as it gives them a "big picture look of the schools' overall health over time."

Value-Added Measure – In 2007, Ohio added a value-added measure to capture student progress at the school level from one year to the next. Value-added results may be used to augment an overall performance designation. Since they demonstrate growth rather than absolute performance, their inclusion functions as a reward for low-performing schools that are making substantial progress but not hitting absolute performance standards. The value-added measure has great promise, but Ohio needs to build district confidence in the measure's accuracy (especially if it is going to serve as a foundation for proposed pay-for-performance compensation systems). More than one administrator expressed concern about its accuracy and felt that in-district benchmark assessments were more reliable gauges of student progress and teacher effectiveness.[72]

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Every school and district in Ohio must meet AYP benchmarks for reading and math proficiency as well as for test participation, attendance, and graduation rates. Ohio calculates proficiency rates of student groups by tallying both the number of students proficient

[72] One state representative, however, countered that Ohio has already acted to strengthen the inferences that can be drawn from its value-added results. The state has implemented a smoothing process to address the annual "expected" fluctuations on the assessments and changed the standard error of measurement.

in a subject *as well as the number of students on track to reach proficiency in that subject within two years*, and then dividing by the total number of students.[73] As one local stakeholder put it, this measure inflates the proficiency rates of Ohio's student population, and is often considered to be one of the worst AYP proficiency measures in the nation.

Assigning school and district designations is a two-step process. First, State Indicators, Performance Index scores, and AYP are combined to form a preliminary designation. If consideration of AYP bumped a school or district up or down a designation level, then that preliminary designation serves as the final designation. If not, the state then incorporates value-added data into the calculation, which may increase (but not decrease) a school or district's final designation.

So while Ohio's performance designations incorporate multiple measures of achievement, the structure of the calculations can result in an inflated picture of student performance. For one, the state's AYP proficiency measure is broad to the point of meaninglessness. Compounding that with value-added scores that can be used to bump up (but not down) schools and districts makes for a potentially inaccurate identification system that may mask areas of weakness.

Further, Ohio's performance labels are just that—labels. As described below, Ohio only ties these designations to sanctions and supports for the very worst-performing schools. Otherwise, Ohio relies on AYP status and NCLB requirements to hold schools accountable.

4) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the school and district levels

Rewards

According to local stakeholders, the performance rating system is an important "carrot and stick" for schools in Ohio. When asked about the importance of incentives, one superintendent responded, "The biggest incentive is the community expectation to pursue or keep the rating of Excellent or Excellent with

[73] The proficiency standards for AYP are different from the standards for determining proficiency in the State Indicators, PI, and value-added calculations. In addition, AYP disaggregates data by student subgroups, while the State Indicators, PI, and value-added measure do not. Thus, while the combination of these indicators produces a robust picture of school and district performance, the different state and federal measures can contribute to general confusion about the overall metric. For example, the accountability system requires that a district or school that meets AYP can be designated no lower than Continuous Improvement, while an Excellent or Effective district or school that does not meet AYP goals for three or more consecutive years (and in the same two or more subgroups) will see its designation reduced by one category. This can lead to final designations that do not appear to align with the state-required indicators. At least one Ohio superintendent wishes that the state would "report [AYP] but not include it as a component of the campus/district rating."

Distinction." Not only does Ohio provide the "stick" for schools that don't achieve these ratings (described below), it provides the "carrot" for those that do—an additional $17 more per pupil in FY 2012-13 for those districts ranked as Excellent or Excellent with Distinction. In addition, while the provision of additional funds based on performance is a relatively new development, districts with those designations have long had the ability to seek waivers to opt out of state requirements.

Above and beyond the six-level designation system, Ohio reports a list of buildings deemed the State Superintendent's Schools of Promise—an award given to economically disadvantaged schools that have met standards for AYP, graduation rates, value-added measures, and student proficiency. This designation, however, includes no financial reward.

Sanctions

Ohio has traditionally maintained few school and district sanctions beyond those mandated by NCLB, and even then the state permits its schools some leeway in adhering to them. Since 2008, Ohio has participated in a federal pilot program that allows it to implement a *Differentiated Accountability* model; it permits the Buckeye State more flexibility in meeting federal accountability requirements. In practice, schools and districts can avoid implementing many federal improvement efforts entirely, and instead craft their own improvement plans under state supervision.

Here's how the *Differentiated Accountability* model works: Ohio requires that all schools and districts in NCLB "school improvement" (meaning those that have missed AYP for at least two consecutive years) complete the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP). The process requires state teams and Educational Service Centers (ESCs)[74] to work with districts and schools to identify areas for improvement, develop improvement plans, and implement and monitor the plans. Throughout the process, the state provides districts with state-developed products and tools, including professional development. The state also provides training in the OIP process for ESC personnel and others who function as regional facilitators, ensuring that districts receive consistent support in their improvement efforts.

Potentially more important to districts than these supports, however, OIP also removes the requirement that districts spend their time in sweeping corrective action—such as replacing building staff and restructuring the internal organizational structures—which some leaders see as unrelated to their daily headaches. The OIP has received national recognition in that regard, as it

[74] Educational service centers (ESCs) work under the direction of and in coordination with the state education agency. According to the ODE website, ESCs provide services to assist districts and schools in improving student achievement and operating more economically and efficiently.

addresses the complaint that NCLB requirements are indiscriminate and disjointed from schools' and districts' actual needs, and at least one school superintendent indicated that the process showed promise in its early stages. But in practice, the OIP has become an institutionalized method for avoiding NCLB requirements. Superintendents described it as a "compliance activity" and a "box-checking activity," that simply allows NCLB sanctions to go away for schools that complete it.

However, Ohio's 2011 budget bill, H.B. 153, layered additional sanctions for Ohio's lowest-performing schools onto these flimsy "differentiated" requirements. The legislation mandates the restructuring or closure of schools that are in the lowest 5 percent of all schools based on PI scores for three consecutive years and that are rated Academic Emergency or Academic Watch. The four turnaround options outlined by the state are stricter than those outlined federally under the School Improvement Grants (SIG)—for example, Ohio's turnaround options do not include the SIG "transformation" model, which typically leaves the majority of a school's staff and programs in place.

In addition, the budget bill included a "parent trigger" provision to be piloted in Columbus City Schools and potentially expanded statewide. The bill targets parents with children in buildings that have ranked in the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools for three consecutive years. Those parents can petition a district to close and reopen the school as a charter school, replace at least 70 percent of the school's staff, contract with another school district or entity to operate the school, turn operation of the school over to the state, or make other fundamental reforms to staffing and governance (similar to NCLB's cascade of sanctions).

The addition of these two accountability measures is a big step forward for Ohio's otherwise weak accountability system. Still, there is some ambiguity as to how Ohio's new turnaround requirements will overlap and function in tandem with the federal system, particularly for those schools that have received SIGs under NCLB.

Support

Ohio's *Differentiated Accountability* model, described above, allows the state to offer different levels of support to schools and districts based on a more nuanced picture of low performance. Instead of focusing on the number of years that a school or district misses AYP—the traditional method for distributing support under NCLB—the model permits Ohio to base support on the aggregate percentage of a school or district's student groups that do not meet AYP in reading and mathematics. This is an improvement over the traditional NCLB support system, which requires that two schools that have missed AYP for an equal number of years—one missing AYP in all subgroups, and the other missing AYP in just one—receive the same level of support.

In addition, and like the OIP process itself, the state provides mechanisms through which districts and schools can obtain outside counsel and guidance. Ohio mandates that the superintendent of public instruction establish an Academic Distress commission when a district is designated to be in a state of Academic Emergency and has failed to make AYP for four or more consecutive years. The commission, which includes two community representatives appointed by the local school board president and three state appointed representatives, is charged with assisting the district in improving academic performance. At the time of this publication, only one district, Youngstown, was declared to be in Academic Distress.

In addition, Ohio requires that its lowest performers participate in the State Diagnostic Team Review Process. Designed for schools or districts designated high support (see below) with multiple curriculum areas, grades, and student groups not meeting AYP, this process requires skilled reviewers from outside the district or school to evaluate district processes, resulting in a diagnostic profile of needs-improvement areas for the district. The state describes the methods and protocols created for this review process as "grounded in scientifically based research practice, and aligned with the themes that have emerged from Ohio Schools of Promise case studies."

5) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual student level

Ohio has some student-level accountability measures on the books, but these are not as stringent as they could be. For one, the state requires that students pass the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) in order to graduate.[75] But because these tests are first administered in tenth grade, and can be retaken by students who do not pass, they are based on tenth-grade learning standards. As a result, district-level representatives express some concern that students are not held to a high standard for graduation. As one district representative opined, "The current indicators that measure proficiency and put students in proficiency categories are just a minimum." Many district representatives look forward to the fundamental shifts in standards and assessments that will occur as the state implements the Common Core standards.

[75] A student may also graduate if he meets the following criteria: (1) he has passed four of the five tests and has missed passing the fifth test by no more than ten scale score points; (2) has had a 97 percent attendance rate each of the last four years and has not been expelled in the last four years; (3) has a grade point average of 2.5 out of 4.0 in the subject area missed and has completed the curriculum requirement in the subject area missed; (4) has participated in an intervention program offered by the school and has had a 97 percent attendance rate in any program offered outside the normal school day or year, including those offered by someone other than the school; and (5) has obtained letters of recommendation from each teacher in the subject area not yet passed and from the high school principal.

On paper, Ohio also requires that third-grade students pass the state's third-grade reading test in order to be promoted to fourth grade. In practice, however, Ohio does little to enforce this legislation; while about 20 percent of all third graders failed to achieve proficiency in 2009-10, only 0.6 percent of third graders were retained for 2010-11. The state is supposed to provide those students who failed but then advanced to fourth grade with additional reading supports, but there is little evidence that those additional supports have any positive impact.[76]

Ohio does offer a number of options for its students to exit low-performing schools and choose schools that match their needs. Since 2006-07, the Educational Choice Scholarship Program has offered private-school vouchers to students in persistently failing schools (i.e., schools earning ratings of Academic Watch and/or Academic Emergency for two of the last three years). The state recently expanded this option to include students in schools ranked in the bottom 10 percent statewide for two of the last three years based on PI score.[77] Ohio also offers separate voucher programs for students with autism and for special-needs students writ large. In addition, Ohio allows for open enrollment among districts, expanding the options for students to exit low-performing schools. While not specifically limited to low performers, the policy allows districts either to permit students to enroll from any district in the state or to permit students to enroll from adjacent districts. About 80 percent of districts allow some form of open enrollment.

6) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual teacher and administrator level

Ohio included legislation in H.B. 153 introducing new requirements for teacher and principal evaluations. The state now requires that 50 percent of teacher and principal evaluations be based on student growth measures. Teachers and principals are to be rated according to the following categories: accomplished, proficient, developing, and ineffective. Districts must evaluate new teachers (i.e., non-tenured teachers) twice a year and all other teachers annually.[78] (The bill is agnostic on the frequency of principal evaluations.)

The legislation leaves many decisions to districts, however, meaning that the quality of implementation and the consequences tied to the evaluation system depend on district initiative. While the legislation requires that the evaluations

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[76] Emmy L. Partin, "Ohio Needs a Reading Guarantee," *The Ohio Gadfly*, November 2, 2011, http://www.edexcellence.net/publications-issues/gadfly/ohio/20111102-oh-gadfly.html.

[77] In addition, proposed legislation to create the Parental Choice and Taxpayer Savings (PACT) Scholarship is currently working its way through the Ohio statehouse. The new voucher program would expand voucher eligibility to families with annual incomes less than $95,000. The legislation passed the House education committee in September 2011 but must still gain full approval of the Ohio House and Senate. Local stakeholders noted that the legislation is not expected to pass, at least in its current form.

[78] With one exception: Districts can opt to evaluate "accomplished" teachers biennially.

"inform" key employment decisions, and that teacher layoffs can no longer be based primarily on seniority, the state does not stipulate whether the evaluations must be tied to dismissal, tenure, transfer, or compensation determinations for teachers or principals. (Only those districts participating in Race to the Top are required to develop teacher performance-pay scales.) Districts are required to have new evaluation systems in place by 2013.

Finally, H.B. 153 mandates that teachers of core subjects in schools ranked in the bottom 10 percent of schools each year must retake all of the state's teacher licensure exams required for the grades and subjects they teach (not more than once every three years). While the measure seemingly aims to hold teachers accountable for their own content knowledge, the requirement is limited to teachers in the lowest-performing schools—and thus will likely overlook many teachers with poor content knowledge in higher-performing schools. In addition, it remains unclear how schools and districts will use this information.

What are the strengths and limitations of Ohio's accountability system?

Strengths

Transparent data. In addition to the school report card issued by all states, Ohio's creation of the web-based interactive Local Report Card (iLRC) steps up the level of transparency typically found in most state reporting systems. The system easily allows comparison among schools and districts, a feature not found in every state.

Comprehensive picture of school performance. With the use of the State Indicators, the Performance Index, the Value-Added Measure, and AYP, Ohio provides a more comprehensive picture of student learning and growth than states that simply report on student proficiency. (Though Ohio has distorted its AYP proficiency measures by allowing students below proficiency, but making "adequate" growth, to be counted as proficient. Further, only the AYP measure includes student subgroups.)

Value-added measure. Ohio should be recognized for its efforts to build a metric that not only shows the value added at the school level, but with further refinement may help to answer the question, "How much value does an individual teacher add to a student's learning over the course of an academic year?"

Differentiated support. Rather than a "one size fits all" response to low-performing districts and schools, the Ohio *Differentiated Accountability* model attempts to differentiate support and consequences for low performers based on the *number* of their subgroups failing to make

adequate progress—rather than overall AYP status. That said, some view the model as an escape hatch from NCLB sanctions, not a model driving authentic change.

Limitations

Limited testing of essential content areas. Ohio only tests writing and social studies at the high school level. This can lead to curriculum narrowing, and students may be caught off guard when faced with these assessments in the later grades. (It also limits the number of teachers whose effectiveness can be analyzed based on student test scores.) At minimum, the dearth of writing assessments may be addressed as new assessments aligned with the Common Core standards come online in 2014-15.

Complex performance-rating mechanism. While Ohio provides a comprehensive look at school performance, the various performance indicators can be confusing at the local level. The system employs different proficiency passing rates for the State Indicators and for AYP, meaning that the same school can pass one but not the other, and/or that the overall performance rating can reflect one but not the other. As a district superintendent described, "The report card ratings are very confusing and convoluted because of multiple measures," despite the state's transparency in reporting all indicators.

Weak outline of sanctions. Ohio traditionally adheres to the NCLB outline of sanctions for low performers—meaning that its own school and district performance designations carry little real weight—but even then it allows schools and districts much leeway in meeting the federal requirements. The state recently took steps to strengthen its accountability system through H.B. 153, but this legislation only addresses the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools, leaving all other struggling schools to fend for themselves. Certainly the capacity and will of any state department to turn around low-performing schools is questionable, but all states (not just Ohio) should think carefully about the role of the state department of education, district, business communities, non-profits and other entities in supporting a wider band of struggling schools. The state and district need not be the only players here.

Final Word

Ohio's accountability system provides a comprehensive picture of school performance. Unfortunately, the state does little to put that information to good use. While it made great strides in strengthening school and individual

accountability with its passage of H.B. 153, the state still has far to go to ensure that the new measures are enacted with fidelity.

Information on Ohio's education-accountability system was primarily drawn from interviews with state representatives, district representatives, and local stakeholders, as well as from the Ohio Department of Education website at www.ode.state.oh.us. Additional information was drawn from the National Council on Teacher Quality's *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*.