

## Section I: Abstract

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**Ohio's** public schools will soon transition to the Common Core. The Common Core are clear, consistent, and rigorous academic standards in English language arts and math aimed at readying all students for success in college and career. These standards—and their aligned assessments—will raise the expectations for all our students, will increase learning standards, and will monitor progress through more focused assessments. These higher standards will inspire and motivate our next generation of students to achieve great things. Great things come at a cost, however. When these higher standards are implemented, Ohio schools will receive a jolt as their proficiency rates plummet. This report projects how painful this transition will be in 2014-15. But once this initial pain subsides, there will be longer-term gain, as the faithful implementation of the Common Core will put all of Ohio's youngsters onto the pathway toward success.

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## Section II: Introduction

### School data at the crossroads

School data took a hit in the Buckeye State last year. Prompted by reports of data manipulation by a few school administrators, the Ohio Auditor of State has conducted a statewide investigation into the fidelity of student attendance data. Though most schools have come out clean, the Auditor has found “questionable practices” in data reporting at five Ohio school districts.<sup>1</sup> The investigation delayed the release of Ohio’s 2011-12 School Report Card data by two months. [As of the writing of this report (December 2012), the Auditor’s investigation remains ongoing and schools have not been issued final Report Cards.]

The manipulation of data, though isolated to a few districts, is troubling and serious. State lawmakers rely on these very data to craft education policies, parents put confidence in them to select a school for their kids, and educators use them to improve performance. Yet, despite the troubles in the data, they still remain the best indicators to compare how schools are doing in the Buckeye State. We therefore use the preliminary Ohio Report Card data to examine how public schools statewide, and in its major metropolitan areas, performed in 2011-12. We dig deep especially into Ohio’s largest urban areas, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Dayton, giving a ten-year view of enrollment and proficiency rates in these cities—for both charter and district schools.

The most relied-upon data source for this report is the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) 2011-12 Preliminary Report Card data, released in October 2012. Because of the limitations of this data set, other sources of data were used, such as ODE’s 2011-12 unverified data set, which was released in June 2012. Other data sources are noted and linked throughout the report in applicable spots.

The data we present here indicate where Ohio public education has come, where it currently stands in 2011-12, and where it may go beginning in 2014-15 under the Common Core. We hope our presentation will enable policy makers and the public to better understand the landscape of public education in the Buckeye State.

### Suburban schools ok; urban areas a mess

Statewide, most of Ohio’s public schools perform competently and in-line with the state’s standard for excellence. Over half of traditional public districts received an excellent (A) or excellent with distinction (A+) rating in 2011-12. These school districts are, as expected, located largely in Ohio’s wealthier and middle-class communities, and several more, in its rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Auditor of State, “No Evidence of Scrubbing Found in Second Phase of Attendance Data Audit,” <http://www.auditor.state.oh.us/newscenter/press/release/1470>.

However, like many other states, Ohio's urban school districts are a mess. Anywhere between 30 to 60 percent of inner-city students fail the state's standardized exams in math and reading, indicating that the majority of urban students are anything but college and career ready. And when these poor test scores are taken together, the entire school building or district will fail also. Traditional urban public school districts, therefore, struggle: Cleveland Metropolitan School District is rated academic emergency (F) and Dayton City and Youngstown City are rated academic watch (D). Combined these three districts serve some 60,000 students.

This mess in urban areas is hardly confined to traditional public school districts—it's in many of Ohio's charters as well. Though charter schools have improved their performance over the past decade (charter performance was pitifully low in the early 2000s), many urban charters still underperform, performing no better or worse than their traditional public school counterparts. In Cleveland and Dayton, for example, around one in three charter students attend a failing charter school (rated academic watch or academic emergency).

### **PARCC exams will slam proficiency rates in 2014-15**

We gaze into our crystal ball, in section 3 of this report, to estimate the impact of Ohio's move to the rigorous Common Core State Standards and its aligned assessments (the PARCC exams) on proficiency rates. The Common Core are academic standards in math and English language arts that all Ohio public schools will fully implement beginning in 2014-15. We use test result data from the Ohio Department of Education's unofficial data set (released June 2012) to forecast what proficiency rates will be statewide and for selected districts and charters in 2014-15.

The confluence of three factors—higher academic standards, more challenging assessments, and a higher cut score on the assessments—have the potential to seriously impact Ohio's proficiency rate. Using the percentage of students who tested advanced plus accelerated—the two performance levels above proficient—on the 2011-12 exams, we estimate that the statewide proficiency rates will fall between **20 to 50 points**. Likewise, urban and suburban school districts' and charter schools' proficiency rates will also fall, somewhere between **20 and 50 points**.

### **An end to the tyranny of low expectations**

Despite the short-term pain for the state and for districts, all is not lost—and in fact, much will be gained. Ohio's current standards, assessments, and definition of proficiency set the bar much too low for youngsters. In fact, they can be hardly described as fast-tracking students for success in college and career. The Common Core standards and the PARCC assessments aim to fix this, by putting students on track for college and career. They will transform Ohio education, setting higher expectations for all students and providing an objective, consistent, and comparable view of how all students perform. They will be the best way to plot how to help every student meet the new standards—and ensure that all our kids graduate high school prepared for success in college and career.