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# A New Compact for Ohio's Schools:

*A Report to Ohio's Educational  
Policy Leaders*

**March 1999**

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## About This Review

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In November, 1998, Achieve, Inc., agreed to undertake a short external review of systemic education reform in Ohio. The review was jointly sponsored by the Ohio Business Roundtable, the Governor's office, and the Ohio Department of Education, and was co-planned with staff from the three organizations.\* The purpose of the review was to provide for the incoming Governor and State Superintendent, as well as for legislators, state board members, and others with a continuing responsibility for state education policy, a brief but candid assessment of the strengths and shortcomings of Ohio's reform strategy, with a particular focus on academic standards, assessment, and accountability. Its major goal was to identify those reform elements already in place that in the review team's judgment constitute solid building blocks for the future, and those unfinished or missing pieces that must receive high priority attention if Ohio's ambitious education goals are going to be realized.

The review team began its work by analyzing a comprehensive set of written documents dealing with various aspects of the state's education system, with a special focus on recent policy initiatives (A complete list of these documents is provided in Appendix A). Members of the review team then spent two and a half days in mid-December in Ohio interviewing a cross-section of leaders from government, education, business, and other stakeholder groups (A complete list of those interviewed is included in Appendix B). The reviewers then compared notes and impressions and drafted this report. Although we asked staff from the three sponsoring organizations to review a draft for factual accuracy, the observations and conclusions in the report are entirely our own. Within tight constraints of time and resources, our goal was to gain a clear enough understanding of the current status of education reform in Ohio to support the development of a focused set of recommendations to education policy makers in this period of leadership transition. We hope these observations and recommendations are helpful to those with policymaking responsibility for the education of Ohio's schoolchildren.

### About Achieve, Inc.

Achieve, Inc., is a non-profit, bi-partisan organization created by the nation's governors and business leaders to help them follow up on the commitments made at the 1996 National Education Summit. Its twelve member Board of Directors includes former Governor Voinovich and John Pepper, Chairman of Procter & Gamble and Chairman of the Ohio Business Roundtable. Achieve provides advice and assistance to state policy leaders on issues of academic standards, assessment, and accountability. It has a small staff, augmented by a team of

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\* Achieve gratefully acknowledges the work of Richard Stoff and Jackie Swick of the Ohio Business Roundtable, Tom Needles and Alan Endicott from the Governor's Office, and Jack Jackson from the Department of Education, without whose help this review would not have been possible.

Senior Associates, and conducts much of its work in partnership with other education and business organizations. To carry out this review, Achieve drew upon three of its Senior Associates – Denis Doyle, Diane Ravitch, and Warren Simmons – as well as Susan Traiman, who directs The Business Roundtable’s education work. The review team was headed by Achieve’s President, Robert Schwartz, and was assisted by Seth Reynolds, graduate student at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government (Short biographical sketches of the review team are included in Appendix C).

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# A New Compact for Ohio's Schools

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## I. Ohio's Challenge

Over the past fifteen years, school reform has increasingly become a central concern of policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public. From *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 through the National Education Summits in 1989 and 1996, Americans have come to understand the degree to which the quality of our civic life and economic prosperity depend on our ability to ensure that all of our young people leave school with a solid foundation of academic knowledge and skills. Consequently, virtually every state in the union is now engaged in raising its expectations for student performance and crafting policies designed to enable students to meet these expectations.

Throughout the 1990s, Ohio's policymakers have worked energetically to raise the bar of expectations for Ohio's students, and to provide local communities with additional resources to support educational improvement, and **there is evidence that Ohio's reform strategy is beginning to show results.** Ohio's principal vehicle for measuring student achievement is its proficiency testing program, which assesses students' knowledge and skills in five subjects and four different grade levels. At the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, for example, 62% of students in 1998 were proficient in all five subjects, up from 46% in 1991, when only four subjects were tested. Over 90% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 1998 are proficient in reading and writing, the highest scores in any subjects at any grade level. Writing seems to be a strength across the system, with math and science being weak spots. Although the absolute scores in most subjects and grades are a substantial distance from the 90% proficiency targets, the trend lines are generally positive, especially in grades six and nine, as are participation rates and performance on ACT and SAT tests.

The question for Ohio, as for most other states, is whether the rate of educational improvement is sufficiently rapid, especially given the pace of change in the larger society. The most powerful and sobering answer to that question is contained in *Knowledge and Know-How: Meeting Ohio's Skill Gap Challenge*, a 1998 study conducted by the Ohio Business Roundtable and the Department of Education in conjunction with American College Testing. This report, based on a sophisticated analysis of the skill level requirements of entry-level jobs in five high growth career clusters, and a related skills assessment of a representative sample of 14,000 Ohio high school seniors, revealed that **only one Ohio student in fourteen is leaving high school well-prepared to participate in Ohio's emerging knowledge-based economy.** Students were assessed in four key skill areas that are common across the career clusters: Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, Applied Technology, and Locating Information. Most students who identify themselves as college-bound met the skill level requirements in the first two areas, but only 27% of college-bound students met the Locating Information standard, and even fewer met the Applied Technology standard. These skill levels were established for jobs typically sought not by the college-bound, however, but by students in vocational or general track programs, and for these students the mismatch between their skills and those required by the jobs

profiled was deeply troubling. In none of the four skill areas could a majority of non-college bound students demonstrate the requisite competence, and in the weakest two areas – Applied Technology and Locating Information – only 11 and 7 percent, respectively, could meet the standard.

The skills gap report has obvious implications for curriculum and instruction – the teaching of physical sciences, for example, clearly needs to be strengthened in the middle grades and high school – **but its major message is that all students, not just the college-bound, need to be given a more rigorous academic program.** In 1997 Ohio adopted a set of policy changes that will require all students to pass a more demanding set of proficiency tests for high school graduation in five subjects, and to take a more challenging diet of academic courses. At the same time, it adopted an ambitious set of 18 performance standards for school districts, 16 of which are tied to pass rates on the state’s proficiency tests. Outgoing Superintendent John Goff indicated in an October speech that if the new performance standards were put in place this academic year, only *six* of Ohio’s 611 school districts would be judged “effective” (i.e., would have met virtually all of the standards), while 358 districts would be in the bottom two categories (“academic watch,” meeting between one-third and one-half of the standards, or “academic emergency,” meeting one-third or less).

**These two interrelated goals – closing the skills gap for graduates and raising the performance level of schools – define the challenge facing Ohio policymakers and educators as the state heads into a new century.**

## **II. Progress in the 1990s**

Ohio can be proud of a substantial set of policy initiatives it has launched in the 1990s, and of the deepening investments it has made in educational improvement. Since Fiscal Year 1991, state education funding has increased by approximately 50 percent, twice the rate of inflation. The increase has been greatest for low-wealth districts. Legislation already enacted guarantees an additional 40 percent increase in state aid over the next five years.

Over and above these increases in general state aid for education, there have been substantial new investments in early childhood education, technology, facilities, and urban education, and major policy initiatives to overhaul teacher education and strengthen public accountability for results. Each of these initiatives deserves comment, for each could be an important element in a comprehensive state strategy to close the gap in student and school performance.

### **Early Childhood Education**

Ohio’s extraordinary commitment to expand access to Head Start and early childhood education for disadvantaged pre-schoolers, moving from 35% coverage of low-income children in 1992 to 87% participation in Fiscal Year 1998, has made it a national leader in this field. **Ohio now has the highest proportion of low-income youngsters enrolled in Head Start of any state in the union,** and it has made comparably impressive gains in expanding access to

pre-school programs for children with special needs. Having achieved the goal of expanding *access*, Ohio now faces the challenge of strengthening *quality* through the establishment of clear learning standards for its early childhood programs, through improved professional development, and through the development of strong curriculum linkages to its primary grade programs.

### **Technology**

A second area where Ohio has made major progress is in its investments in technology. Since Fiscal Year 1996 the state has invested \$525 million in capital and operating funds, with a special target of providing one computer workstation for every four children in grades K-4. Two-thirds of all low-wealth districts have been completely wired, and virtually all school districts in the states have had technology plans approved by the state. Unlike some states, Ohio has complemented its investments in hardware with nearly \$50 million in professional development programs to help insure that the technology is fully utilized to help improve student learning.

### **Urban Districts**

A third area where Ohio has launched targeted new investments has been in its twenty-one urban districts. Under the leadership of John Goff, the state and representatives from these districts fashioned a comprehensive Urban Schools Initiative (USI) in 1997 that provides support for the development or expansion of full-day kindergarten, family resource centers, urban professional development and leadership academies, discipline intervention programs, and school-to-work transition. **While the individual components of the USI are undoubtedly valuable, it is not yet clear that they add up to a coherent state strategy for assisting urban districts.** Those urban educators with whom we met were principally focused on the need for assistance in developing and aligning curriculum with academic standards and in designing high quality on-going professional development programs to help teachers strengthen their practice, and they did not view the state as a source of significant support for this work.

### **Teacher Preparation**

The fourth area where there has been substantial progress is in teacher preparation and licensing. **Ohio can take legitimate pride in the policies it has put in place to raise standards within the teaching profession.** It has been a national leader in implementing the major recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Ohio now requires all of its teacher education programs to meet the new performance-based standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Under Ohio's revised professional licensing standards, new teachers must have received a solid academic foundation; substantial instruction in the teaching of reading (for elementary and middle grade teachers); and must successfully complete an entry-year program, with formal mentoring and an extensive assessment of classroom performance. License renewal requires ongoing participation in professional education and development, including the completion of a Masters program (or 20 semester hours of graduate work) within one's first decade of teaching. Ohio also provides incentives and support for experienced teachers to seek certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and

now has the second-highest number of teachers in the nation who have successfully met the Board's very demanding qualifications.

### **Accountability**

A fifth area where Ohio has moved forward has been in the development of an accountability system, principally through the passage in 1997 of Senate Bill 55. **This innovative law incorporates several initiatives which, taken together, should help strengthen the performance of Ohio schools.** Among the law's most significant features are the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading guarantee, which provides intensive remediation and support for below-level readers in the first four grades; a new 10<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency test (to replace the 9<sup>th</sup> grade test) which, along with additional course requirements, will be required for graduation; a new system for classifying school districts based largely upon student performance on the proficiency tests; and new state-issued public report cards on school districts and schools based largely on educational and fiscal performance data.

### **Facilities**

A final area worth commenting on is school facilities, where despite significant recent investments the challenge remains severe. Although estimates differ on the magnitude of the problem, **by all accounts too many Ohio children, especially in poor rural and urban districts, attend classes in dreadfully sub-standard facilities.** In fact, one report, prepared by the GAO, ranks Ohio dead last among all fifty states in the condition of its school facilities. It was not until the early 1990s that the state seriously began to address this problem. During this decade the state has invested over \$1 billion in capital improvement funds for schools, more than tripling the investments made over the previous four decades. However, without a reliable inventory of the state's facilities and a solid cost estimate for bringing all Ohio school up to standard, it is impossible to know just how much progress has been made. While the state has at least made a down payment on a long deferred problem, this is a major piece of unfinished business for Ohio's policymakers.

**Important as these new investments and initiatives have been, they are unlikely, by themselves, to lead to the kinds of gains in student performance we are now seeing in other states, most notably North Carolina and Texas.** These two states, whose students have made the greatest achievement gains during the 1990s, have at the center of their reform strategy a tightly aligned system of clear grade-by-grade academic standards, annual measurement of student progress against these standards, and strong public accountability for results. In contrast to these states, Ohio's reform strategy has a substantial hole at its center. Unless that hole is repaired, it is unlikely that the state's recent laudable investments and initiatives will produce the performance gains that all Ohio citizens want and need from their schools.



### III. Major Issues Facing Ohio Policymakers

In our judgment, Ohio's quest to significantly improve student performance over the next decade will turn in large measure on the state's ability to accomplish three things:

- Put in place clear, explicit, measurable academic standards and an aligned set of assessments.
- Build a stronger accountability system with clear consequences for persistently low-performing schools.
- Enable school districts to develop the capacity to provide high quality professional development and support for teachers, and leadership development for principals and superintendents.

We will discuss each of these issues in turn and then offer recommendations for addressing them.

#### Standards and Assessment

If Achieve brings a particular perspective to this review, it is that **states need to have at the heart of their education reform strategy clear and rigorous academic standards, challenging assessments designed to measure progress against those standards, and an accountability system that rewards success and takes action against persistent failure.** We do not mean to suggest that standards, assessment, and accountability can *by themselves* produce significant changes in student performance; but they can and should be important drivers of change in curriculum, instructional practice, and school organization. They need, most importantly, to be accompanied by a thoughtful, comprehensive, sustained strategy for strengthening the capacity of teachers, principals, and other education professionals to change their practice, and a commitment to provide extra resources and support to students and schools who start out furthest from the goal line. But without a clear roadmap for teachers, parents, and students (i.e., standards), an agreed-upon yardstick for measuring progress (i.e., assessments) and consequences for results (i.e., accountability), states in our view are unlikely to help their schools significantly improve student performance. Ohio has important building blocks in place in its standards-assessment-accountability system, but we believe each of these elements needs to be substantially strengthened if this system is to become a powerful lever for improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

**Strictly speaking, Ohio does not really have statewide academic standards, at least as that term is used in most other states.** The absence of standards is particularly troublesome, because virtually all participants in Ohio education reform activities agree that clear standards should be the basis for pre-service training for teachers, the curriculum, student assessments, classroom materials, and ongoing professional development. Unless there is clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, how can teachers' colleges know what teachers are supposed to teach? How can assessment developers know what to test? How can publishers of textbooks and instructional materials know what to

include at each grade level? How can students prepare for the tests if there is no clear-cut agreement about what they are supposed to learn?

The best way to ascertain whether there are real standards in place is to ask three questions: First, would a new teacher in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, or any other grade know what the students in his or her class are expected to learn? Second, would a student who was new to Ohio's schools know what he or she was expected to learn in order to succeed on the state proficiency tests? Third, would a parent know what her child is expected to achieve each year in school? **In all cases the answer is "No."**

We have reviewed two different sets of documents that address the question of what Ohio students are supposed to know and be able to do. The first, called "learning outcomes," are linked to the tests and, at least in English and citizenship, are distressingly vague. **The outcomes in these subjects are imprecise and are devoted almost entirely to process rather than content.** They lack any reference to literature or history. If teachers use the "learning outcomes" as their guide to determine the content of the curriculum, children in Ohio will graduate without any knowledge of our nation's literary heritage or its history, or of the literature or history of other major civilizations. According to these "learning outcomes," Ohio students need never learn about the eight Presidents who came from the state of Ohio or about the major literary figures from Ohio, such as William Dean Howells and Toni Morrison. Nor need they ever read anything written by universally recognized poets, novelists, dramatists, and orators. Nor will they have any in-depth understanding of the key historical events and figures who have shaped the American nation, since at no time are they asked to demonstrate knowledge of any historical event or document other than the Northwest Ordinance, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Certainly these three documents should be part of every student's education, but American citizens need to know far more about the events, individuals, and ideas that are a significant part of our history.

The second, more substantial set of documents are the Department of Education's Model Competency-Based Program curriculum guides in each of the four core academic subjects. Independent of the quality of these documents, there are two important things to be said about them. First, they are voluntary, so it is hard to gauge the degree to which they are actually in use by teachers across the state. Our anecdotal impression is that **districts vary greatly in how or whether they use these documents to guide curriculum and instruction.** Our second strong impression is that these Model Competency-Based Program documents have very little public currency. The well-informed representatives of parents and other stakeholder groups with whom we met seemed generally unaware of these documents, which taken together total 750 pages, and were unclear as to whether Ohio in fact had explicit expectations for what students should know and be able to do at key grade levels in the core academic subjects. Even Education Department officials themselves described the standards as being implicit rather than explicit in the Competency-Based Program documents.

As for the quality of the curriculum guides themselves, we did not review them in enough depth to offer our own judgment, but they have been evaluated in published reports by the American Federation of Teachers, the Council for Basic

Education, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the grades have been mixed. The math guides have received uniformly high marks (2 A's and a B+), the social studies guides were judged weak (2 D's), and the evaluators disagreed over English (B, C, F). The important point about the model curriculum guides, however, is that in our view **they cannot substitute for publicly enunciated academic standards that are clear, specific and measurable, are widely publicized and available to every teacher and parent, and are used to guide the design and development of curriculum, teacher preparation and professional development programs, and state assessments.**

In contrast to the ambiguity surrounding the standards question, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that Ohio has an assessment program. The Ohio proficiency tests clearly occupy a central role in Ohio's reform strategy. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency tests have generated substantial controversy since they were first put in place in 1991, and by all accounts are taken very seriously by parents, teachers, and students, and the community at large. We heard varying opinions about the quality of these tests, and the degree to which they are aligned with either the model competencies or the learning outcomes, but **in the absence of publicly communicated and understood academic standards, the proficiency tests carry disproportionate weight in the system.** We heard testimony that teachers see the tests as something they need to take seriously, but that are separate and apart from the curriculum. Teachers prepare kids for the tests, we were told, then move on to the real work of the class. In a more tightly aligned system, where standards, curriculum, and tests are designed together, the line between instruction and assessment becomes blurred, because the two are closely intertwined, and do not represent separate and competing claims on classroom time.

## **Accountability**

Any accountability system worth its name needs to provide schools and districts incentives for success, rewards for improvement, and consequences for persistent failure. Such an accountability system, if it is to be fair, must be accompanied by a significant state commitment to capacity building and by continuing access to high-quality technical assistance and professional development.

**The accountability system launched under SB 55, while it has many admirable features, offers neither incentives for success nor sanctions for failure.** It sentences low-performing school districts to a lifetime of continuous improvement planning, without providing any recourse for parents if the schools do not in fact get better. And because the state's performance standards apply to school districts rather than individual schools, the continuing failure of a low-performing school can be masked if it is surrounded by high performers (although the school-level report card at least provides parents comparative performance data).

The reluctance of the state to hold principals and teachers accountable for persistently poor performance stands in sharp contrast to the state's willingness to impose tough sanctions on students. We applaud the state's determination to deny diplomas to students who cannot pass 10<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency tests, but a

**system that does not impose comparably stringent consequences on the adults who are responsible for preparing students to meet these standards does not meet our definition of fairness.**

## **Capacity-Building**

**If school districts are expected to meet the performance standards established in SB 55, and the skills gap is to be substantially narrowed, Ohio must mount a substantial, sustained, statewide program to equip its administrators and teachers with the skills and support they will need to substantially improve student performance.** In addition to teacher professional development, leadership development for both building principals and superintendents is a must. The Department of Education is clearly aware of this challenge, and has laid out an ambitious plan for addressing the problem in its December 1998 draft report, *Building the Capacity for Standards-Based Educational Improvement in Ohio's School Districts*.

The report outlines three interlocking strategies the Department needs to undertake to help build local capacity for improvement. The first strategy focuses on technical assistance, especially to low performing districts, with the Department principally responsible for helping districts assess their needs and linking them to appropriate regional and local service providers. The second strategy focuses on professional development, with an emphasis on helping the state's twelve regional professional development centers better align their services with district needs, and on promoting professional development partnerships between districts and universities, businesses and other organizations with relevant resources and skills. The final strand in the Department of Education's capacity-building plan focuses on helping school districts engage their various publics in their reform work, especially by using the District Report Cards to spark community dialogue and encouraging higher education and business leaders to help raise expectations for student achievement.

The strategies outlined in this report strike us as generally sound, but we have no way of gauging the Department's own capacity to deliver on this ambitious plan. Anecdotal evidence, coupled with our knowledge of the difficulty that education agencies in other states have had in shifting from being monitors of compliance to becoming providers or brokers of technical assistance, suggests that such a transition will not come easily. We heard substantial skepticism about the Department's capacity to respond creatively and flexibly to the needs of large urban districts, and little confidence that the Department could become a genuine partner with such districts.

Clearly, the new State Superintendent needs to make her own judgment about both the merits of this plan and the current capacity of the Department to carry it out. Without such a plan, however, and the ability to deliver substantial, sustained technical assistance and support to help school districts improve their performance, it is difficult to see how Ohio can possibly meet its ambitious performance goals for schools and students.

## IV. Recommendations

### Standards and Assessments

Ohio needs a set of academic standards that are clear, specific and measurable; that describe the knowledge as well as the skills the state expects its students to master; and against which curriculum, assessment, and professional development can be aligned. These standards need to be publicly available and understood, and be endorsed by educators, employers, and higher education leaders.

Fortunately, a process is already underway in Ohio that could lead to the development of such standards. A council jointly created by the State Board of Education and the State Board of Regents, assisted by the Council for Basic Education (CBE), has been leading the development of a new set of high school exit standards. These standards specify the knowledge and skills in six subjects-- English, math, science, history, the arts, and foreign languages-- that students need as a foundation for work, civic participation, and further learning. Because CBE has undertaken similar projects with other states and large school districts and has carefully reviewed the standards documents of other states and nations, its participation should enable Ohio to put in place a set of academic expectations for high school graduates that are second to none.

Assuming that these new high school exit standards are reviewed and endorsed by key constituency groups before they are adopted by the State Boards, they should then become the foundation for the development of rigorous and detailed standards and aligned tests at earlier grade levels. There is growing interest nationally in the idea of grade-by-grade standards, especially since the release of the RAND report on North Carolina and Texas, but given Ohio's strong tradition of local control, it may be more appropriate for the state to set standards for groups of grades and expect local districts to develop grade-by-grade guidance for teachers.

The important point here, though, is that **Ohio must bring its proficiency testing program into alignment with whatever new sets of standards it develops.** Because these tests were initially developed to measure minimum competency rather than performance against rigorous academic standards, they may need to be entirely recast. Consequently, Superintendent Zelman may want to consider assembling an advisory panel of testing experts to review the state's current assessment system.

The higher education system's co-sponsorship of the new high school exit standards suggests a logical next step: the joint development of a set of end-of-course examinations linked to these standards. Several other states – e.g., Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia – have in place or under development such exams, and they can be used not only to assure that courses with a common label (e.g., Algebra II, Physics, U.S. History) have in fact common content and are being taught to comparable standards of performance, but they can be a key element in a state's strategy to raise admission standards in its higher education institutions. If Ohio State University, for example, were to require its in-state applicants to have passed

exams in a prescribed set of courses and earned a grade of B or above, it would likely have a dramatic motivating effect on the work habits of university-bound students, and would over time enable the university to scale back the resources it commits to remedial, pre-collegiate level instruction. **Linking new high school graduation requirements with strengthened college and university admissions requirements is a strategy several other states are following, most notably Oregon and Maryland, and we urge Ohio to build on this joint standard-setting project that is already underway.**

### **Accountability**

**Ohio needs to put in place a comprehensive accountability system that builds on the foundation created in SB 55.** SB 55 focuses principally on the performance of districts, not individual schools, and it neither offers rewards for unusual progress nor sanctions for persistent failure. District and school report cards are an important first step in providing the public with better instruction about educational performance, but the public also needs to know how policymakers will act upon that information.

In our view, good accountability systems for districts and schools establish clear, common, high performance targets for all schools, but then measure each school's and district's progress against its own starting point. Such a system needs to be flexible enough to expect and reward different rates of progress depending on one's starting point, while holding fast to the requirement that all schools must by a date certain bring virtually all of their students to a statewide standard of proficiency.

States have experimented with varying strategies for recognizing and rewarding school and district performance, but these experiments are too young to enable us to confidently recommend a single "best practice" for Ohio. Kentucky's experience with cash awards, for example, suggests two cautions: take care that your assessment system is widely perceived to be valid, reliable and fair before attaching financial consequences to performance; and decide up front whether the rewards are to be used as salary bonuses or for educational enhancements. Some states – Texas, especially – have relied heavily on public recognition as well as financial incentives, and have created a political environment in which schools are motivated to be seen and honored as exemplary. Other states – South Carolina, for example – have experimented with deregulation as an incentive, extending to high-performing schools the autonomy and latitude that education analysts typically associate with charter schools. We understand that the Department of Education has submitted recommendations to the legislature for a program to reward districts for improved performance, but that no legislative action has yet been taken. We urge Ohio policymakers not to let this issue disappear off the screen.

The more pressing accountability problem is what to do about persistently failing schools. A high priority for the incoming State Superintendent should be to fashion an intervention strategy that makes high quality technical assistance available to schools that are in trouble. That assistance needs to go well beyond help with school-based planning; it needs to address issues of school leadership, instructional improvement, and organizational restructuring. **If, after a**

**reasonable period of on-the-ground assistance, low-performing schools continue to show little or no progress, they should be closed.** Parents should be given choices to enroll their children elsewhere, and the state and district should collaborate on a reconstitution strategy to reopen the school under new management. The new management team should have full authority to hire and fire staff, and the reconstituted school should have the operational autonomy of a charter school.

States with strong accountability systems provide useful data to educators, parents and policymakers which inform and drive school improvement efforts. These states also provide extensive training to teachers and administrators in how to use data to improve practice. Ohio is missing two critical pieces of data: (1) information on how student performance in Ohio compares to performance in other states, and (2) data on student performance disaggregated by race. Ohio should participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in order to benchmark Ohio's performance in core academic subjects with other states in grades 4, 8, and 12. Over 40 states currently participate in NAEP, and **Ohio's failure to do so deprives policymakers and citizens of the only opportunity currently available to compare student performance across state lines.** We also recommend that the legislature remove the prohibition against reporting disaggregated data and that rewards for improvement be based on improvements for each subgroup, not just overall scores.

Building on the foundation of SB 55, these additions to Ohio's accountability policies, paired with strengthened professional development strategies suggested in the next section, should focus every level of the education system on improving teaching and learning.

### **Capacity Building**

**The single biggest challenge states face as they move from the adoption of new academic standards to their implementation in the classroom is that of capacity building.** As suggested above, we are impressed by the Department's draft plan to help districts build the capacity to successfully implement standards-based reform, but we have no basis for judging the Department's own capacity to carry out this ambitious agenda. We understand that Superintendent Zelman is planning to initiate a management study of the Department that will address this question, and we applaud this initiative. We suggest that the scope of the study be broad enough to provide Dr. Zelman and the State Board with an appraisal of the capacity of the regional professional development centers and other provider organizations that are part of the Department's extended technical assistance family.

Once that study is completed, there is at least one immediate challenge that will test the Department's ability to address the needs of the field: the implementation of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading guarantee. We commend Governor Taft for making early reading a major priority of his administration, and for leading an effort to mobilize 20,000 reading tutors. Such tutors, if they are well organized and trained, can be of enormous assistance to the schools. They are no substitute, however, for a massive professional development program focused on insuring that every primary grade teacher in Ohio has access to the most current

knowledge about best pedagogical practice, or for a technical assistance program that helps principals avail themselves of the organizational and instructional strategies of such demonstrably effective programs as Reading Recovery and Success for All. **We urge the Department to mobilize the best university and other expertise in the state to help develop a comprehensive technical assistance and professional development plan to help districts successfully implement the reading guarantee.**

The reading problem will almost certainly be most acute in Ohio's urban districts, which brings us to the special challenge the Department faces in responding to the needs of the districts serving the largest number of low-income and minority students. We believe the Urban Schools Initiative represents a good beginning, but that **a more intensive, coherent, focused state effort is going to be required if the children in these districts are not going to be left behind in the race to raise standards.** We hope Dr. Zelman's proposed management study will pay special attention to assessing the Department's current capacity to work with urban districts. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that urban education leaders in Ohio do not now view the Department as a source of meaningful help in addressing their special needs. If our impression is borne out by this study, we would urge the Superintendent to consider creating a high profile team of urban specialists that cuts across the various departmental units and that has the authority to cut red tape and commandeer resources from across the agency on behalf of the urban districts. The Department is understandably proud of its role in helping restore local ownership and control to a beleaguered and demoralized Cleveland School District. The question now is whether it can help other urban districts strengthen their own local capacity to manage the reform process.

Because the problems of children and families in high poverty neighborhoods often require responses that are well beyond the capacity of schools alone to solve, **the Department of Education's urban team should be part of a coordinated interagency strategy that helps cities urban communities link their health and social services agencies more effectively to the schools.** Such an interagency strategy would underscore the commitment of the new Governor and Superintendent to work together on behalf of the state's neediest children.

Ohio's cities have been the source of some of the state's most promising professional development and leadership training initiatives. Peer assistance and review programs in Columbus and Cincinnati, designed and implemented by far-sighted teacher union leaders, have not only helped countless teachers strengthen their practice, but have also demonstrated the commitment of the profession to hold itself to high standards. Programs like those offered by Cincinnati's Mayerson Academy and the Superintendent's Leadership Institute offer much promise for strengthening the profession, as does the proposed state leadership academy for principals. One role the Department can play is to help spread the lessons from such innovations as Mayerson Academy statewide.

The Department also needs to pay special attention to supporting the critical role of the building principal who, in our view, is best positioned to effect transformational results in school and student performance. Yet building principals in Ohio do not have access to the kind of leadership development they



need to fulfill this change agent role. We applaud the efforts currently under way in Ohio to establish a world-class leadership academy for principals. **This collaborative effort between the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators, the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators, the State Board of Education, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Business Roundtable and others is highly promising and deserves the full support of the Legislature.**

## **A New Compact**

Although our review team was asked to focus its attention principally on the standards-assessment-accountability issues that are central to Achieve's mission, we cannot help but comment on Ohio's ongoing school finance suit, for this issue casts a very long shadow over the state's efforts to reform and improve its schools. While there is little we can add to the technical or legal aspects of the suit, we can make some general observations about its impact on the larger school reform climate, and on the need to resolve the suit in a way that advances the twin goals of equity and excellence in Ohio's schools.

**In our view, the recommendations we have made to strengthen Ohio's standards, assessment, and accountability systems must not await the resolution of the school finance suit for their adoption and implementation.** That being said, however, it was apparent to us in our interviews with Ohio educators that it will be difficult to get their full attention as long as the finance issue remains unresolved. The suit creates a cloud of unpredictability and uncertainty that hangs over the educational landscape. The uncertainty surrounding the state's school finance structure is compounded by the legislatively-imposed tax limitation measure that requires school districts across the state to go back to their voters every two or three years to raise sufficient revenue to operate their schools. As one superintendent put it, "I spend every third year running a political campaign, not running my school district." Given the ambitious performance targets Ohio has set for its school districts, superintendents should be expected to be full-time educational leaders, not part-time campaign managers. **This institutionalized financial instability and uncertainty invites frustration and cynicism and diverts the attention of local school boards and their administrative leaders from their core mission, the improvement of teaching and learning.**

We know that the usual tendency of elected officials is to allow complex, politically charged cases like *DeRolph* to play themselves out in the courts. Given the resounding defeat of last year's tax package, the path of least resistance is for the state to exhaust all appeals and wait for a final court order, presumably sometime in 2000. But given the urgency of the education reform agenda, and the need to encourage local educators to focus full attention on implementing such important initiatives as the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading guarantee and the strengthened high school graduation requirements, we urge the state's political leaders not to take the path of least resistance.

With a new governor in place, and a State Superintendent about to take office, **this may be a propitious moment to forge a new social compact between**

**Ohio's government policymakers and its education community.** The terms of the compact would be relatively simple and straightforward: governmental leaders will commit to fix the funding system and provide adequate time and resources to enable educators to develop the skills they need to teach to higher standards, in return for which the education community will agree to be held accountable for making annual, measurable progress in helping virtually all young people meet higher academic standards. Additional state investments in local capacity-building will accompany the implementation of new accountability measures. Higher state expectations around school and district performance will be accompanied by greater local flexibility in determining the best means of meeting those expectations.

**In order to implement this compact, extraordinary public leadership will be required from all parties.** Building on the education summit he convened just before taking office, Governor Taft must attempt to pull together the other public sector policymakers—legislative leaders, State Board members, the new Superintendent—into a coherent leadership group that can speak with one voice on these issues. It will take extraordinary political will to break through the school finance impasse, and not simply await the imposition of an eventual judicially-ordered remedy. It will take extraordinary energy and determination from Superintendent Zelman to lead the Department of Education through the transition from being principally a monitor of compliance to becoming a credible source of advice and assistance to school districts. And it will require significant courage on the part of the local school boards, administrators and teachers to step up to the challenge of accountability.

**Fortunately, there is already in place in Ohio a strong culture of collaboration, both statewide and in several key communities.** We could not help but be impressed by the broad array of organizations represented around the table at the BEST meeting we attended, and the evident commitment of teachers, administrators, school board members,, parents, and leaders from the religious, higher education, and business communities to work together on a shared reform agenda. And we noted earlier our admiration for the reform partnerships formed in cities like Cincinnati and Columbus between teacher union leaders and superintendents.

**We believe Ohio's business community is uniquely positioned to help broker this new compact.** It has been a forceful advocate for standards-based reform and accountability for results, and through its role in BEST, it has built solid working relationships with Ohio's educational leaders. It has a vital self-interest in strengthening the knowledge and skills of Ohio's young people, and in assuring the quality of the schools that educate them. And it can be a crucially important ally of the state's elected leadership in persuading the public that the state has a credible plan for guaranteeing that additional resources for the schools will in fact lead to measurable improvements in performance.

The challenges Ohio faces are neither unique nor unexpected. Old ways die hard, and schooling is no exception. For 150 years American public education has been measured by "inputs," not by results. In the standards-driven era that is emerging, schools will be measured by what they produce, their "output." That is

not to say that “inputs” are unimportant; they always have been and always will be. But they must now be viewed in the context of what they produce.

In short, Ohio’s schools are part way through a major paradigm shift; it is no wonder the road is rocky. But the stakes are high and the promise great. Ohio has set for itself an ambitious set of goals: a well-prepared class of 2005, fully proficient in the core academic skills, able to compete successfully in college or the workplace; and a substantial majority of effective, high-performing school districts, on track to assure a continuing flow of students well-prepared to keep Ohio’s civic life strong and its economy prosperous well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now is the time for Ohio’s governmental, educational, and corporate leaders to forge a new agreement to enable local communities and their schools to move forward to realize those goals.

## Appendix A

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### Documents Reviewed

- “*African American Perspectives on Education Funding in Ohio.*” African American Education Roundtable (December 1997).
- Draft Competencies for High School Graduation Qualifying Tests
- “*Destination: Success in Education: Ohio’s 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Progress Report on the National Education Goals.*” Ohio Department of Education.
- “*Education Improvement & Mandate Relief Summit.*” Notebook for Participants in Summit Hosted by Governor-elect Bob Taft (December 18, 1998).
- “*Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas.*” David Grissmer & Ann Flanagan. National Education Goals Panel (1998).
- “*Improving College Preparation in Ohio: A Total System Approach.*” Report from Secondary and Higher Education Remediation Advisory Committee (June, 1997).
- “*Knowledge and Know-How: Meeting Ohio’s Skill Gap Challenge.*” Joint Initiative of the Ohio Business Roundtable and Ohio Department of Education in cooperation with American College Testing, Inc. (June 1998).
- “*Learning Outcomes: All Grades and Areas.*” Ohio Department of Education, 1997.
- Mayerson Academy Information Packet. Prepared by Mayerson Academy (January 1999).
- “*Model Competency-Based Program*” Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, English. Ohio Department of Education, 1990.
- “*Ohio Proficiency Tests.*” Grades 4, 6, 12 (Practice Tests and Resource Guides) Ohio Department of Education (1997).
- Ohio Teacher Education and Licensure Standards Guidelines.
- “*Ohio’s Schools: Preparing for New Accountability.*” 1997-98 Annual Report of the State Board of Education.
- “*Policy Report: Building the Capacity for Standards-Based Educational Improvement in Ohio’s School Districts.*” First Draft (December 14, 1998).
- Process for a School to be Put on Academic Watch
- School Report Cards
- Senate Bill 55 Overview
- “*Straight Talk About School Funding: A Briefing for Ohio’s Leaders.*” Ohio Business Roundtable (April 1998).
- “*Taft’s Education Agenda Priorities.*” Prepared by the Governor-elect’s Office.

- *“Through the Eyes of Children: A New Vision for Ohio’s Urban School Communities.”* Prepared by Ohio Department of Education.
- *“Will Our Children Be Ready?”* Speech by State Superintendent John Goff to Ohio Business Roundtable (September 17, 1998).
- *“Will Our Children Be Ready?: Transition Issue Briefs.”* Presented by Superintendent John Goff to Governor-elect Bob Taft (December 1998).
- *“Working Harder & Smarter, Doing More With Less.”* Policy Brief from Voinovich Administration.

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## Appendix B

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### Individuals Participating in Meetings and Interviews

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Patricia Ackerman	Ohio Alliance for Black School Educators
Damon Asbury	Worthington City Schools
Melanie Bates	State Board of Education
James Betts	Alliance for Adequate School Funding
Michael Billirakis	Ohio Education Association
John Brandt	Ohio School Boards Association
David Brennan	Brennan Industrial Group
Greg Browning	Office of Budget and Management
Maribeth Burns	The J.M. Smucker Company
Lou Castenell	University of Cincinnati
Roderick Chu	Ohio Board of Regents
Chan Cochran	Cochran Public Relations
Hon. Jo Ann Davidson	Speaker of the House of Representatives
Sharon Draper	Cincinnati Public Schools
Alan Endicott	Office of the Governor
John Fernbaugh	Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Hon. Lee Fisher	Democratic Candidate for Governor
Hon. Linda Furney	Ohio Senate
Hon. Randall Gardner	Ohio House of Representatives
John Goff	Former Superintendent of Public Instruction
James Harbuck	Ohio Association of Secondary School Admin
Susan Hersh	The Ohio State University
Scott Howard	Perry Local Schools (Lake County)
Brenda Hughes	Ohio Parent Teacher Association
Jack Jackson	Ohio Department of Education
William Kirwan	Ohio State University
Tahlman Krumm	Ohio Board of Regents
Kathy Leavenworth	Ohio School Boards Association
Doug Mangen	Dayton Business Committee
Ronald Marec	Ohio Federation of Teachers
Richard Maxwell	Buckeye Association of School Administrators

John Michel	Honda of America Manufacturing
Hon. Ray Miller	Ohio House of Representatives
Tom Mooney	Cincinnati Federation of Teachers
D. Richard Murray	Ohio Association of Elementary School Admin
Dan Navin	Ohio Chamber of Commerce
Kathleen Neal	Springfield City Schools
Thomas Needles	Office of the Governor
Nancy Nestor-Baker	Westerville City Schools
John Pepper	The Procter & Gamble Company
William Phillis	Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School I
Dan Raisch	University of Dayton
Mark Real	Children's Defense Fund (Ohio)
Jeffrey Reinhard	Hilliard Darby High School, Hilliard City Sch
J. Roderick Rice	Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Warren Russell	Ohio School Boards Association
Joseph Roman	State Board of Education
Tom Smith	Ohio Council of Churches
Barbara Sprague	Ohio Parent Teachers Association
Richard Stoff	Ohio Business Roundtable
Jackie Swick	Ohio Business Roundtable
Hon. Bob Taft	Governor of Ohio
Don Van Meter	VMG Consulting Group
Hon. George Voinovich	Former-Governor and current U.S. Senator fro
Hon. Eugene Watts	Ohio Senate
Robert Wehling	The Procter & Gamble Company
Sue Westendorf	State Board of Education
Paul Young	National Association of Elementary School Pr
Susan Tave Zelman	Superintendent of Public Instruction

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## APPENDIX C

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### Biographies of Review Team

#### Denis Doyle

Denis Doyle is a nationally known education writer, analyst, and consultant. He has been associated with various think tanks, including the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute, and the Heritage Foundation, as a resident or visiting fellow since 1980. Doyle also works directly with school districts and major corporations in the US and abroad on a wide range of education issues. He has served as a member of the Phi Delta Kappa editorial advisory board, the RJR Nabisco Foundation Advisory Board, and he was appointed by Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander to serve on the National Education Commission on Time and Learning. He currently serves on the boards of the Ball Foundation and the Center for Education Reform. Previously, Doyle served as assistant director of the US Office of Economic Opportunity and at the National Institute of Education. Before moving to Washington, DC, he was a consultant to the California legislature, first as a program analyst, then as the architect of a series of education bills. Doyle earned an MA and an AB in political theory at the University of California at Berkeley.

#### Diane Ravitch

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor at New York University. She holds the Brown Chair in Education Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., where she is a Senior Fellow and edits the Brookings Papers on Education Policy. From 1993-94, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution. She is also an Adjunct Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a Senior Fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute. She was appointed to the National Assessment Governing Board in 1997, which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress. From 1991 to 1993, Ravitch served as Assistant Secretary of Education and Counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander; she was responsible for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. Before entering government service, she was Adjunct Professor of History and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. A native of Houston, Ravitch is a graduate of the Houston public schools. She received a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and a BA from Wellesley College.



### **Robert Schwartz**

Robert Schwartz is President of Achieve, Inc. and a lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Earlier in his career, he has been a high school English teacher and principal; an education advisor to the Mayor of Boston and Governor of Massachusetts; an Assistant Director of the National Institute of Education; a Special Assistant to the President of the University of Massachusetts; and the Executive Director of the Boston Compact, a public-private partnership designed to improved access to higher education and employment for urban high school graduates. From 1990 to 1996, Schwartz directed the education grant-making program of The Pew Charitable Trusts, one of the nations' largest private philanthropies. He holds degrees in English and American Literature from Harvard and Brandeis Universities.

### **Warren Simmons**

Warren Simmons is currently the Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Previously, he was the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Education Fund. Prior to joining the Fund, Simmons was a Senior Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation where he was responsible for developing initiatives focused on urban school reform. Before joining the Casey Foundation, he served as Director of Equity Initiatives for the New Standards Project, a coalition of 17 states and 6 school districts building a performance-based examination system to drive curricular and instructional reforms. In addition to his work on national and state education reform initiatives, Simmons has served as special assistant to the superintendent of schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. Warren received his BA in psychology from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and earned a doctorate in psychology from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

### **Susan Traiman**

Susan Traiman is director of The Business Roundtable's education initiative, where she oversees the Roundtable's state education reform policy activities and manages communications strategies to build public support for higher academic standards. Previously, Traiman was Education Policy Studies Director at the National Governors' Association, and a senior associate with the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. She also served on the staff of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Before coming to Washington, DC, Traiman was a teacher and a consultant at a regional service center of the New Jersey Department of Education. She earned her B.A. and M.S. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania.

### **Seth Reynolds**

Seth Reynolds is currently a candidate for a Master in Public Policy degree at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. His work experience includes teaching and management consulting. From 1994 –1996, Reynolds taught a bilingual fifth grade class in Pasadena, CA as a Teach For America corps member. From 1996 – 1998, he worked for The Parthenon Group, a management consulting firm headquartered in Boston. In his current

studies, Reynolds is focusing on economic development and education issues. He graduated from Amherst College with a B.A. in American Studies.

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