



High-Quality High Schools

Preparing All
Students for Success in
Postsecondary Education,
Careers and Citizenship

Presented to the State Board of Education
on Monday, October 11, 2004

State Board of Education's Task Force on

Quality High Schools
for a **Lifetime of Opportunities**



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Vision: Making Ohio's High Schools Work

For too many Ohio students, high school does not work. The Task Force's vision for solving this problem is clear. The journey to make this vision a reality — to ensure that every student graduates with the knowledge and skills he or she needs to succeed in college and the workplace and to be a good and productive citizen — will not be easy. But it is one Ohio needs to take.

We envision every student receiving a personalized education in a school where he or she is known by adults at the school; where every student has an advocate; where no student falls through the cracks; and where parents, families and communities are involved in the life of the school.

We envision every student taking a challenging curriculum that is based on widely understood and accepted academic standards — a curriculum that also is engaging, inspiring and relevant to the student and the world he or she will face.

We envision students being taught this curriculum by teachers and school leaders who are well prepared, valued and acknowledged for success.

We envision every student receiving the academic supports and tailored interventions he or she needs to achieve academic success — and learning in a high school that never gives up on students no matter where they are in their education.

We envision every student demonstrating his or her knowledge before getting a diploma — by passing either reliable tests or other equally rigorous demonstrations of achievement.

And we envision every Ohio student, regardless of his or her parents' wealth, ethnic background or geographic location, getting an excellent education that instills a lifelong passion for learning.

This is not too much to expect.

Realizing this vision is not merely the job of the state government. Indeed, in Ohio, the state has relatively little control over what happens in classrooms. The state can, however, shape policy in a manner that raises expectations; builds capacity; and focuses the energies of students, parents, educators and communities on obtaining desired results and using research-proven processes.

Ultimately, it is Ohio's communities and school districts that are responsible for the schools' success. The state can offer multiple models of success; it can provide incentives and offer flexibility. Ohio communities need to decide that their futures will be shaped by the success of their high schools.

That, too, is not too much to ask.

The State Board of Education's Charge

Despite the recent success in improving the performance of Ohio's schools and the students they serve, the state's system of public education is being threatened on three fronts.

First, there are too few schools where all students are succeeding — and where wide and unacceptable achievement gaps that separate students by race, ethnicity, income and geography have been closed.

Second, a large number of the state's students are leaving high school, either through graduation or as dropouts, without acquiring the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education or the workplace.

Third, unless teaching and learning improves substantially, a large number of Ohio's schools — particularly its high schools — will not make adequate yearly progress in student achievement, as required by federal law.

In this context, the Task Force was charged with helping the state's education policy leaders rethink the rules, roles and relationships that define the high school. It was directed to provide the State Board of Education with recommendations for the policy changes required to ensure all Ohio students get an education that prepares them to succeed in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship. Specifically, the State Board asked the Task Force to answer questions in three core areas:

1. Transforming the High School Experience

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

2. Aligning Ohio's P-16 System

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

3. Blending Education and Workforce Development

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

Building on a Decade of School Improvement

During the past decade, Ohio policymakers have made significant changes designed to produce better schools and improve student achievement. They have used two governor's commissions, legislative action and a range of State Board of Education initiatives to raise students' academic achievement in ways that result in a better Ohio. Most important, policymakers have benefited from the commitment and hard work of educators, school leaders and communities throughout the state. Today, the results of these efforts are clear.

Long "stuck in the middle" in both its statewide student achievement scores and national comparisons, Ohio schools and the students they serve are making substantial progress. Consider, for example:

- Statewide testing results released in August 2004 show that over the past five years, the average of all students' scores on state tests increased by 12.9 points — from 73.7 to 86.6.
- During the 2003–04 school year, more than six out of seven Ohio school districts — and almost four out of five schools — made gains in achievement when compared to the previous school year. Student achievement improved in all grades and most subjects, with mathematics leading the way.
- Overall, nearly 94 percent of Ohio school districts and 90 percent of their schools earned "Excellent," "Effective" or "Continuous Improvement" designations on the 2003–04 Local Report Cards. Compared to last year, 30 more school districts and 394 more schools made the top three ratings.
- During the past year, the number of school districts and schools identified in "Academic Emergency" declined 44 percent, and the number in "Academic Watch" declined 40 percent.
- Based on 2003–04 achievement results, 102 Ohio schools, including 33 high schools, were designated as "Schools of Promise," which means at least 40 percent of their students come from low-income families, but more than 85 percent of their high school students passed Ohio's reading or mathematics assessments. These schools — some of which are in the state's largest urban centers and others of which are in its poorest Appalachian counties — are proving that children from low-income communities can achieve at high levels.

Solid achievement, indeed. But Ohio can and must do better — all students must achieve at the highest levels.

Ohio has hundreds of excellent, high-achieving schools where students are learning at ever-higher levels and being prepared for success in classroom, the workplace and life. And Ohio has thousands of wonderful teachers — skilled, caring professionals who know their subjects and how to teach them.

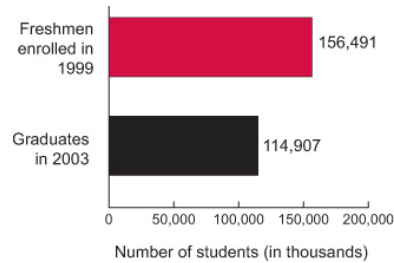
The State Board of Education understood this when it asked the Task Force on Quality High Schools to help it identify ways to increase the likelihood that all Ohio high schools and students would be successful. Its message to Task Force members was clear: We have many excellent high schools with high-achieving students in our state. The goal is for every high school to be excellent and for every student to be high achieving.

What's the Problem We're Trying To Solve?

Despite the significant progress made as a result of the past decade of reforms in Ohio, substantial work still remains to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after high school graduation.

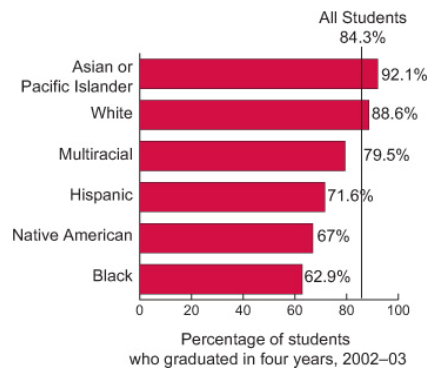
Too Many Students Drop Out

Students leave school for a variety of reasons, but in Ohio, three in 10 students who start ninth grade drop out before they graduate.



SOURCE: Ohio Department of Education

The situation is far worse for Ohio students who are poor, black or Hispanic.

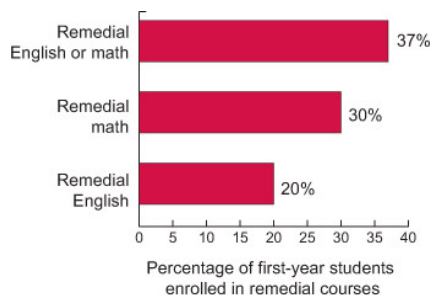


NOTE: Some researchers, such as those with the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, estimate even lower graduation rates for Ohio students.

SOURCE: Ohio Department of Education

Too Many Graduates Are Not Prepared

Of those students who do graduate, many are forced to take remedial courses in college to catch up.



SOURCE: *The Performance Report for Ohio's Colleges and Universities, 2003*, Ohio Board of Regents, <http://www.regents.state.oh.us/perfrpt/2003-I.html>

The Task Force's Goal

Improve and sustain the academic achievement of all Ohio high school students, ensuring that they acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship.

Indicators of Success

How will Ohio's leaders, educators and citizens know that progress is being made — that the goal of preparing all students for success in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship is being achieved? To help answer this question, the Task Force offers these indicators of success.

- Higher percentages of students (in all racial, ethnic, income and geographic groups) meet or exceed Ohio's academic content standards
 - Increases in the statewide percentage of students who pass each section of the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT)
 - Increases in the percentage of students in each demographic group who pass each section of the OGT
- Higher graduation rates
 - Increases in the statewide graduation rate for all students
 - Increases in graduation rates for each demographic group of students
 - Increases in the percentage of students who advance with their cohort group from eighth grade to graduation
- Higher percentages of students (in all racial, ethnic, income and geographic groups) succeed in postsecondary education and the workplace and contribute to the quality of the community
 - Increases in the percentage of students who take Advanced Placement and college-credit courses
 - Increases in the percentage of students who complete a high school curriculum that reflects the state's model curricula and academic content standards through the 12th grade (as recommended by the Task Force)
 - Increases in the percentage of students who take SAT/ACT tests and in the students' mean scores on these tests
 - Increases in college enrollment rates
 - Decreases in Ohio's college remediation rates for recent high school graduates
 - Increases in college attainment and completion rates
 - Decreases in unemployment rates among young adults
 - Increases in employers' perception that young adult employees are well prepared for employment
 - Decreases in the percentage of young adults in correctional facilities
 - Increases in the percentage of young adults who vote
 - Increases in percentages of students who volunteer or participate in service learning

Coming Together for a Better Ohio

If you are reading this, you likely care about improving Ohio's schools. Most Ohioans care deeply, and most of us base our thinking about education on our own experiences in school and beyond.

We are 34 citizens from across the state who spent a year together working on a common task — strengthening Ohio's high schools. We each started with our own experiences, but we learned from those of others. Together, we grasped the uncomfortable nature of a problem that is not unique to Ohio. We debated the value and implications of possible solutions. We argued passionately our points of view. And eventually, we reached consensus.

As co-chairs, we were privileged to engage with our 32 colleagues in a quest that we very much hope will make Ohio a better place in which to live, grow up and work.

When talking about a persistent problem, there is always the risk that the public will only hear the bad news. The risk here is they will not realize that many educators and many students are doing a great job in Ohio's high schools. That risk, however, is one we feel we must take.

The data, which you will see throughout this report, are clear — Ohio's high schools are not producing the results that we all need. Too many students drop out of school before they graduate. Too many of those who do graduate obtain diplomas but not the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, technical training or today's workplace — or to be effective citizens. And too many students are bored by classes that are insufficiently challenging or seem to lack relevance to their lives.

For a very long time, Ohio has been satisfied to educate a relatively small percentage of our students very well, while a much larger percentage got an education that was, at best, mediocre. The portion that got the best schooling was largely white and wealthy, while students of color and those who were poor routinely got an education that prepared them for little.

That has to change. It has to change because it is morally wrong to do otherwise. It has to change for our state to be successful in the knowledge economy and to capitalize on our heritage of leadership.

We looked hard at the problem and the range of solutions that are being implemented across the country as well as in Ohio. We listened to Ohio innovators and national experts. We listened to students and their parents and the educators who teach them. We crisscrossed the state meeting and listening to citizens.

In just a few words, what the Task Force learned is this: Ohio high schools must focus on three “new Rs” — *rigor* for all students, *relevance* to the community and wider world, and *relationships* that ensure all students are actually known by adults who both understand their needs and care about their success.

We wrestled with the best policy solutions for Ohio, and we wrestled with exactly whose role it is to “fix” high schools — to understand what the state should do as opposed to local school districts and schools or even parents and the community.

Collectively, we chose a careful balance between state and local leadership, and we developed an innovative set of four recommendations that are explained in detail in this report. Briefly, our Task Force recommended:

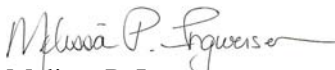
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1. Creating more personalized learning environments, and improving the conditions of learning for every student.
 2. Providing all students with the opportunity to take a challenging curriculum that prepares them for success in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship — and expecting them to complete it.
 3. Significantly increasing the portion of Ohio students who graduate from high school by preventing students from dropping out and by reconnecting with students who have left without graduating.
 4. Bridging the gap between high school and postsecondary education by getting the state’s systems of schools — K–12, colleges and universities, and adult workforce education centers — to work together to support the academic needs of students.

Our recommendations are targeted at helping all students acquire the knowledge and skills that are reflected in the state’s academic content standards and specific grade-level indicators in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies through 12th grade. Our focus on standards in these four areas does *not* mean that a quality high school education should not include foreign language, the arts and technology. To the contrary, these are critical academic content areas that help prepare students for success in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship.

We were a Task Force of the Ohio Board of Education, and that is to whom our recommendations are being made. But if we are to be successful, communities across the state will have to understand that their high schools need to make sure every student succeeds, not just some. Collectively as a state, we will have to understand that a successful student today is one who has mastered the state’s academic standards and is prepared to handle college-level work, technical training or the demands of the workplace. In addition, we must understand that a successful student is one who has the knowledge and skills needed to be a good and productive citizen.

We will have to be resourceful and innovative. Some changes can be made with little or no cost, some can be made by redirecting resources and some will require new dollars. We do not offer a price tag here, but we are quite sure that the investment is one that Ohio must make to secure its future.

Ultimately, we will be judged by the fate of all our students, particularly the ones who have traditionally not done well in school. We need to ensure that all Ohio students get an excellent education that will give them the opportunity to succeed and lead productive and fulfilling lives. We believe this is possible, that it is largely a question of political will. If our conversations over the past year are an indication, Ohio has that will.


Melissa P. Ingwersen
Co-Chair


Carl F. Wick
Co-Chair

RECOMMENDATION #1

Improve Learning Conditions in Ohio's High Schools

For many generations, Ohio's economy was dominated by agriculture and manufacturing. Young adults did not need to earn a high school diploma to make a living. Learning beyond high school was not required for a productive and successful life.

Today, Ohio's economy has changed as hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have disappeared and innovative technology and knowledge-based companies have changed the way we do business. Increasingly, jobs that pay a living wage require some postsecondary education or training. As a state, our quality of life is now tied to how well we provide our population with an education that will help them be productive citizens and good neighbors. The Task Force believes that our high schools must provide each of our students with a quality education that will allow him or her to succeed well beyond high school.

The experts who study high schools say the best schools offer an experience where students feel personally known and cared about. These schools have teachers who engage students in practical applications of the state's academic content standards. And in these schools, students are more likely to perceive education as being relevant to their lives.

Ohio's young people told our Task Force that they crave a personalized approach that meets their needs and aspirations. They reported that often they feel their schools "do not have a clue" about who they are or what they need. Too often, they feel lost.

Increasingly across Ohio and the nation, educators and communities are creating smaller learning communities where students are known and know what is expected of them, where they face a wide range of learning opportunities, and where they develop strong ties to the larger community. School districts are improving the capacity and the commitment of their teachers and school leaders — ensuring that educators know their subjects and know a variety of strategies for helping their students master those subjects. They are building learning environments where students feel motivated to learn, not just told to learn.

In Ohio, nearly every major urban school district has engaged its students, families, community leaders, unions and educators in transforming their high schools into new autonomous small schools. Much of this work is being done through the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), a partnership among the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ohio Department of Education. Through these aggressive school improvement initiatives, 60 new autonomous high schools serving 25,000 students in 12 school districts opened in fall 2004. These new schools are creating personalized learning environments that offer students an education that is more relevant to their lives.

Ohio leads the nation in pursuing this type of high school transformation. But the Task Force believes that these efforts to improve the conditions of learning must be accelerated. The state can promote this personalized focus by offering incentives to local school districts and schools and by producing models and providing information and technical assistance. The state can improve the quality of teaching by providing practical on-the-job training that helps educators teach challenging content in a manner that requires students to apply their learning in the real world. It can help high schools and school districts develop stronger ties to the larger community, which contributes mightily to student achievement levels, as well as to the closing of persistent achievement gaps.

Implementing Initiatives

Initiative 1a: Small Learning Communities. In partnership with state and national foundations, the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) should continue the development of small learning communities as a key initiative. They should support efforts that lower the number of students per high school and grade level and that lower the number of students for whom teachers are responsible, starting with low-achieving school districts and focusing on students and schools with the greatest needs.

To help ensure that small learning communities generate and sustain improved learning results for students, ODE should provide support for a network of small high schools that offers technical support and financial incentives for innovations that promote variability in institutional forms and arrangements, instructional strategies, use of time and staff resources, and curriculum within a framework of common rigorous standards.

The Task Force urges ODE to expand the dissemination of best and promising high school redesign practices with emphasis on the diffusion of lessons learned through the OHSTI. The Department's priority should be on expanding efforts to create small learning communities by building on what works.

Initiative 1b: Applied Learning Opportunities outside the Classroom. The Task Force believes that ODE should encourage school districts to work with their communities to identify and promote best practices associated with internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, service learning projects and similar applied learning opportunities. These learning experiences help students see the relevance of their high school education. They give students alternative ways to meet the state's rigorous academic standards, just as they provide effective tools for the development of essential workplace and citizenship skills.

In partnership with these school districts and communities, ODE should develop a statewide policy that allows students to earn required (not just elective) credits for hands-on, nontraditional learning experiences. It also should work with the Ohio Board of Regents to ensure that new course designs for nontraditional learning experiences meet college and university standards and that institutions of higher education accept community-connected curriculum design and implementation.

Through its regional service centers, the state should assist high schools in recruiting and training people — from the community — to provide and support internships, mentorships and other applied learning opportunities for students. As a part of this training, regional service centers should help these volunteers acquire a full understanding of Ohio's expectations for all students as they are articulated in the state's academic content standards.

Initiative 1c: Professional Development. The state should fund expanded professional development opportunities for teachers to build their skills to the level required by the state's model curricula (see Recommendation #2). This state-funded effort should include an initiative similar to SIRI (State Institutes for Reading Instruction), through which ODE would help school districts develop the capacity of teachers to give their students applied, hands-on learning opportunities. In addition, it should include support for externships, summer employment and other programs that allow teachers — including career and technical education teachers — to expand their knowledge of workplace issues and skills and to develop innovative instructional approaches for the benefit of their students.

Developed through a collaborative process involving P–12 and higher education faculty (including practicing classroom teachers and adult workforce education instructors), as well as representatives from the business community, these professional development opportunities should be designed to:

- Help *career and technical education instructors* know how to integrate the teaching of core academic standards, including literacy, into their daily instructional programs in ways that emphasize real-world applications of academic skills.
- Help *secondary school teachers of core academic subjects (including special education teachers)* know how to integrate real-world applications of their subjects into their daily instructional programs.
- Help *all secondary school teachers* acquire the skills they need to teach literacy or technical literacy to students who need it most and to make effective use of literacy coaches to assist them with the implementation of these new skills.
- Help *secondary school administrators* support the integration of core academic instruction and career/technical education.
- Deepen *teachers' and school leaders'* knowledge of Ohio's academic content standards and build their understanding of the collection and use of performance data (both the OGT and locally adopted short-term assessments).

Initiative 1d: Community Engagement. The Task Force urges ODE to offer school districts assistance on a range of community engagement strategies designed to change the relationship between high schools and the communities they serve. To support school-community connections that produce mutual support and improvement, the Department should:

- Provide technical assistance on effective community engagement strategies to support the creation of partnerships for transforming high schools.
- Recognize districts and community entities that have worked together to reform high schools in ways that have generated substantially improved academic results.
- Offer financial incentives for school districts to promote and increase community access to school facilities.
- Develop and disseminate information about best and promising practices for engaging and training parents to become powerful advocates for student achievement, with emphasis on educating parents about the state's academic content standards, as well as about the skills and competencies young people need to succeed in postsecondary education, the workplace and citizenship.

Initiative 1e: Career and Technical Education Teachers. To ensure that all career and technical education students have teachers who know their subjects and know how to teach them, the state should capitalize on the capacity of community colleges to better prepare, recruit, retain and renew career and technical education teachers. Working collaboratively, the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents should urge the state's two-year community and technical colleges, as well as branch campuses of the state's four-year institutions, to develop programs — in partnership with four-year degree-granting colleges and universities — that help prepare teacher candidates in critical shortage areas of technology, career-technical fields, mathematics and science.

The Value of Small Learning Communities

More than a quarter century of research indicates that students in small schools perform better on a number of measures. In small schools or small learning communities, students earn better grades and enroll in college at higher rates. They feel more connected, are less likely to drop out, demonstrate fewer behavioral problems and participate in more extracurricular activities. The benefits of small learning communities are particularly pronounced for students from low-income families and students with limited English proficiency.

Although most researchers conclude that high schools ideally should have approximately 400 students or less, the research does not agree on a single optimum high school size. Many researchers also acknowledge that size is not the only critical factor. There is a growing consensus that it is easier to get the conditions of teaching and learning right in small learning communities. Therefore, they point to the fact that people come to know and care about one another more in small learning communities; parents and families become more involved in the education of their children; and educators and school leaders are more likely to use effective instructional approaches such as team teaching, experiential learning and performance assessments.

Typically, small learning communities have teams of teachers dedicated to the development of a core group of students. The fundamental difference between autonomous small learning communities and traditional high schools is the opportunity for students, teachers, parents and community members to build the relationships needed to ensure the successful academic and social development of all students.

Small learning communities offer extended instructional time and the opportunity for each student to be known, as well as the opportunity for increased collaboration among all stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, administrators, students, community entities and others). Therefore, instructional practice is able to meet the needs of all students. Learning is personalized and connected in small learning communities. All stakeholders become part of a professional collaborative, invested in leading the success of each small learning community. In addition to changing the school structure, small learning communities alter the culture and conditions of learning in high schools.

Across Ohio, nearly every major urban school district has engaged its students, families, community leaders, unions and educators in transforming their high schools into autonomous small learning communities. Much of this work is being done through the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), a partnership among the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ohio Department of Education.

The OHSTI is one of the nation's most aggressive school improvement efforts focused on changing the prevailing model of large high schools. By making connections among people, places, resources and ideas, this innovative initiative is building relationships between adults and students as the foundation for learning. It is demonstrating the great potential for transforming Ohio's high schools and for creating learning environments that improve student performance, reduce violence and graduate larger percentages of students.

Community Engagement: A Key to Effective School Improvement

Community engagement in school change efforts can improve teaching and learning. It can deepen parent involvement and build greater community trust in schools. It can increase the financial, physical and human resources available to schools. And it can support legislative and policy reform.

To carry out and sustain reform and positive educational outcomes, political will is needed — and that is not likely if communities and parents are not engaged as full partners. The experiences of communities that have been successful in overcoming the obstacles to school reform tell us that the community is often the one constant that can advance and sustain improvement initiatives when school district leadership and administration change over time. These experiences also confirm that school change that is rooted in community ownership has access to more resources to support school reform.

There are multiple ways to engage the community in the education of its children. Such processes often include a series of community conversations designed to provide people with opportunities to listen to a wide variety of perspectives and share their own points of view. Most successful community engagement initiatives provide forums for people — including school personnel, parents, students, senior citizens, elected officials, local business leaders, faith-based organizations, social service agencies and the general public — who do not normally interact with each other to build common understanding, strengthening both relationships within a community and local decisionmaking processes.

Community engagement often is defined very differently by different groups of people. Some groups promote community engagement to achieve “buy-in” from community members on plans that have already been developed or decisions that have already been made. Others maintain that the benefits of engagement come from creating community ownership by allowing community members to participate in and influence official decisions.

Embracing this latter view, the KnowledgeWorks Foundation has developed 10 principles of effective community engagement — a process that educates people so they can make informed decisions:

- It involves all sectors of the community.
- It asks the community to engage on important questions and acknowledges their views and contributions.
- It involves the community early in the process.
- It connects with and influences official decisions.
- It offers opportunities for people to gather at convenient and comfortable locations and at a variety of convenient times.
- It consists of more than one meeting.
- It is driven by aspirations that communities hold for their future.
- It has a learning component that helps build community awareness and knowledge around the subject at hand.
- It allows time in the process to make informed judgments.
- It allows for sustained involvement by community stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Provide All Students a Challenging Curriculum that Prepares Them for Success

If Ohioans expect all students to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workplace, in technical training or higher education and in life — and we do — we have to make sure students are taught what they need in a manner that ensures they learn.

Through focus groups, statewide polls, public meetings with Ohioans, and presentations by national experts, the Task Force learned that in Ohio and across the country there is too often a culture of low expectations for children who are poor or minority that is neither fair nor equitable. It also does not make sense because we will succeed as a state only when *all* of our students are successful.

Today, far too many of Ohio's high school students, particularly low-income students, are taking lackluster classes that prepare them for little. The students do not see the connections between what they are being asked to learn and the world beyond high school, and often they are bored with the coursework.

The nation is awash in fresh reports of how states set high academic standards but do not actually demand that the schools teach all students the courses they need to meet these standards. Ohio is no different.

The American Diploma Project, for example, conducted a landmark examination of what students must know in mathematics and literacy to succeed in either the modern workplace or postsecondary education. It found that, for either path, students essentially need what has traditionally been viewed as a college preparatory curriculum. They must have more math and science, and they must have stronger reading, writing and reasoning skills. Yet, a study by the Manhattan Institute suggests that students are not taking sufficient coursework in the core academic areas to be ready for either the workplace or higher education.

According to a study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, only 47 percent of Ohio's ninth through 12th graders take at least one upper-level mathematics course (as compared to 59 percent in top-performing states). Similarly, only 23 percent of Ohio's ninth through 12th graders take at least one upper-level science course (compared to 41 percent in the nation's top-performing states).

Some states, such as Indiana, have developed a recommended high school curriculum for all students. In 2002, 61 percent of Indiana's graduates completed the recommended curriculum. And Indiana has seen a very large increase in the numbers of students now going on to postsecondary education and training, as well as in the number of those who are prepared to handle postsecondary coursework.

Over the past three years, the State Board of Education has adopted academic content standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, the arts and technology. Ohio high schools are beginning to grapple with the curriculum changes that will be necessary to ensure that all students learn these standards. But this work is slow and uneven.

The Task Force has crafted a uniquely Ohio solution, calling for model core curricula that blend rigorous coursework and hands-on technical training to ensure our students learn the state's academic content standards. This recommendation is not meant to change the

guidelines for students with special needs — it is meant to ensure that they are encouraged and pushed to reach their potential, while adhering to federal law.

Taken together, the Task Force believes the following implementing initiatives will ensure that all students (1) understand what it takes to fulfill their aspirations and to succeed in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship; (2) have an opportunity to take the courses needed to succeed beyond high school; and (3) master the content of these courses.

Furthermore, the Task Force hopes that eventually Ohio will measure the success of our high schools by what students know when they graduate rather than how many courses they take or how long it takes them to move through high school. In this vision, nontraditional courses and learning experiences will be valued, skills for meeting academic standards in mathematics and English language arts will be infused throughout the curriculum, students will be allowed to move through high school at their own pace and schools will be held accountable for what their students learn as opposed to the courses they have completed.

Implementing Initiatives

Initiative 2a: Models of a Core Curriculum. The State Board of Education should develop multiple models of a core curriculum that lay out sequences of courses that are matched to the state’s academic content standards and to the grade-level indicators that should be taught in each course. These model core curricula should go beyond the knowledge, skills and competencies required to pass the 10th-grade Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) and, because English language arts and mathematics form the foundation for all other learning, should include four years of courses in each of these subjects.

These models should eliminate barriers and allow students to participate in hands-on, nontraditional learning experiences, including but not limited to internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, service learning projects and similar applied learning opportunities, to earn required (not just elective) credits and to learn good citizenship skills. The State Board should work with high schools and school districts to develop a strategy for improving the link between such programs and other workforce training initiatives.

The models of core curricula developed by the State Board of Education should include models for the state’s career and technical education (CTE) programs to ensure students in those programs have the opportunity to take a sequence of courses and have experiences that cover the state’s academic content standards through 12th grade. In developing model CTE curricula, the State Board of Education should ensure that courses are market-driven, with learning expectations that are anchored in the real world.

Initiative 2b: Expectation for All Students. Whether state- or locally developed models are used, the State Board of Education should expect every Ohio school district to offer a high school curriculum designed to ensure that all students are taught the state’s academic content standards. All high school students should be expected to complete a sequence of courses that covers all academic content standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, the fine arts and technology through grade 12.

However, recognizing that some parents may have different goals for their children, local boards of education should have the discretion to allow parents to permit their children to opt out of the more challenging core curricula reflected in the state models and pursue a curriculum that prepares students to pass the OGT and meet state graduation requirements.

The State Board of Education should fund a multiyear public awareness campaign to promote the importance of postsecondary education and to familiarize students and parents with the state’s model core curricula. The campaign should explain the importance of completing the core as preparation for postsecondary education, the workplace and citizenship in our society.

Initiative 2c: Waivers from the State’s Carnegie Unit Requirements. The State Board of Education also should adopt a policy that allows school districts to seek waivers from the state’s Carnegie Unit requirements for graduation. Districts that receive waivers would be required to develop a curriculum and instructional plan that is consistent with the state’s model core curricula and academic content standards through 12th grade and that satisfies other state accountability requirements, including passage of the OGT.

Initiative 2d: Curriculum Mapping. To ensure that all students are able to master the content expectations through the 12th grade, the State Board of Education should direct ODE to work with educators across the state to define various ways in which the curricula could be mapped from the early grades through middle school so that students who reach ninth grade are more likely to have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in high school.

Initiative 2e: Career and Technical Education. The State Board of Education should structure CTE programs around already-proven models, such as High Schools That Work and College TECH PREP, which feature quality college and career readiness curricula and emphasize the need for learning beyond high school. To define and strategically fund CTE programs and courses, the State Board should expand its use of labor market information and projections for future knowledge- and technology-based employment opportunities.

The State Board should encourage CTE programs to strengthen their relationships with the state’s adult workforce education full-service centers, the state’s two-year public college and university branch campuses and other regional workforce development entities — and to make greater use of industry-based testing and certification systems — to ensure that students acquire the skills that will make them fully competitive for real jobs. In addition, the State Board should develop a statewide system for certifying high school CTE programs that contribute to the achievement of Ohio’s academic and technical standards; prepare students for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship; and align to current and future workforce development needs.

Initiative 2f: Scholarship Support. The state should provide scholarship support for students who complete a set of courses that reflects the state’s more challenging models of core curricula and covers the state’s content standards through grade 12. This scholarship should incorporate need-based funding criteria (e.g., to fill participants’ remaining financial need after other funding sources have been applied).

Initiative 2g: Accountability for Challenging Models of Core Curricula. The State Board of Education should require high schools and school districts to report the percentage of graduates who complete a curriculum that incorporates the state’s more challenging models of core curricula. The State Board should modify the state’s accountability system to give credit to schools and school districts where a large percentage of students — or where an increasing proportion of students — successfully complete this curriculum or a state-approved equivalent.

Initiative 2h: Aligning Model Core Curricula with Workplace and Postsecondary Expectations. ODE should work with the Ohio Department of Development and employer organizations to ensure that its model core curricula are aligned to the entry-level expectations of Ohio’s workplaces. They should establish a process for ensuring that students who complete a more challenging curriculum are ready to enter the workplace remediation free. Similarly, the State Board of Education should work with the Ohio Board of Regents to establish a process for eliminating gaps between high school and college expectations to ensure that students who complete a more challenging curriculum are ready to enter college without remediation (see Initiative 4a).

Initiative 2i: Model Assessments. To help high schools ensure that students who are taking a more challenging curriculum are learning the academic content standards and grade-level indicators associated with each course — and that they will graduate prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship — the State Board of Education should develop model assessments, such as end-of-course or end-of-grade (e.g., 11th or 12th grades) assessments, that high schools can opt to use to measure student progress beyond the material covered by the OGT. These model assessments should be for local use only. Schools and districts should not be required to administer or report data from these assessments.

Initiative 2j: Alternative Assessments beyond the OGT. The State Board of Education should consider alternative assessment systems beyond the OGT to assess whether students have met the state’s academic content standards. For this purpose, it should develop an appeals system, similar to that adopted in Massachusetts, for allowing students to graduate when there is substantial objective evidence that the students have learned the standards measured by the OGT but have not passed all of the sections of the test. As part of this review, the State Board should consider using performance-based and/or competency-based assessments, drawing on the experience of and input from high schools and school districts. It also should consider using the ACT or SAT test as an alternative way of demonstrating proficiency when students have not passed the OGT.

What Ohioans Think of Their High Schools

Many of the Task Force's recommendations require difficult changes that depend on public support to succeed. To help assess public awareness of the need to improve student preparation for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship, the Task Force asked Belden Russonello & Stewart, a nationally known public opinion research firm, to conduct a series of six focus groups and a statewide opinion poll of 1,002 state residents.

The focus groups and survey results show a public that sees room for improvement in Ohio high schools but has little appetite for increasing the difficulty of the coursework and requiring advanced mathematics and science. This is contrary to what many national experts told the Task Force about Ohio's future workforce needs. Researchers emphasized that good paying jobs that required minimal education were disappearing in Ohio. In contrast, the public still tends to believe that many students will be well-prepared for the workplace if they meet minimal high school coursework requirements.

The public views high school as a place to learn the basics and be exposed to multiple skills and subject areas that will help determine and nurture each student's unique aspirations, interests and abilities. The most popular reforms were those that provided personalized attention to developing each student's unique needs and interests.

This window into public attitudes helped the Task Force understand Ohioans' views as it crafted its recommendations and will provide valuable information as the recommendations are communicated to the public.

Key findings include:

- Efforts to help students find their own unique path into adulthood received the most public support. Fifty percent of those surveyed believe providing individualized counseling so all students understand their options and get the support they need to succeed in high school and beyond is “extremely” helpful in improving high schools.
- The most important measure of a high school's success is the number of students successfully completing high school and receiving a diploma. More than three-quarters (77 percent) of those surveyed believe reducing dropout rates is a “very important” measure of a high school's success.
- High school is considered an important place to learn core subjects. Eight out of 10 people surveyed (81 percent) believe mastery of basic mathematics skills should be required for graduation, and 73 percent believe mastery of English should be required.
- Social development is considered an equally important aspect of high school. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed believe high school is where students learn to become good citizens, to get along with different kinds of people (67 percent), and to make friends and develop socially (52 percent).
- Three-quarters of Ohioans (75 percent) say it is “essential” for all students to learn skills needed for getting a job, but only six in ten (59 percent) say it is “essential” for all students to gain the necessary knowledge for college.
- Less than half of the residents surveyed believe advanced subject areas, such as algebra, biology and chemistry, should be required for graduation.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Prevent Dropouts and Reconnect with Students Who Have Left without Graduating

It is not hard to make the case that each student who drops out of high school before graduating is a drain on the state's economy. That student will make roughly \$200,000 less over the course of his or her life, is likely to be less productive and certainly will pay less in taxes.

Today, the Ohio numbers are dramatic:

- Every year, about 40,000 students drop out before graduating. Across the state, this represents about a third of the students who start high school, and the portion is far higher in Ohio's biggest cities.
- Each year's class of dropouts will cost Ohio's economy \$8 billion.
- The total number of dropouts is huge, and minority and poor students are overrepresented significantly.

In the Task Force's view, making sure students get a diploma should be as much about equity and morality as it is about economics — students who drop out of high school will simply have fewer good choices in their lives.

The Task Force believes that Ohio will have fewer dropouts if we can create the kind of personalized and relevant education for all students described in Recommendation #1. Additionally, we are convinced that fewer students will leave high school before graduation if schools and school districts provide more challenging curricula as described in Recommendation #2. Individualized attention will help a great deal. Yet still more is needed.

Ohio needs to do far more to reach potential dropouts early, prevent students from dropping out, and “recover” those who do drop out and get them back in school or in alternative programs. The Task Force has offered a number of recommendations that range from information and counseling to engaging communities in helping ensure that students stay in school or return to school.

Implementing Initiatives

Initiative 3a: Literacy Intervention. To ensure that more students stay in school and that they graduate prepared for success, the State Board of Education should adopt and direct ODE to implement a comprehensive literacy intervention initiative for all students whose literacy skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and logical thought processes) are below the proficient level, as measured by achievement tests and/or classroom performance.

This initiative should begin in the middle school grades and continue through ninth grade. It will be effective only if it builds on the success of existing efforts to raise the literacy achievement levels for elementary grades K–3. So the Task Force urges the State Board of Education to build a K–12 literacy initiative that includes individual literacy plans to improve the skills of students who are not proficient and uses proven models and literacy coaches to assist teachers in developing required instructional skills. (See Initiative 1c.)

Initiative 3b: Early Intervention. The Task Force encourages the State Board of Education and ODE to target intervention dollars to school districts that can demonstrate a plan for identifying and providing services to students before they enter ninth grade.

Resources should be targeted to districts that propose using proven strategies for identifying early on students who need assistance and accelerating their learning.

Initiative 3c: Personalized Information on Academic Strengths and Needs. ODE should develop tools for providing every high school student who takes the eighth-grade Ohio Achievement Test or the OGT, and his or her family and teachers, with a personalized workbook with detailed, timely information about the student’s academic strengths and needs, as measured by the assessments. This information should be provided in a manner that is easy for students, parents and teachers to understand and use. In addition, it should direct parents and students to Web sites, libraries and other resources that could help students learn the specific knowledge and skills they will need to master in a challenging model curriculum.

Initiative 3d: Advisory Programs and Counseling. To ensure that students have the personal attention they need, the State Board of Education should direct the Ohio Department of Education to identify high schools that have successfully used advisory programs to increase graduation rates and other indicators of preparedness for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship. ODE should use its systems of regional support and professional development to help all high schools — but particularly those with low graduation rates — learn how to emulate the best practices of these successful advisory programs.

ODE should work collaboratively with postsecondary education institutions and the business community to develop a high-quality preparation and professional development program for school counselors and advisers. Training materials should be developed and made available to school districts and the state’s regional service providers. In addition, ODE should produce a version of the postsecondary/career counseling training materials to make them appropriate for use with staff in community service agencies and youth service groups, including faith-based groups. ODE should support efforts to make the training available to community groups and other entities that work with children and youth.

Initiative 3e: Business- and Community-Based Services and Supports. ODE should assist school districts that are working with community organizations and other partners to provide additional services and supports — such as mentoring programs, after-school tutoring, psychological and family counseling, and other interventions — that will prevent at-risk students from dropping out. For this purpose, it should work through the state’s regional service centers to identify and train volunteers from school districts and communities who have experience with effective school-community partnerships — and to link them to other communities where their expertise can be used to support effective community engagement.

ODE should provide technical assistance and support for the creation of business- and community-based intervention programs that have a high likelihood of helping students learn the knowledge and skills required by the OGT — and of connecting students with effective employment programs, adult education centers/programs, community college programs, and other community-based after-school tutoring and mentoring resources.

Initiative 3f: Innovative Dropout Recovery Programs. ODE should provide technical assistance — and if possible, financial support — to school districts interested in developing innovative dropout recovery programs, including flexible-day schedules and work-study initiatives.

Initiative 3g: Recognition for Exemplary Dropout Prevention/Recovery Programs. ODE should recognize high schools and school districts that have established exemplary dropout prevention/recovery programs (similar to the Schools of Promise initiative). In addition, it should disseminate best and promising practices to all school districts.

Initiative 3h: Dropouts and the Accountability System. The State Board of Education should create incentives for school districts to persist with students who take longer to graduate and to actively pursue and recover students who have left before earning a diploma. For this purpose, the State Board should:

- Ensure that the state’s accountability system does not penalize high schools and school districts more than once when a student drops out, even if that student returns to school and drops out multiple times.
- Review and revise its policies relating to the counting of dropouts so that the public gets a more accurate picture of the extent to which students are dropping out. It should ensure that dropouts are counted for state accountability purposes in ways that both discourage “push-out” practices and encourage schools and school districts to reach out to recent dropouts and help them pursue graduation.
- Give high schools and school districts credit in the state’s accountability system for students who graduate in six years or less.

Why Do Students Drop Out?

Across Ohio, too many students are leaving before they finish high school. But knowing why students drop out can guide educators' and policymakers' efforts to keep students in school.

To shed some light on this issue, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted a national longitudinal study of students in grades 8–10. The top reasons students gave for dropping out include:

School Related:

1. Did not like school (51%)
2. Could not get along with teachers (35%)
3. Was failing school (39.9%)

Job Related:

1. Couldn't work and go to school at the same time (14.1%)
2. Had to get a job (15.3%)
3. Found a job (15.3%)

Family Related:

1. Was pregnant (31%)*
2. Became a parent (13.6%)
3. Got married (13.1%)

This report reinforces the messages the Task Force heard when we conducted focus groups of students of all education levels, including those who had dropped out of high school, across the state. Students leave school for reasons beyond the purely academic. Some wish to escape an unhappy home situation. Others may not see education as the road to a good job. Still others struggle academically and do not see the value of what they learn.

In many cases, poor academic performance is the symptom but not the cause of the problem. For this reason, the Task Force recommends creating more personalized learning environments where students feel connected to the adults in the school, developing a rigorous curriculum that is connected to the knowledge and skills students need to succeed after graduation, and providing additional supports such as counseling and family services to students who need more help.

*Females only

RECOMMENDATION #4

Bridge the Gap between High School and Postsecondary Education

Ohioans have heard plenty of commissions and task forces say that state and local government agencies need to do a better job of working together. This Task Force has a similar message, even as it acknowledges that the agencies responsible for education policy in Ohio have different missions, different constituencies and different histories.

The Task Force’s vision is an education system across Ohio — and across all learning levels — that consistently focuses on the needs of students, rather than the agendas of bureaucracies. We need to provide students with a consistent message of what is expected of them.

In part, we can do this by improving the connections between what we expect K–12 students to know and be able to do and the knowledge and skills required for success beyond high school — in both postsecondary education and the workplace. This is why the Task Force called — in Recommendation #2 — for increased collaboration among the State Board of Education, the Ohio Board of Regents, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Development and employer organizations to eliminate the gaps between high school, postsecondary education and workplace expectations.

But we also need to provide students and their families early on with a clear understanding of what it will take for students to be ready for college, advanced training and the world of work.

This is not to say that Ohio’s education policy leaders are not already working together to address this challenge — to connect high school preparation more closely with postsecondary success. They are. Collaboration is reflected in the ongoing efforts of the Joint Council of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, which ensured that higher education faculty were at the table when the state’s academic content standards were developed a few years ago. But more needs to be done to ensure that all students are being prepared to succeed in education and training beyond high school. With this in mind, the Task Force has crafted this final recommendation to move toward a seamless education system focused on the success of students.

Implementing Initiatives

Initiative 4a: Elimination of Gaps in Expectations. The State Board of Education and Ohio Board of Regents should work together to identify and eliminate any gaps between high school expectations (i.e., the state’s academic content standards) and college expectations to ensure that students who master the content reflected in the State Board’s multiple models of a core curriculum have the knowledge and skills required for success in college without remediation. Similarly, these two state education agencies should work in partnership with colleges and universities to make sure that higher education institutions will accept students whose transcripts include alternative courses and instructional programs or may not be based on Carnegie Units. (See Initiatives 1b, 2c and 2h.)

Initiative 4b: College Readiness Assessments. To ensure that high school students and their families have credible and timely information about their readiness for college and careers, the Task Force urges ODE and the Ohio Board of Regents to work together to

develop low-stakes, online assessments that students can take to know whether they are ready for college or the workplace. Alternately, the Task Force believes that the state should pay the cost of administering the pretests for SAT or ACT (i.e., the PSAT or PLAN assessments) during the seventh, eighth, ninth or tenth grades. This would give all students time to take additional coursework in areas of identified weakness and thus reduce the need for remediation in postsecondary education.

In addition, the state could use a portion of existing tests to allow high school students to demonstrate readiness and obtain college placement. In California, for example, students now can choose to take an additional 30 questions as part of the state's 11th grade test and obtain mathematics and English placement in the California State University system. This past year, California expected 100,000 students to choose this placement portion of the exam, but nearly twice that number did so.

Initiative 4c: Early College High Schools. The State Board of Education and ODE should continue to support Ohio's Early College High School (ECHS) pilots, with emphasis on conducting rigorous evaluations to identify program successes and shortcomings. Toward this end, the Task Force encourages these agencies to explore innovative funding strategies similar to the weighted average daily membership currently used for career and technical education funding.

Initiative 4d: Dual-Enrollment Programs. To update the performance of Ohio's education pipeline, the state should promote dual-enrollment programs that improve the transitions between secondary and postsecondary education. For this purpose, the State Board of Education and ODE should work with state legislators to appropriate resources for a system that provides additional weighted funding to districts for students who participate in the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program. The additional weight should be sufficient to reduce the extent to which schools perceive a financial disincentive for participation. The state should limit this funding to quality college courses that meet criteria established by the State Board of Education and Ohio Board of Regents through the Joint Council.

In addition, the State Board of Education and Ohio Board of Regents should work together to address and eliminate four additional barriers that inhibit the development of a sustainable PSEO program:

- ***Quality of Instruction Barriers.*** How can we ensure that all PSEO courses are being taught uniformly at a college level — that they meet the academic standards that have been set for other college courses?
- ***Accountability Barriers.*** How can we ensure that school districts are not penalized from an accountability perspective if their motivated and high-achieving students are among those who pursue PSEO and other early college opportunities?
- ***Administrative Barriers.*** How can we open PSEO opportunities to students without requiring them to apply for admission six months before the beginning of the school year — and sometimes a full year before a particular course is offered?
- ***Awareness Barriers.*** How can we make sure that students and parents have greater awareness of Ohio's early college and PSEO programs?

Initiative 4e: P-16 Data System. To promote rigorous curriculum alignment and program collaboration involving high schools and Ohio's colleges and universities, the state should develop an integrated P16 data system that is fully compatible with the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the Higher Education

Information (HEI) system. This data system should be structured to ensure effective collaboration among ODE, Ohio Board of Regents, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and other state and local entities. It should be constructed and managed in ways that maximize the reliability of the data, and it should be accessible to all stakeholders consistent with state and federal laws and appropriate privacy considerations.

The state should mandate regular information sharing between Ohio's secondary and postsecondary education systems, including but not limited to:

- Requiring the state's colleges and universities to report to school districts on the developmental course-taking of their students within two years of graduation and on their performance on placement tests and other performance measures used to determine college readiness.
- Requiring the Joint Council to report annually on the progress of Ohio's P-16 integration initiatives by disseminating both state-level and district-level results on such performance measures as (1) the percentage of graduates enrolled in postsecondary education and (2) the percentage of graduates who complete high school having attained some college-level skills and knowledge (e.g., those earning advanced-placement credits or successfully completing college-level courses prior to high school graduation).
- Ensuring that students' OGT scores are automatically sent to colleges and universities, just as ACT and SAT scores are sent today.

Finally, the Task Force urges the State Board of Education to study the possible benefits and problems related to including the following indicators on high schools' and school districts' report cards: (1) the percentage of their graduates enrolled in postsecondary education; (2) the percentage of graduates who complete high school having attained some college-level skills and knowledge (e.g., those earning advanced-placement credits or successfully completing college-level courses prior to high school graduation); (3) annual yearly progress in raising the percentage of graduates who complete high school having attained some college-level skills and knowledge as defined above; and (4) the percentage of their graduates who required remedial education when they moved on to postsecondary education.

Carrying out portions of this initiative will require the Ohio Board of Regents to work with colleges and universities to define what students should know and be able to do to be successful in college without remediation, as suggested in Recommendation #2. This remediation-free standard will give all high schools a common ground for reporting remediation rates.

Initiative 4f: Evaluation of the State's Assessment System. The State Board of Education should evaluate the state's assessment system to determine how well its assessments predict success in postsecondary education or the workplace. This evaluation should include comparing results on OGT with other assessments such as SAT, ACT and ACT's WorkKeys. A part of this evaluation might include allowing school districts to request waivers to use college entrance exams in lieu of the OGT, if the college entrance exam can be shown to address adequately Ohio's academic standards.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options: Getting a Jump on College

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program is designed to promote rigorous academic pursuits and provide qualified high school students with opportunities to experience coursework at the college or university level. This program is not intended to replace coursework available in high school or to offer students a full-time college course load.

The state of Ohio established the PSEO program in 1989. Originally, students in the 11th and 12th grades were eligible for this dual-enrollment program. However, in 1997, the program was expanded to include students in public, nonpublic and nonchartered schools in grades nine through 12.

Ohio law states clearly that high schools continue to be responsible for providing a comprehensive and challenging college preparatory curriculum, including Advanced Placement and other advanced-level courses for their students. Therefore, college courses should either contribute to or supplement the broad academic preparation needed by high school students.

Since students who are enrolled in these college-level courses can earn both high school and college credit, PSEO offers students who want to go on to postsecondary education a leg up in getting through college while helping them save on college costs. Many parents and educators find dual enrollment attractive because it keeps students academically challenged throughout their high school career. In this way, PSEO supports the No Child Left Behind Act's goal of encouraging greater academic rigor during the high school experience.

Proponents of dual enrollment make several arguments for this program.

- PSEO gives students a true college experience; it prepares them for the academic rigors of college by exposing them to the type of intensive curriculum that researchers say promotes bachelor's degree attainment.
- PSEO gives students a more realistic understanding of the academic and social skills they will need to succeed in college.
- PSEO allows students to progress to their next academic challenge without having to wait until high school graduation.
- PSEO lowers the cost of postsecondary education for students by allowing them to earn free college credits.
- PSEO provides students with a greater variety of class offerings, particularly in high schools that, due to small size or inadequate funding, are unable to offer a full range of interesting and exciting electives.

During the 2002–03 school year, 9,381 Ohio public school students participated in PSEO either at a postsecondary institution or by taking college-level courses offered at their schools. School districts and postsecondary institutions are responsible for arranging such courses.

A STRATEGY FOR GETTING STARTED

Seizing the Opportunity

Today, most of Ohio's high schools are far from ready to offer a personalized educational experience to each of their students. They are ill equipped to provide every student a challenging curriculum — one that is engaging, inspiring, based on widely understood and accepted academic standards, and relevant to the world he or she will face beyond graduation.

To be sure, standards-based reform has focused Ohio's attention on providing all students with the opportunity to learn. It has generated significant changes designed to produce better schools and improve student achievement. And although substantial progress has been made, improving the performance of Ohio's schools and the students they serve is a work in progress.

In the broad panorama of school reform, high schools have proven to be the most challenging education institutions in which to effect lasting, meaningful change. That's why the State Board of Education established this Task Force and charged it with recommending ways to improve and sustain the academic achievement of all Ohio high school students and to ensure that they acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education, careers and citizenship.

We know that the implementation of our recommendations will be a big job. We know that it will not be easy. And we know that limited financial resources and time will not allow all of it to be accomplished at once.

At the same time, we caution state policymakers against implementing our recommendations in a piecemeal fashion, or against viewing them as a menu from which to pick and choose without regard to the impact such an approach would have on the effectiveness of our proposed policy actions. Careful consideration to the timing and sequencing of our recommendations is essential.

Where should the work begin? To help the state's education policy leaders and educators who will now grapple with our recommendations, the Task Force has identified three priorities for getting started.

Developing a Funding Strategy

Implementing the Task Force's recommendations will require the development of a creative funding strategy — one that blends the reallocation of existing resources with the investment of new dollars from both the public and private sectors. Over time, efforts to carry out these recommendations without all types of revenue-enhancing initiatives will be futile.

Achieving the vision advanced by this Task Force requires high schools and school districts to reallocate some of their existing resources, just as they work to increase administrative productivity while reducing real costs. It demands that communities — as well as high schools' corporate partners — step up and become more involved, both physically and financially, based on an understanding of the profound nature of the changes being proposed. And it necessitates new targeted investments by the state of Ohio. To disregard any of these revenue sources would turn the Task Force's recommendations into unfunded mandates for high schools and school districts. It also would weaken our vision for Ohio's high schools.

For this purpose, the Task Force urges the State Board of Education to establish a Quality High Schools Innovation Fund to provide seed capital for a limited number of

innovative initiatives per biennium (e.g., 25 to 30). The fund should include both public and private dollars for which high schools and school districts can apply (i.e., a competitive grant program).

The Task Force believes that grants from this innovation fund should be targeted to change strategies that reflect real innovation, not a minor reworking of already-established policies and practices, with priority given to the lowest-performing high schools and districts. The innovation fund should offer schools, school districts and communities opportunities to pilot innovations consistent with each of the four recommendations in this report.

Grant requirements should be specific and widely understood to ensure that innovation fund dollars are used to support school districts' efforts to create new, research-based change strategies designed to improve all students' academic achievement. Finally, all grant applications should be linked to the Task Force's indicators of success and should include documentation that the proposals were developed in partnership with the community.

To ensure that the innovation fund dollars are used effectively and equitably, the Task Force recommends the following:

- All high schools and school districts should be eligible for support from the innovation fund, although priority should be given to low-performing schools with the greatest needs.
- The State Board of Education and ODE should require independent evaluations of all funded initiatives for two purposes: to identify what works and what doesn't so other high schools and school districts can adapt and use successful strategies in their own high schools and to generate a body of knowledge that can be used by the state education policy leaders in future decisionmaking.
- ODE should provide a system of support for assisting schools and school districts in developing innovation fund proposals that have a high likelihood of improving the learning of academic content standards; increasing graduation rates; and improving preparation for careers, postsecondary education and citizenship.
- ODE should seek funding support from state and national foundations to design and carry out a public awareness campaign that promotes the innovation fund and its purpose and that disseminates best and promising practices based on the evaluation of these innovative programs and practices.

Developing Challenging Curriculum Models

The State Board of Education and ODE should begin immediately to develop multiple models of a core curriculum that lay out sequences of courses that are matched to the state's academic content standards through grade 12, as well as to the grade-level indicators that should be taught in each course. As described in the Task Force's report, this work is essential to realizing our vision of high schools that offer every student an academically challenging curriculum that is engaging, inspiring and relevant to the world her or she will face after graduation.

The Task Force urges the State Board and ODE to establish a process for developing these curriculum models that involves Ohio's practicing classroom teachers and school leaders, as well as college and university faculty, the Ohio Board of Regents staff, representatives of adult workforce education programs, parents, and representatives of the business community.

Developing the Knowledge Base

Task Force members heard frequently that Ohio’s data-collection and data-sharing systems have many holes and limitations that prevent education policymakers from having the reliable and current data they need to make effective policy decisions. This is why we have recommended that the state develop an integrated P–16 data system. Work on this initiative needs to begin immediately.

Timely action on the development of new information tools for students, parents and teachers also should be a priority. With the State Board of Education’s direction, ODE should begin now to work with educators across the state to define various ways in which the curricula can be mapped from the early grades through middle school so that students who reach ninth grade are more likely to have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in high school.

Similarly, now is the time to begin developing a variety of assessment tools designed to give students and their families — as well as their teachers — personalized feedback on how students are doing in their studies. Specifically, ODE should begin working on tools for providing every high school student who takes the eighth-grade Ohio Achievement Test or the OGT, and his or her family and teachers, a personalized workbook with detailed, timely information about the student’s academic strengths and needs, as measured by the assessments. Also, it should begin now to develop low-stakes, online assessments that students can take to know whether they are ready for postsecondary education or the workplace. Alternatively, it should explore ways to use a portion of existing tests to allow high school students to demonstrate readiness and obtain college placement.

The Task Force's Work: What We Did

How can Ohio's high schools improve so that every student meets the state's high academic standards, graduates and is prepared to succeed in life after high school? The State Board of Education posed this question to our statewide task force of 34 high school teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, higher education faculty and administrative leaders, business people, community leaders, and public officials. We were urged to rethink the rules, roles and relationships that define the high school and suggest ways to increase the likelihood that all Ohio high schools and the young people they serve are successful.

We came from all parts of the state, from urban, suburban and rural school districts and communities. Melissa Ingwersen, president of Bank One Ohio, and Carl Wick, a member of the State Board of Education, have served as our co-chairs.

As a full group, the Task Force met five times. Its committees met regularly from November 2003 through May 2004. During Task Force and committee meetings, we listened to and questioned experts from Ohio and around the nation. We reviewed the most current research on high school change, and we discussed and debated issues among ourselves.

We visited nine Ohio high schools in all parts of the state. These high schools all model interesting innovations, designs or noteworthy partnerships with postsecondary institutions, businesses or community organizations.

All of the Task Force's meetings were open to the public. We appreciate the support of those Ohioans who took the time to attend our meetings or to provide us with presentations or testimony.

In February 2004, the Task Force convened six focus groups — in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati — where we talked directly with teachers and 18- to 25-year-olds about their own high school experiences. We talked with young adults who had dropped out of high school without receiving a diploma, high school graduates who did not pursue college, and current two-year and four-year college students, in addition to teachers of various types of high school students.

The focus group discussions were followed by a statewide survey of Ohio residents, which was conducted by telephone between March 10 and 15, 2004, to facilitate communication with the public and target audiences about improving the high school experience.

During July and August 2004 — after an early draft of the Task Force's policy options were shared with members of the State Board of Education — we went back into communities across the state to conduct 15 constituent group meetings with nearly 300 total participants. In these meetings, we collected reactions to our draft policy options, and we sought to identify issues that had not yet been adequately addressed. To assist with these meetings, we called on Ohio's leading education organizations and professional associations. Their efforts assisted us with developing a final report that reflects the views of their constituents. We appreciate their help.

Resources

- “State High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform,” Center on Education Policy, August 2004.
- “Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams,” Achieve, Inc., June 2004.
- “Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Nation’s Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?” Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, June 2004.
- “Crisis or Possibility? Conversations about the American High School,” National High School Alliance, May 2004.
- “Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools,” Jay P. Greene and Marcus Winters, Manhattan Institute for Policy and Research, May 2004.
- “Ready for Leadership: Lessons Learned from the Front Lines of School Reform,” Mass Insight Education and Research Institute and Partnership for Learning, May 2004.
- “Ohioans Consider the State of Their High Schools and Efforts to Improve High School,” Belden Russonello & Stewart, April 2004.
- “The Educational Pipeline: Big Investment, Big Returns,” National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, April 2004.
- “Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform,” National Association of Secondary School Principals, February 2004.
- “Bridge to Postsecondary Success: High Schools in the Knowledge Economy,” Hilary Pennington and Joel Vargas, Jobs for the Future, February 2004.
- “Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis,” Gary Orfield, Daniel Losen, et. al, Harvard Civil Rights Project, Urban Institute, Civil Society Institute’s Results for America Project, Advocates for Children of New York, February 2004.
- “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts,” The American Diploma Project, Achieve, Inc., February 2004.
- “The Performance Report for Ohio’s Colleges and Universities,” Ohio Board of Regents, January 30, 2004.
- “Are California High Schools Ready for the 21st Century?” The Education Trust – West, 2004.
- “Connecting the Dots: Linking High Schools and Postsecondary Education to Increase Student Success,” David T. Conley, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Winter 2003.
- “Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts,” The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth, November 2003.
- “State High School Exit Exams: Put to the Test,” Keith Gayler, Naomi Chudowsky, Nancy Kober, Madlene Hamilton, Center for Education Policy, August 2003.
- “All Tests Are Not Equal: Why States Need to Give High-Quality Tests,” Achieve, Inc., Summer 2003.
- “Multiple Pathways and State Policy: Toward Education and Training Beyond High School,” Patrick M. Callan and Joni E. Finney, Jobs for the Future, June 2003.

“Toward High Achievement for All Students,” State Board of Education Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force, Ohio Department of Education, May 2003.

“High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program,” American Institutes for Research and SRI International, April 2003.

“Closing the Graduation Gap: Toward High Schools That Prepare All Students for College, Work and Citizenship,” Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, February 6, 2003.

“Mixed Messages: What High School Tests Communicate about Student Readiness for College,” David Conley, Standards for Success, 2003.

“Ready for Tomorrow: Helping All Students Achieve Secondary and Postsecondary Success,” National Governors Association, 2003.

“Transforming the American High School: New Directions for State and Local Policy,” Michael Cohen, The Aspen Institute, 2003.

“Reforming Chicago’s High Schools: Research Perspectives on School and System Level Change,” Valerie Lee, Consortium on Chicago School Research, November 2002.

“High School and Beyond: The System Is the Problem — And the Solution,” Mark Tucker, National Center on Education and the Economy, October 2, 2002.

“Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity: Developing Pathways To and Through College for Urban Youth,” Adria Steinberg, Cheryl Almeida, Lili Allen and Sue Goldberger, Jobs for the Future, March 2002.

“Most Likely to Succeed: Policymaking in Support of a Restructured High School,” National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002.

“Overcoming Obstacles to School Reform: A Report on the 2002 Organizing for Educational Excellence Institute,” Research for Democracy: A joint project of the Temple University Center for Public Policy and the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, 2002.

“Sizing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think about Large and Small High Schools,” Public Agenda for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2002.

“Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools,” KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2002.

“Dropouts in America,” papers commissioned by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and Achieve, Inc., January 2001.

“Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000,” National Center for Education Statistics, November 2001.

“High Schools That Work: Findings from the 1996 and 1998 Assessments,” Research Triangle Institute, April 2001.

“A Total Approach: Improving College Preparation in Ohio,” Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio Department of Education, June 1997.

“Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change: A Report of the Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education,” Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 1997.

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Ohio Council of Parents and Teachers
Ohio Education Association
Ohio School Boards Association
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Stark County Educational Service Center
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