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December 2012

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Foreword by
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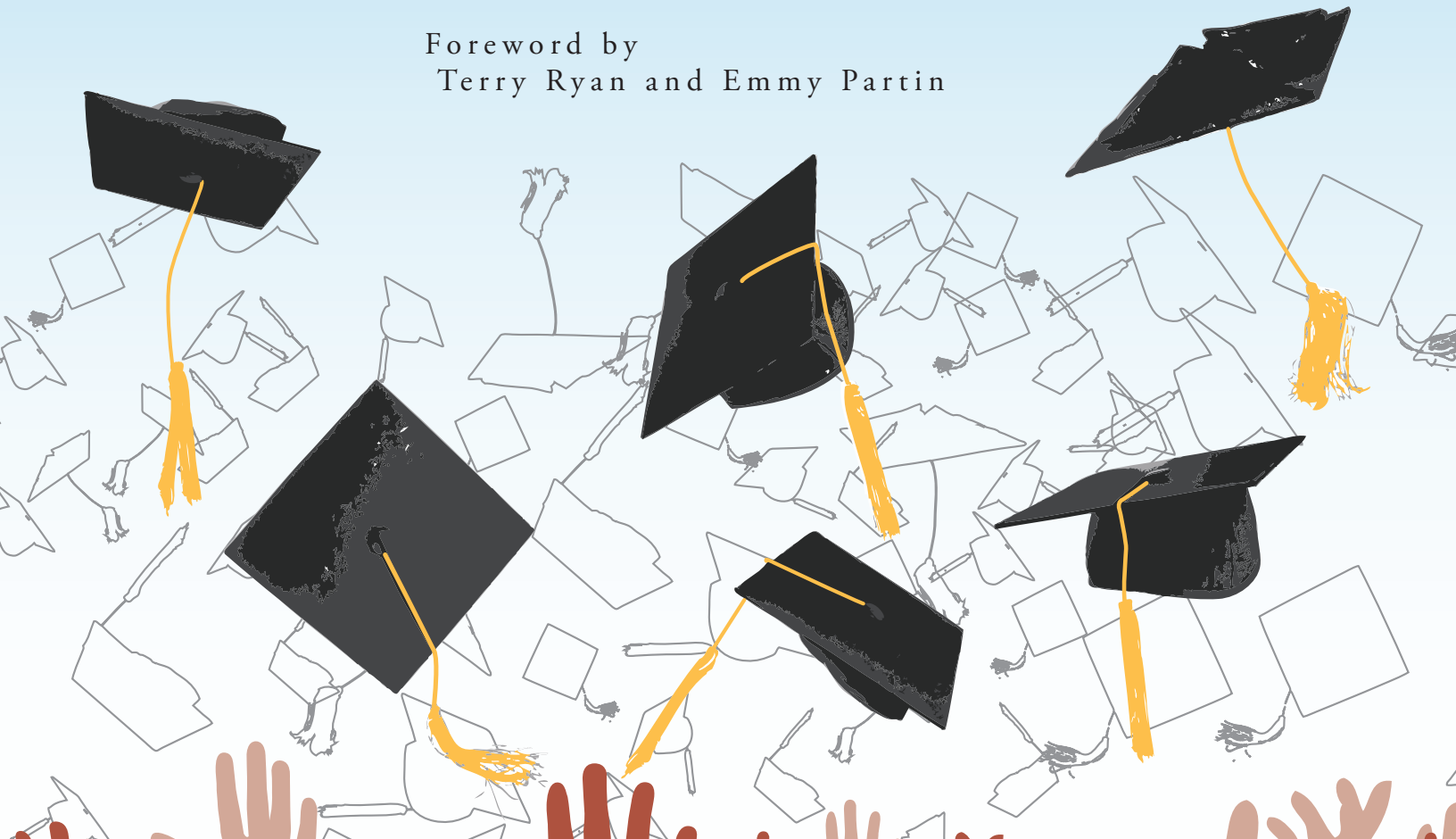

THOMAS B. FORDHAM INSTITUTE
ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is the nation's leader in advancing educational excellence for every child through quality research, analysis, and commentary, as well as on-the-ground action and advocacy in Ohio. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and this publication is a joint project of the Foundation and the Institute. For further information, please visit our website at www.edexcellence.net or write to the Institute at 1016 16th St. NW, 8th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

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Foreword

"NOBODY IS SATISFIED WITH THE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF OHIO'S POOR, URBAN, AND MINORITY YOUNGSTERS—OR THE SCHOOLS THAT SERVE THEM." This was how we opened our 2010 report *Needles in a Haystack: Lessons from Ohio's High-Performing, High-Need Urban Schools*, which examined high-flying elementary schools. That sentiment is just as true for the high schools we studied in 2012 as it was two years ago for the grade schools we examined. Yet there are high schools in the Buckeye State that buck the bleak trends facing too many of our urban students. Such schools show significant achievement for disadvantaged youngsters from depressed inner-city communities.

Whereas the original version of *Needles in a Haystack* looked at eight exceptional elementary schools, this report examines six high schools that are making good on promises of academic excellence; specifically, schools that work for low-income and minority students. These high schools make serious efforts ***not*** to leave anyone behind. It's a tall order, as too many urban schools—which we have come to know are those with high numbers of poor and minority students—leave too many children behind. For example: Ohio has 135 high schools that have been identified as "dropout factories"—schools that fail to graduate more than 60 percent of their students on time.[1] They account for roughly 15 percent of the state's high schools.

All of our Needles high schools—two each in Cleveland, Dayton, and Columbus—have student bodies that are more than 60 percent economically disadvantaged. Five of the six have majority African American enrollment. All but one of these Needles schools is a district high school, working within the confines of a district bureaucracy and with labor union rules. Schools with these demographics, in urban settings, are lucky to have 70 percent of their students pass basic state tests and graduate 60 percent of their students. Yet students in these Needles schools score ten, twenty, even thirty points higher than their district peers—and over 90 percent of these students graduate, most going on to some form of higher education. In fact, *U.S. News* ranked three of these Needles schools in the top 101 schools in Ohio; two others earned Bronze Medals from the magazine.[2]

Such high-performing outlier schools have tantalized us since we first noticed them in the state achievement data for schools in Ohio's big cities, which we analyze and report on every year. We undertook this study of high-performing, high-need high schools in order to understand and spotlight the reasons for their success.

How did we find these "needles in a haystack" high schools?

We started out by looking at enrollment and achievement data for 818 public high schools.[3] We wanted to identify those schools that served predominately economically disadvantaged students with a particular focus on those schools that also served a majority of students of color (for detailed methodology see Appendix B). We then looked for high schools in the data that performed at a relatively high academic level for at least three consecutive years (2008-09 through 2010-11). After applying our performance criteria, fifty schools (just 6 percent) met the cut in

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[1] *Building a Grad Nation* report, by Civic Enterprises, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, America's Promise Alliance, and the Alliance for Excellent Education: http://www.americaspromise.org/our-work/grad-nation/building-a-grad-nation.aspx.

[2] http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/ohio

[3] Ohio has more than 818 public high schools; we reviewed data for those schools for which three years of data were available (2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11).

terms of both being high-need and high-performing (see the full list in Appendix C). From these fifty we settled on a sample of six to profile.

These six aren't the *only* such high-need, high-performing schools in Ohio. But in order to put limits around our project, we focused on those schools serving the neediest urban high school students, and delivering truly uncommon results over multiple years.

Knowledgeable readers will observe that many of the findings here mirror those not only of our earlier *Needles* report, but those of other studies. Several excellent books have uncovered lessons from high-performing schools, including Samuel Casey Carter's *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom's *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, Karin Chenoweth's *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons from Unexpected Schools*, Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed*, and David Whitman's (Fordham-published) *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism*.

Those, in turn, built upon an earlier generation of "effective schools" and "best practices" research going back at least to Ronald Edmonds and Michael Rutter in the 1970s. Many of our findings in Ohio in 2010 and 2012 reaffirm traits common to effective schools, including solid leadership, excellent teachers, stability among staff, rigorous expectations for academics and behavior, and data-informed decision making, to name a few. But our goal is not simply to echo earlier findings about what makes some schools effective. It is to help Ohio develop more such schools, especially high schools.

To study these Needles high schools and report on what makes them tick, we called on veteran journalist, and former news editor of *Life* magazine, Peter Meyer. Peter has vast experience when it comes to covering education, from working with the Fordham Institute and covering the challenges facing America's schools and their students, to serving as a member of his local board of education. Peter and his research assistants spent several days in each of the schools, clocking more than two hundred hours observing classes and interviewing district administrators, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Peter also scoured public sources of information and vetted dozens of documents about each school provided by Fordham.

Peter's fantastic reporting provides important insights into how to improve our high schools so they can better serve our neediest kids. In the Afterword of this report we share six policy lessons from Peter's observations that can help us in the ongoing struggle to create and sustain more high-performing urban high schools. These six high schools prove once again that it is possible to do right by high-need youngsters within the framework of America public education—and give the lie to defeatists and excusers who claim dropout factories are to be a given until we fix families and their communities.

As with the first *Needles* report, we hope that by uncovering the secrets of these schools' exceptional performance we can suggest district and state policies and practices that will foster more such schools—without making it harder on the few we have now. Even if the ingredients of success turn out to be no secrets at all—and in fact many of the ingredients of success for these high schools are similar to what we discovered in the original Needles schools—transforming that understanding into widespread practice remains a challenge for Ohio educators, policymakers and commentators. Because, as we all know, such schools don't happen by accident. If Ohio wants more of them, the adults have to make it happen.

Terry Ryan,
Vice President for Ohio Programs and Policy
Emmy Partin,
Director of Ohio Policy and Research

Acknowledgments

THIS REPORT IS DUE TO THE HARD WORK AND TIME OF MANY INDIVIDUALS.

First and foremost we thank the superintendents, principals, teachers, students, and parents who opened their schools to us. This truly is *their* report. They spoke candidly about their education experiences, both good and bad, and granted us full behind-the-scenes access to the secrets of their success. All six of the schools signed on to the project without a moment's hesitation. We are grateful for their eager participation.

We are of course also grateful to Peter Meyer for the time, travel, thought, and tenacity he has put into this report. Few others could bring both the education knowledge and journalistic lens that he lends to this project. We also thank (former) Fordham staff members Jamie Davies O'Leary and Bianca Speranza, who served as Peter's research assistants on this project. Also at Fordham, we must acknowledge the assistance of the many staff members who have contributed to the development and production of this report: Aaron Churchill, Adrienne King, Matt Kyle, Danyell Lewis, Jeff Murray, Amanda Pierce, and Theda Sampson.

We appreciate Matt Cohen, chief research officer at the Ohio Department of Education, for the guidance he provided about the use of data to select schools for the study. Finally, kudos to Shannon Last for her sharp-eyed copyediting and Emi Ryan for her savvy graphic design work.

A Note about the Data and Site Visits

WE SELECTED THE SCHOOLS TO BE FEATURED IN THIS REPORT IN FALL 2011, BASED ON PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA FOR THE 2008-09, 2009-10, AND 2010-11 SCHOOL YEARS. Site visits were completed by March 2012 and the first draft of the report was completed in May, one month before the current attendance-data scrubbing scandal came to light and before the Auditor of State launched his investigation. The data provided and referenced herein are the most recently available, *official* data available from the Ohio Department of Education. Because the audit is ongoing, we have not provided preliminary 2011-12 performance data for the Needles schools. Likewise, the information and stories told throughout this report are from site visits during the 2010-11 school year. For example, if a teacher is referenced as having sixteen years of experience, that was her number of years teaching as of 2011—it's safe to assume she has another year under her belt today. And some of the students and staff mentioned in this report may no longer be affiliated with the school due to graduation, retirement, or other moves.

About the Author

PETER MEYER IS A BERNARD LEE SCHWARTZ ADJUNCT FELLOW WITH THE THOMAS B. FORDHAM INSTITUTE. Meyer is also a former news editor of *Life* magazine. Over the course of his three-decade journalism career, Meyer, who holds a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago, has touched down in cities around the globe, from Bennington to Baghdad, and has written hundreds of stories on subjects as varied as anti-terrorist training for American ambassadors to the history of the 1040 income tax form. His work has appeared in such publications as *Harper's, Vanity Fair, National Geographic, New York, Life, Time,* and *People*.

Since 1991, Meyer has focused his attention on education reform in the United States, an interest acquired while writing a profile of education reformer E. D. Hirsch for *Life*. Meyer subsequently helped found a charter school, served on his local board of education (twice) and, for the last eight years, has been an editor at *Education Next*. He has written 15 articles for the journal, including "Advice for Education Reformers: Be Bold!" (Fall 2012), "Assessing New York's Commissioner of Education" (Summer 2011), "The Middle School Mess" (Winter 2011), "The Early Education of our Next President" (Fall 2008), "New York City's Education Battles: The Mayor, the Schools, and the 'Rinky-dink Candy Store'" (Spring 2008), "Learning Separately: The Case for Single-sex Schools" (Winter 2008), and "Can Catholic Schools Be Saved?" (Spring 2007).

Introduction

"All right, class, listen up." The teacher, fifteen-year-veteran Amanda Franklin, stood at a lectern in front of a classroom of thirty-four students, all of whom were now sitting bolt upright at their desks, which were lined up precisely, in neat rows.

"Here's the question," Ms. Franklin bellowed, though she didn't have to raise her voice since the room had gone silent as soon as she spoke. "Jones, are you listening?" She shot a menacing glance toward the rear of the room. A lanky, curly-haired kid in the fourth row stiffened.

"All right, here's the question," Franklin continued. "Have any of you heard of a school that doesn't say it believes in excellence or doesn't want every child to succeed?"

Silence. The kids shot quick glances at each other. Brows furrowed. Silence. Another trick question from Franklin.

"That's what I thought," said the teacher. "Class dismissed."

***

That is an apocryphal exchange, of course, but true—as good fiction is *true*. The report that follows is nonfiction—and also true.

This report chronicles six public secondary schools that bucked the trends in urban high school education. How do they do it?

Not with fairy dust.

In the pages that follow, I describe what we found when we visited these remarkable schools. Over several months of reporting in 2011 and 2012, I saw many teachers who had a command of their classrooms, as the fictional teacher above did. I saw classrooms with desks lined up as they were in this fictional classroom. But I also learned that "command of the classroom" does not always mean hearing pins drop or aligning desks in perfect rows.

> ***None of these schools, though deservedly proud of their accomplishments, was satisfied with its excellence.***

There were science labs and jazz performances, classrooms with desks in circles and classrooms with no desks at all. There were old teachers and young teachers. And, if you're in DeShona Pepper-Robertson's dance class at Stivers High School in Dayton, there is music, motion, and the exquisite discipline required to make the body do some wild things. Or, if you happen on an afterschool gathering at Cleveland School of the Arts, you might end up, as I did, dancing! But amidst all this splendid creativity and diversity is one quality that seemed universal to our Needles schools: an intensity of purpose. It is hard to describe, but it is palpable. It is sweat-on-the-brow hard work, for everyone.

We are forced by these schools of excellence to look for the essence of education success in places beyond the bumper sticker reasons for failure. It is worth noting in this respect that none of these schools, though deservedly proud of their accomplishments, was satisfied with its excellence. And thanks to their efforts, we know that it is not the color of a child's skin, nor a child's economic status, that is the cause of his or her not going to college; at least, it doesn't have to be the cause. It is not even the toxic stress that many of these students live with in their neighborhoods, though without a doubt this presents challenges to teaching and learning. Most of what these schools have succeeded in doing is seeing these children as worth the effort of educating. And, most importantly, they prove that the effort is worth it.

"Raise the bar" was a refrain we heard constantly, "and the kids will rise to meet it." And they have.

> ***This is a place where there is not one answer. People have reinvented wheels more times than I can remember.***
>
> – Mike Mangan, Stivers (teacher)

Yet, in a variation of Tolstoy's famous comment about families, we can say this about our six schools: each is successful in its own way. Several of our schools excel in the arts, some in sports. One of our Needles schools doesn't have sports or a music program. And yet each has beaten the odds and is making disadvantaged students college ready.

"You can come and see what we do," says Marge Mott at Dayton Early College Academy, "but don't go home and try to be DECA. You have to see what you think will work for you and take it back and make it yours…. Everyone needs to make their own soup."

Secret recipe? You bet. You have to make it yourself. "This is a place where there is not one answer," says Mike Mangan, who founded the music program at Stivers School for the Arts in the 1970s. "People have reinvented wheels more times than I can remember."

Our Needles high schools each make their soup differently, but each gets most of its kids to graduation and most of its graduates to college.

Urban education is not a game for the faint of heart; it's about saving lives, sometimes quite literally. Indeed, the staff of our Needles schools have a sense of mission and calling that resonates far beyond the school walls; but that's because the dedication resonates far beyond the school walls. That's because the staff's dedication is contagious—students catch it and there's no stopping their progress.

This report is the story of how six schools get it done.

Peter Meyer

About the Schools

Centennial High School

Columbus, OH

Principal: Frances Hershey

School type: District (neighborhood)

Grades served: 9-12

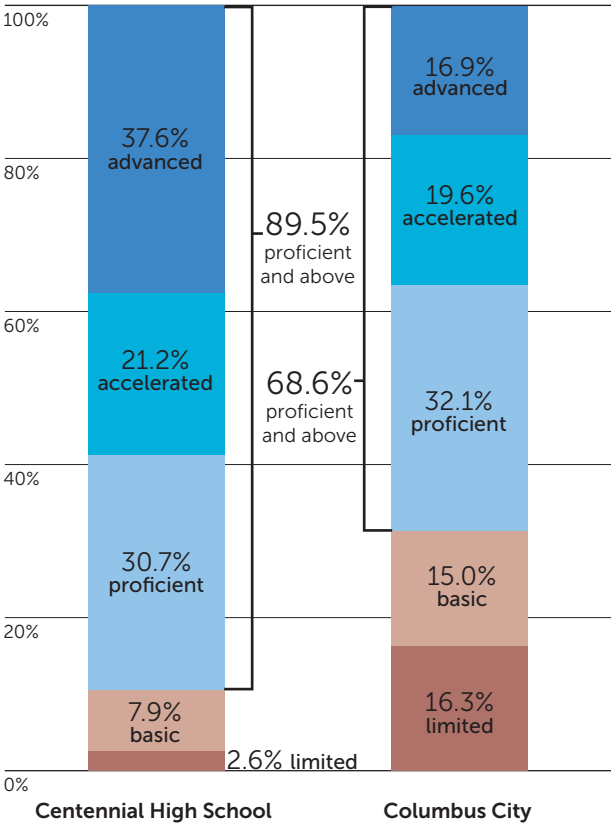
773	Student enrollment
52.9	Percent economically disadvantaged
51.7	Percent non-white
14.7	Percent of students with disabilities
15	Teachers' average years of experience
$67,753	Average teacher salary
$11,946	Total expenditure per pupil

Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

So named for its 1976 opening, Centennial is a 9-12 college prep "neighborhood" school in the Columbus City School District. About 40 percent of its students hail from the school's attendance zone, but the remainder comes from all over the city, via the district's choice lottery. Unlike some of our Needles schools, Centennial does not reserve slots for the academically talented.

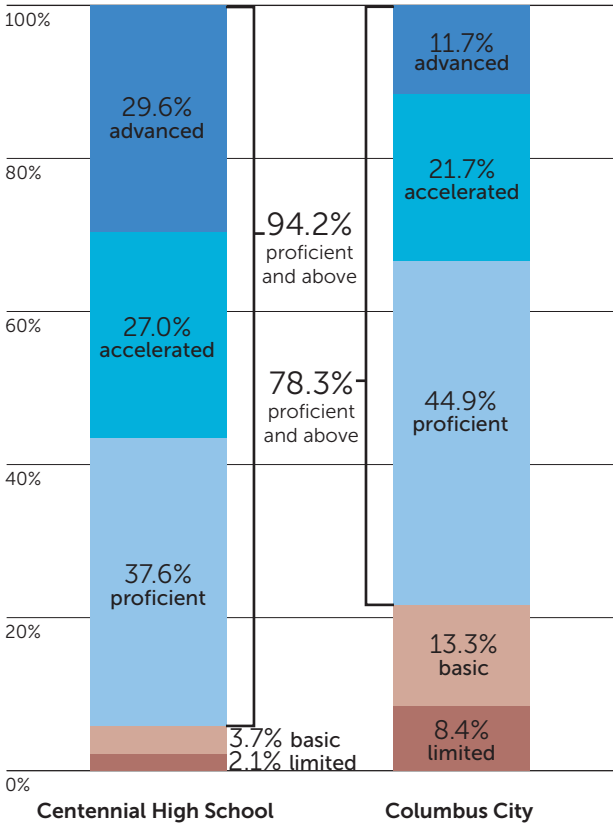
Because the school's neighborhood is almost 90 percent white and working class, Centennial has the lowest percentage of black and economically disadvantaged enrollment among our Needles schools—36 percent black and 53 percent disadvantaged. It does, however, have the highest percentage of disabled students among our group: 15 percent.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (Centennial vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (Centennial vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	Centennial	COLUMBUS CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	83.2%	64.4%
Proficiency rate of black students	91.4%	64.2%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	Centennial	COLUMBUS CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	91.1%	74.7%
Proficiency rate of black students	97.1%	75.4%

Columbus Alternative High School

Columbus, OH

Principal: Sharee Wells

School type: District (choice)

Grades served: 9-12

606	Student enrollment
61	Percent economically disadvantaged
74.2	Percent non-white
7.7	Percent of students with disabilities
16	Teachers' average years of experience
$70,617	Average teacher salary
$13,166	Total expenditure per pupil

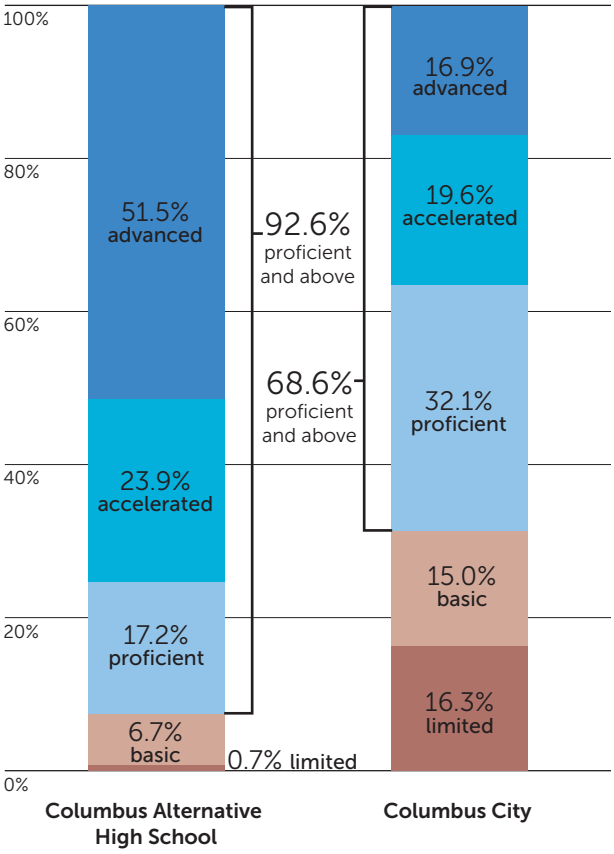
Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

A banner hangs in the hallway of Columbus Alternative High School (known as CAHS "--käz--" by students, teachers, and the community): "Welcome to our school, where no child is left behind." Outside of Room 110, there's another sign: "Through this door pass the best kids in the world." The school's mission statement is posted outside each CAHS classroom: "Each student who enters Columbus Alternative High School excels in college-level coursework and graduates from CAHS with scholarships, passionate, open-minded and prepared to thrive as a contributing citizen in college and beyond."

In an era of feel-good banners and posters, this one might not stand out but for the wall of pictures in the same hallway: pictures of their National Merit Scholarship winners. The class of 2012, with barely one hundred graduates, had three National Merit semifinalists.

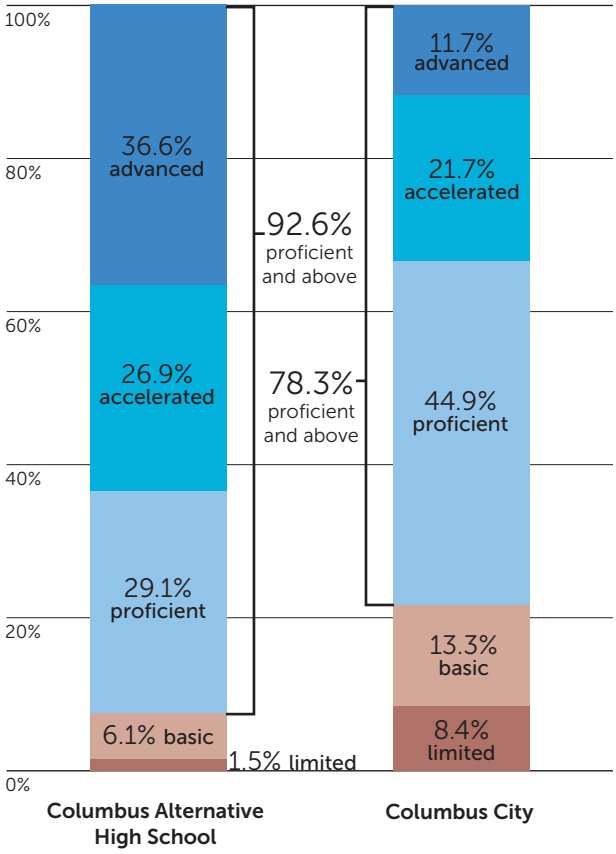
Entry to this grade 9-12 school is 100 percent lottery, yet over 61 percent of CAHS students are economically disadvantaged and 65 percent are black. Still, the school has a 99 percent graduation rate for each subgroup—twenty points above the city's average.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (Columbus Alt. vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (Columbus Alt. vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	Columbus Alt.	COLUMBUS CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	89.3%	64.4%
Proficiency rate of black students	90.6%	64.2%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	Columbus Alt.	COLUMBUS CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	90.7%	74.7%
Proficiency rate of black students	93%	75.4%

Stivers School for the Arts

Dayton, OH

Principal: Erin Dooley

School type: District (choice)

Grades served: 7-12

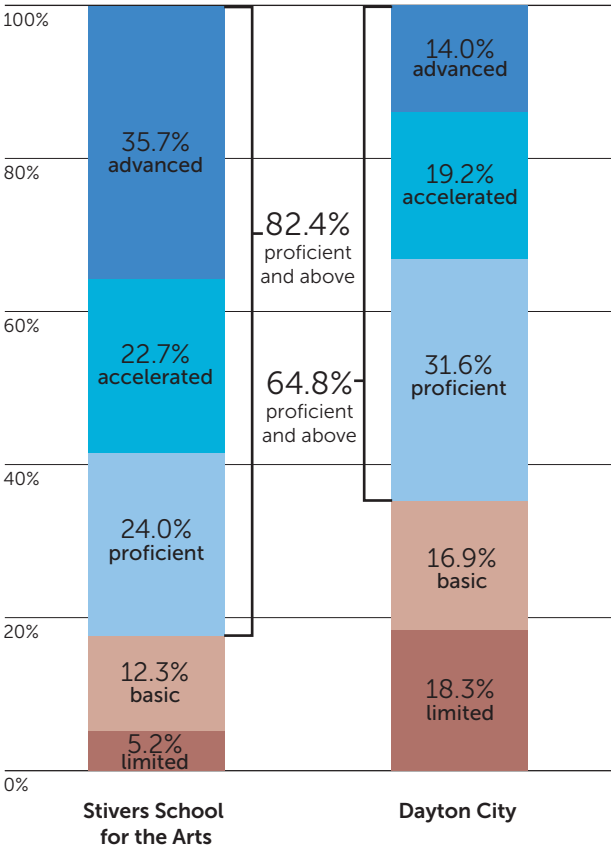
911	Student enrollment
55.2	Percent economically disadvantaged
66.3	Percent non-white
11.4	Percent of students with disabilities
21	Teachers' average years of experience
$56,367	Average teacher salary
$8,473	Total expenditure per pupil

Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

Stivers is a nationally acclaimed school for the fine and performing arts and the only grade 7-12 school in the Dayton Public School District (see Dayton Early College, below, and Belmont High School, now 7-12, modeled after Stivers). It has, surprisingly, the largest sports program in the district, with a trophy cabinet that would be the envy of any public high school. And that is not the only surprise in a school whose 911 students are 60 percent black and 55 percent economically disadvantaged, and has an audition entry bar: singing and dancing counts, but not test scores, report cards, or recommendation letters.

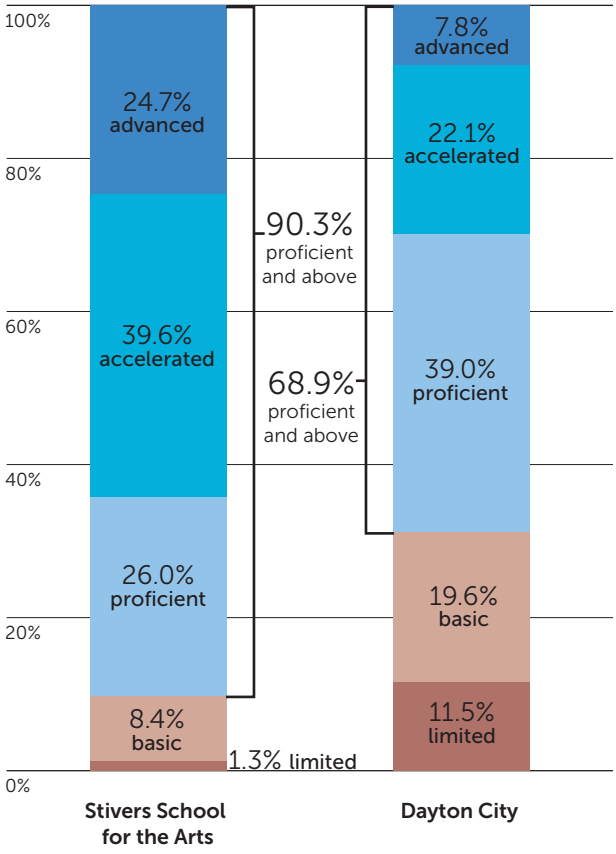
The school met fourteen out of seventeen state indicators in 2010-11. Its students routinely score fifteen and twenty points above their peers in the other Dayton public high schools in reading and math, its eleventh graders scoring in the high nineties on the state's Ohio Graduation Tests in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies. The school graduates more than 95 percent of its minority and poor students, more than ten points above the city's average, and also routinely sends its graduates to college, including colleges with names like Cornell, Brown, Oberlin, and Julliard.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (Stivers vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (Stivers vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	Stivers	DAYTON CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	74.7%	61.3%
Proficiency rate of black students	78.6%	63.6%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	Stivers	DAYTON CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	86.7%	65.6%
Proficiency rate of black students	88.8%	67.6%

Dayton Early College Academy

Dayton, OH

Principal: Dave Taylor

School type: Charter

Grades served: 7-12

390	Student enrollment
78.4	Percent economically disadvantaged
87.9	Percent non-white
2.6	Percent of students with disabilities
4	Teachers' average years of experience
$40,591	Average teacher salary
$8,554	Total expenditure per pupil

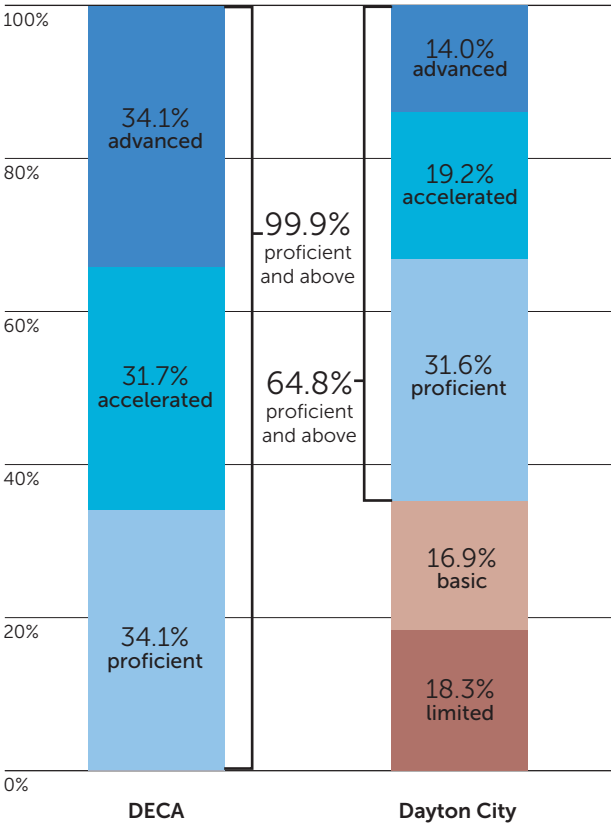
Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

DECA began as a Dayton Public School District "pilot" in 2003, with a mission of getting poor kids to college. And it does: 100 percent of its graduates (and graduation rate is over 95 percent) are admitted to college and 87 percent make it to their sophomore year. This, despite the fact that now, as an Ohio charter school, DECA has no admissions criteria except that applicants must reside within the geographic boundaries of the Dayton Public School District. DECA must advertise an open enrollment period—first-come, first-serve. If it exceeds its advertised openings, then a lottery is held.

DECA serves grades 7-12 in its current location, but opened a K-6 partner school in August of 2012 (which has the same open enrollment policy).

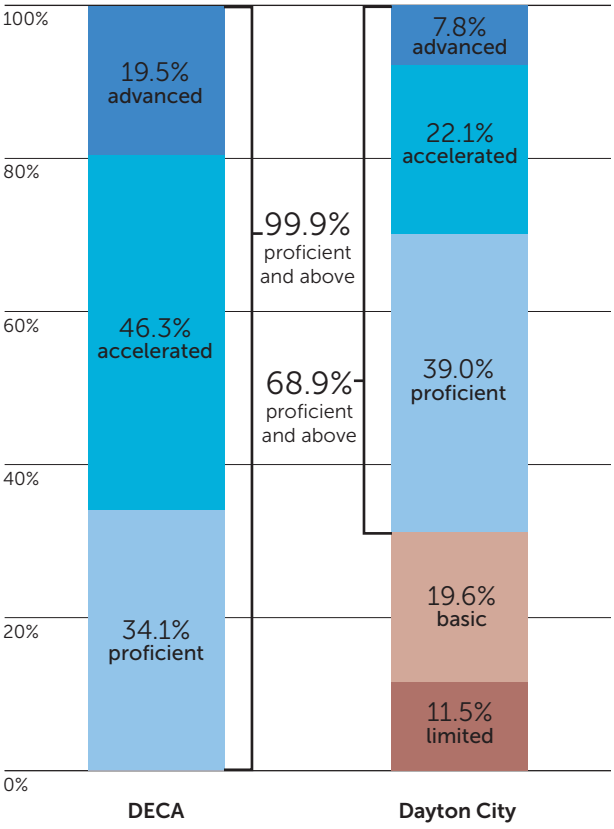
On average, each DECA student graduates with twenty college credits. It became a charter school in 2007—the only charter in our Needles group—and was awarded an "Excellent with Distinction" rating by the state in 2010-11, the only school in the city of Dayton to receive the highest possible rating. It also has the dubious distinctions of paying its teachers two-thirds the average salary of our other Needles schools and being housed in one of the more unique venues of any Needles school: a former factory.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (DECA vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (DECA vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	DECA	DAYTON CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	100%	61.3%
Proficiency rate of black students	100%	63.6%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	DECA	DAYTON CITY
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	100%	65.6%
Proficiency rate of black students	100%	67.6%

John Hay Early College High School

Cleveland, OH

Principal: Carol Lockhart

School type: District (choice)

Grades served: 9-12

225	Student enrollment
100	Percent economically disadvantaged
88.9	Percent non-white
2.2	Percent of students with disabilities
13*	Teachers' average years of experience
~$70,600*	Average teacher salary
$18,813	Total expenditure per pupil

*No teacher-level data available for John Hay Early College HS. Number reported is average of data for John Hay School of Architecture & Design and John Hay School of Science & Medicine

Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

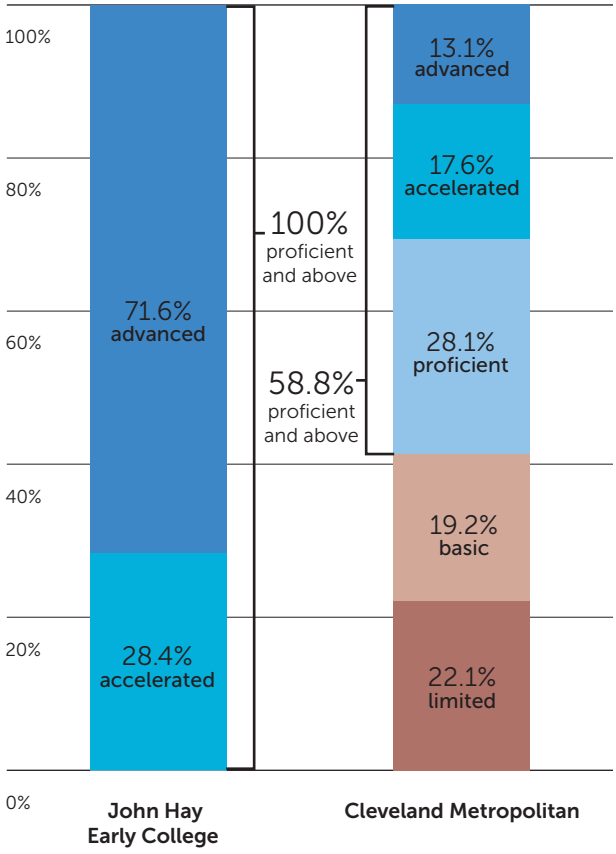
John Hay High School is housed in a renovated neo-classical gem designed by Cleveland Schools architect George Hopkinson and built in 1922. But the building cost so much to renovate in 2006 that it convinced the city not to do it again. Thus, the old world beauty and grandeur of John Hay will not be seen in its sister school, the Cleveland School of the Arts (see below), another one of our Needles schools, whose old building, across a wide field behind John Hay, is being demolished—and rebuilt.

John Hay Early College is one of three "small schools" in the grandly renovated Hopkinson building. John Hay, on the second floor, was created in 2002 to be, as its website says, "an innovative school to allow Cleveland's best and brightest students to earn their high school diplomas in an accelerated three-year program while completing college classes at the same time." Indeed, admission is based on seventh-grade Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA) scores in reading and math, teacher recommendations, a math entrance exam, and an interview. Students enter as ninth graders but are ready for college by the end of their third year.

And the plan from more than a decade ago has worked. In 2008, Thomas Ott wrote in the Cleveland Plain Dealer that John Hay "isn't what it used

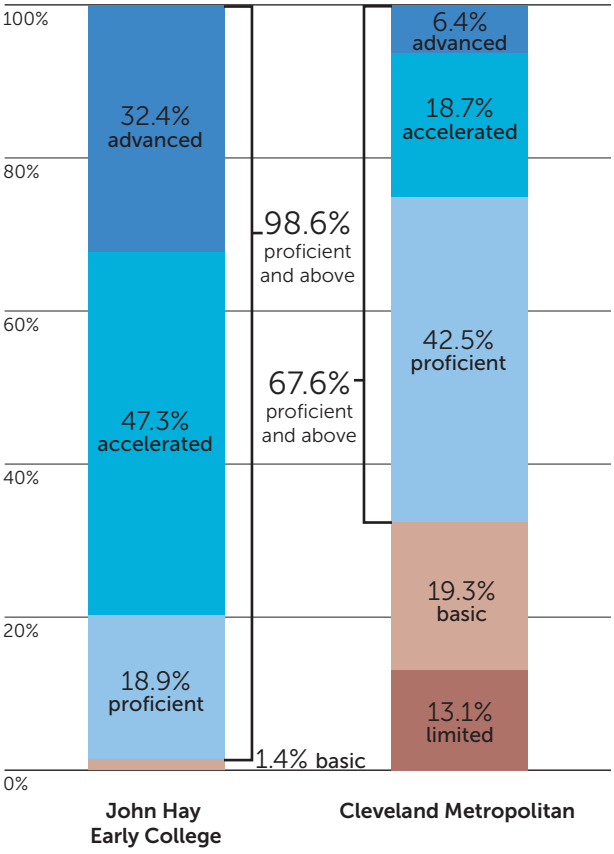
to be. And to many people, that's a good thing." When it was John Hay High School, said Ott, it was "known for test scores so low they trailed even the district's modest averages. Suspensions ran high; so did teacher absences." That has all changed, for the better. Today the school of just 225 successfully graduates 100 percent of its students (71 percent of whom are black and 100 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged), a figure that is nearly thirty points higher than the district graduation rate.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (John Hay Early College vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (John Hay Early College vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	John Hay Early Collage	CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	100%	58.7%
Proficiency rate of black students	100%	56.4%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	John Hay Early Collage	CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	98.6%	70.6%
Proficiency rate of black students	98%	65.8%

Cleveland School of the Arts

Cleveland, OH

Principal: Andrew Koonce

School type: District (choice)

Grades served: 6-12

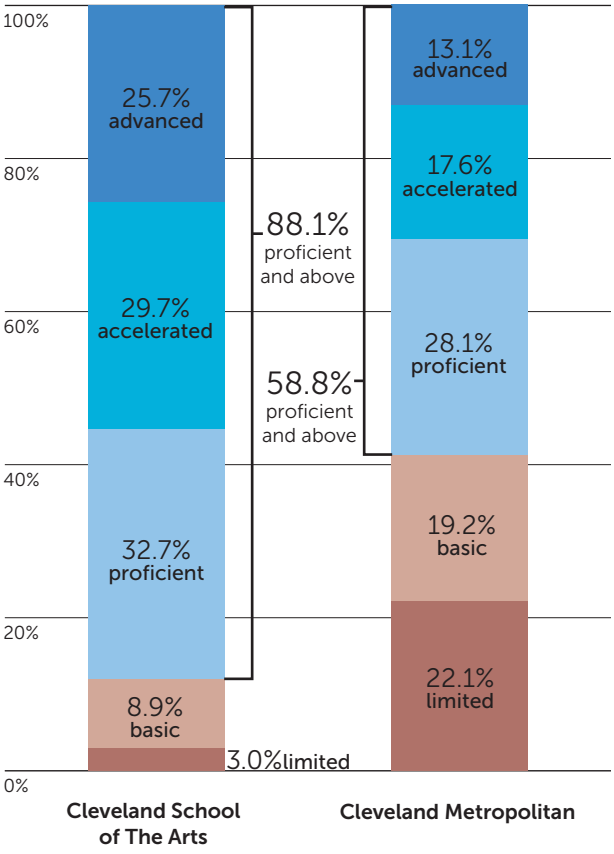
634	Student enrollment
100	Percent economically disadvantaged
93.4	Percent non-white
6.6	Percent of students with disabilities
18	Teachers' average years of experience
$69,552	Average teacher salary
$8,724	Total expenditure per pupil

Data are for the 2010-11 school year, available from the Ohio Department of Education at ilrc.ode.state.oh.us.

This is an amazing grace story: nearly 90 percent of CSA's 634 students in this 6-12 school are economically disadvantaged; 88 percent are black. Yet the disadvantaged students at Cleveland School of the Arts (CSA) pass the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), in math and reading, coming in thirty points higher than their disadvantaged counterparts in other city public schools; its black students do twenty to thirty points better. More than 95 percent of CSA's economically disadvantaged students graduate high school, compared to 65 percent who graduate Cleveland's average public schools. The graduation for black students at CSA is 95 percent, twenty points above the average in other Cleveland public schools.

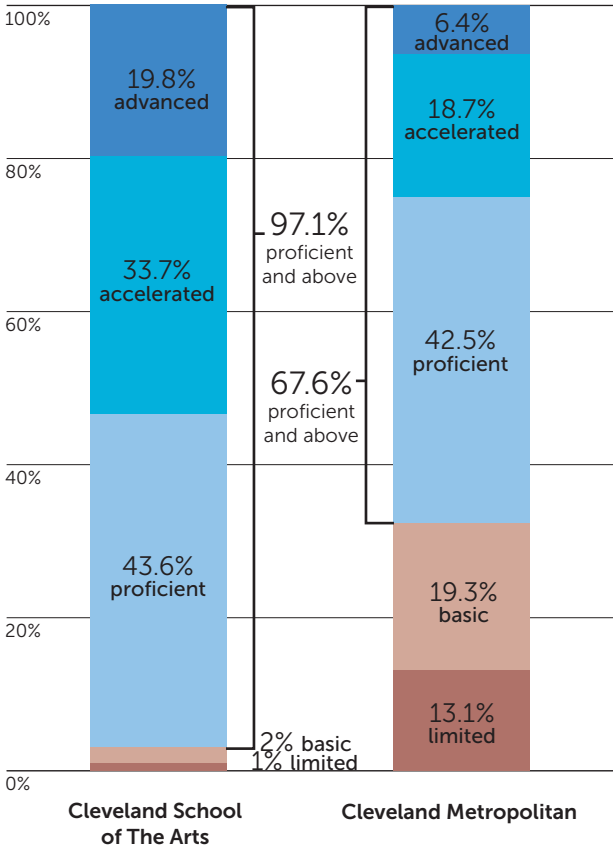
Established in 1981, Cleveland School of the Arts is a specialty school of choice within the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, one of the last magnet schools—now called "City Wide Draws"—in Cleveland. "It's the only arts school that is free," says Gabriel Gonzalez, a 1999 graduate. It is also a selective-admissions school: to gain entry students must first audition in one of the art forms—dance, drama, visual arts, band, strings, vocal, creative writing, photography, or graphic design—then pass a series of interviews and other assessments.

10th-Grade Math Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2010-11 (Cleveland School of The Arts vs. district)

10th-Grade Reading Proficiency Levels



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2010-11 (Cleveland School of The Arts vs. district)

10th-Grade Math Highlights

	Cleveland School of the Arts	CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	88.1%	58.7%
Proficiency rate of black students	87.3%	56.4%

10th-Grade Reading Highlights

	Cleveland School of the Arts	CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN
Proficiency rate of economically disadvantaged students	97.1%	70.6%
Proficiency rate of black students	96.5%	65.8%

Inside the Needles Schools

God (and a Good Education) Is in the Details

WE ARE WALKING DOWN A LONG HALLWAY AT STIVERS SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS IN DAYTON, THE FLOORS GLISTENING AND THE WALLS ADORNED WITH STUDENT ART. Principal Erin Dooley, an eleven-year veteran, is describing her school's successes, the millions in scholarships her seniors have received over the years, the 95 percent-plus graduation rates of her economically disadvantaged students, the magnet program that employs a couple dozen visiting musicians, actors, dancers, and artists, the recent multi-million-dollar school renovation, and—without missing a beat—she stops, bends down, and scoops up a candy wrapper off the floor.

> *Every little thing matters. If you take care of the little things, the big things take care of themselves.*
>
> – Fran Hershey, Centennial (principal)

A few hours later I tell this story to Liz Whipps, who runs the Stivers magnet program, and she laughs. "Attention to detail is what makes this place work," she says. And Whipps shares the story of a particularly tough teacher hiring event: "After two interviews, all the candidates were equally good," she continues. "So we invited them all back. And before they arrived we crumpled up a piece of paper and threw it on the floor right at the building entry. Several of them walked by it, but one of the candidates picked up the scrap of paper and put it in his pocket. We hired him," she says with a smile.

Such attention to detail is not a minor preoccupation at the schools highlighted in this report. But it is an attention to detail very much driven by a vision of educational excellence that makes the difference. It is seeing the individual student—his or her quirks, tics, dressing patterns, hair color, family background, living situation—within a mission-driven context. Assessment data is minutely analyzed and re-analyzed. Schedules are checked and double-checked.

No student gets left behind. Carol Lockhart at John Hay in Cleveland applies the *God is in the details* mantra to student discipline. "Every little thing matters," she says. "Even sitting in seats. Students have to stay in their seats. You're firm but fair." Says Fran Hershey, principal of Centennial High in Columbus, "If you take care of the little things, the big things take care of themselves."

It is amazing what flows from order and attention to detail—especially if you have your priorities right.

Safety First

IT FEELS ODD COMING INTO THE GRAND, LIGHT-FILLED ENTRY OF THE EIGHTY-YEAR-OLD JOHN HAY EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL IN CLEVELAND AND RUNNING SMACK DAB INTO A MODERN METAL DETECTOR. But it is a sad fact of urban education life: No matter how old or how new the building, that these mechanical defenses against violence—including gated doors and windows, security cameras, armed officers in hallways—have become common reminders of the more chilling realities of today's schools.

And it is the ***absence*** of such violence that is one of the major draws of these Needles high schools.

In fact, though we chose these schools because of their academic prowess, many parents, students, and teachers choose them for their relatively calm environment. They are safe. And safety is perhaps ***the*** most important ingredient of these successful schools.

"You don't have to worry here," says Ernest Priester, a security officer overseeing the morning ritual at John Hay, "rarely a fight."

It is the same across all six Needles schools highlighted in this report.

As security guard Derrick Palmer of Cleveland School of the Arts says, after ten years there he has seen fewer than a dozen fights, a record almost unheard of in a large urban public high school.

"For many parents it's about safety, not academics," says Columbus Alternative High School (CAHS) counselor Owen Hickey. Sara Penny, another counselor at CAHS, agrees. "Parents will send their kids across town to keep them safe.… Families are looking for safety."

What is the "safety" question if not ***the*** question? Safety, after all, is just above breathing and eating on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, more important than friendship and family, self-esteem and achievement. Should it not be a top priority for every school? And safety in school is not just the absence of violence—it is the *school environment* that allows all members of the school community to do what they need to do; thus can teachers teach and students learn.

> ***Parents will send their kids across town to keep them safe. Families are looking for safety.***
>
> – Sara Penny,
> Columbus Alternative (counselor)

"I live in a bad neighborhood," says Erica Lockett, a senior at Centennial in Columbus. "My dad didn't want us to go to the neighborhood school, Linden McKinley. The great thing about Centennial is no fights."

In fact, many of these students live in tough neighborhoods where violence is a daily occurrence.

There is no doubt that urban education is hard because urban life is hard. There is violence and drug addiction. There are gangs, family dysfunction, and hardship after grueling hardship—all of which, like a wet blanket, hang heavily on the shoulders of students when they come to school. Children from such difficult backgrounds often have few books in their homes and fewer models of education success, few conversations that would elicit the names Voltaire or Plato. They arrive at school as kindergarteners or first graders with thousands fewer words in their vocabularies than their middle class contemporaries, who live in much less toxic environments.

Raabi'a Foggie, a tenth grader at Columbus Alternative, lives in a dangerous neighborhood. The school bus picks her up and drops her off at her front door. "My cousin got killed four blocks away, a month and a half ago," she says. "I was really close to him, but hadn't seen him for a while. He was involved in gangs."

"You see a shooting on the news," says Nicholette Leanza, the school counselor at Cleveland's John Hay, "and you know that one of our students might know the person or know someone who knew him."

During one of our interviews at Dayton's Stivers School for the Arts, in response to a routine question about family life, a tenth grader said that her parents were deceased. When asked what happened, the young woman, a choir major, reluctantly explained that her dad had shot her mother, then himself. "Thank God this is rare," says school leader Erin Dooley, "but many of our kids live in very violent neighborhoods."

During another interview a young African American student explained that he never walked down his street; his mother or father drove the kids everywhere they needed to go, including to the school bus stop just two blocks away.

The point about safety in the schools is this: It is not about metal detectors and building walls; it's about keeping kids safe. "All the adults here build relationships with these kids," says Columbus Alternative safety officer Eric Maddux, offering one clue to the establishment of a "safe environment." As veteran safety officer at the Cleveland School of the Arts Evelyn Akins says, "we're like family here." Family that many of these kids don't have at home.

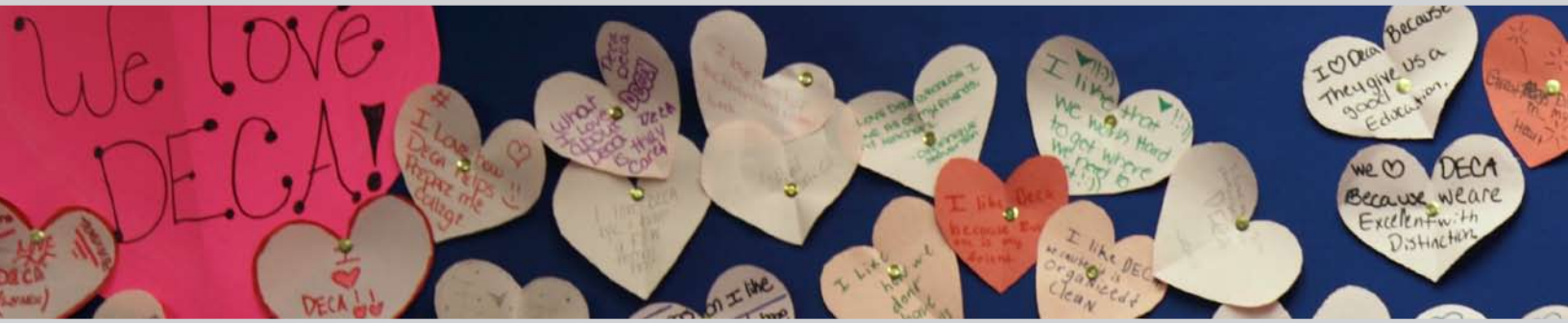
> ***You see a shooting on the news and you know that one of our students might know the person or know someone who knew him.***
>
> – Nicholette Leanza, John Hay (counselor)

This is not the correctional facility approach to schooling that has burdened many of our urban schools (and rural ones as well) and distracted them from the tasks at hand. Not all Needles schools have metal detectors, but no one in the schools that have them credits such devices with creating a safe environment. (In Cleveland metal detectors are mandated by the school district.)

> ***Discipline and instruction are not separate. Challenging kids solves 99 percent of the issues. Down time creates problems.***
>
> – Lynn Taylor, Centennial (teacher)

Yes, these high-achieving schools have a code of conduct, sometimes provided by the district, sometimes developed in-house.[4] At the Dayton Early College Academy, teachers and administrators developed its twelve-page code of conduct and the board of trustees approves it annually. And though all schools take their codes seriously, none claim that such discipline docu-

[4] Cleveland's Code is here (http://www.cmsdnet.net/en/Departments/~/media/Files/DistrictForms/StdtCodeCond-Eng7-18-HR.ashx). Dayton's is here (http://www.dps.k12.oh.us/documents/contentdocuments/doc_23_5_121.pdf). DECA has its own Code (author's files). Columbus Alternative and Centennial use the Districts Guide to Positive Student Behavior (http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/website.nsf/%28CCS_Documents%29/Parents/$FILE/Student%20Conduct%20Booklet%20updates.2008.pdf). CAHS provides a student handbook that highlights the school's specific expectations related to attendance procedures, grading, etc.



ments account for their schools' reputations for *safety*. If anything, they credit their academic discipline with tempering behavioral problems. As Nia, a junior at Dayton Early College, observed, "with all of the work we have to do, we don't have time to pick fights."

Veteran Centennial English teacher Lynn Taylor puts it this way: "Discipline and instruction are not separate—discipline takes care of itself. Challenging kids solves 99 percent of the issues. Down time creates problems." Donte Goosby, who teaches U.S. Studies at Centennial, adds that, "Expectations are big part of it. But class preparation goes a long way in determining how well a class is managed…. My very best lessons are ones I've spent a great deal of time on or have already taught."

Teachers Put In The Effort; Kids Respond

"Here's the bar," says Columbus Alternative assistant principal Davan Dodrill, holding his hand up. "The kids move to it. It doesn't move down."

"When you have high expectations for students they will rise to the challenge—morally, ethically, academically," says Stivers athletic director Randall Risner, who also teaches American history and African American Studies.

"Music and the arts create discipline," adds Mike Mangan, who created the music program at Stivers more than thirty years ago. "You have to discipline yourself to do what you need to do."

Discipline becomes the key to understanding how art and academics—and the behavior associated with getting the work done—are just different sides of the same coin. "Stivers," reads a school information sheet, "is a prime example of how participation in the Arts enhances academic performance." This is not something you see simply on sheets of data; it's on the walls and in the halls and classrooms.

Liz Whipps of Stivers puts it simply: "Here we work very hard, but we also have a responsibility to understand our students…. So-called discipline problems are usually just feedback problems." Whipps, who keeps an "activity sheet" for each student in her program, says, "These kids are fighting from the ground up."

> *When you have high expectations for students they will rise to the challenge – morally, ethically, academically.*
>
> – Randall Risner, Stivers (athletic director)

"I told Liz she doesn't have time to do all this," says Bill Pflaum, a Stivers volunteer who has helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for the school and its students. "And she said, 'I don't have time not to.' She is so enormously devoted to these kids."

Knowing her students is how Whipps discovered that one of the school's eleventh graders was caring for both his invalid father and his grandfather and working at a truck loading dock at night. "No

wonder he was having a hard time getting up in the morning and making it to class," Whipps explains. She rearranged the student's schedule so he could come to school later. And then she helped initiate an afterschool program, from four to six in the evening, for other kids who had difficulty making the regular school schedule.

Keeping The Neighborhoods Out Of The School

Needle schools recognize that bringing the neighborhood to school is not just something that students ***do*** or ***don't do***; the adults in the school have a responsibility to not act like the adults in the neighborhood act. The feedback challenge—knowing your students, addressing their problems, and encouraging their ambitions—is part of what these high-performing, high-need schools do to create a safe and productive learning environment.

"I believe there's greatness in you," is what Carol Lockhart, principal at Cleveland's John Hay and a former probation officer, tells her students. And she makes her students repeat that: "There's greatness in me." "It's important to affirm young people," she says. "I might be the only person who they hear it from."

Not everyone keeps an activity log about each student, but our Needles schools do understand the intimate connection between ***life*** and ***school life***. Understanding the former and focusing on the latter gives you a better chance of creating an environment where academic excellence can thrive.

This doesn't mean that the schools don't have student management challenges and don't use their codes of conduct. At Dayton Early College, for example, student discipline and classroom management are handled with a fairly simple discipline plan: check 1, warning; check 2, warning and possible move; check 3, detention and phone call home.

Columbus Alternative has zero tolerance for violence or, as assistant principal Dodrill says, "anything that brings the street into our school…. If you fight, you're out for ten days." In 2011-12 that policy accounted for eighty suspensions and just one expulsion.

The Tipping Point

From a school management point of view, keeping order in the building means maintaining the right balance between the motivated student and, as David Fawcett, a thirty-seven-year veteran teacher says, "the hard core" kids. Fawcett teaches Advanced Placement chemistry and International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge at Columbus Alternative and suggests that there is a "tipping point," when you have too many of the latter.

"This happened several years ago at CAHS," he says. "And we had discipline problems. It affected the entire school culture. You've got to have a critical mass of students who are motivated to be in school. For a time we saw that critical mass shift slightly…. There were more fights, more behavioral problems, with a consequential drop in academic success." Fawcett believes that you have to have 80 percent of the

kids "on board" in order to handle—and change—those who don't really want to be in class.

Brian Hamilton, a Centennial science teacher, has taught in other city schools and says that "My previous school was 95 percent poor, and there was lots of violence…. We have many of the same kids, from the same families, here. But it's different here. The good guys outnumber the bad."

> *You've got to have a critical mass of students who are motivated to be in school. For a time we saw that critical mass shift slightly. There were more fights, more behavioral problems, with a consequential drop in academic success.*
>
> – David Fawcett, Columbus Alternative (teacher)

Fawcett's colleague Sarah Thornburg, who teaches humanities, history, and social studies, also talks about a "tipping point." But she sees it as an individual student phenomenon as well as one that tips the school culture scale. "We have kids here who have stayed silent their entire lives. They were scared. But here they begin to realize, slowly, that it's cool to be a nerd. It's cool to question. It's cool to actually provide the teacher with the answer."

And as the individual students begin to tip, so will the class, and ultimately the school. "We definitely have some classes that are rougher than others," she says. "But you get creative and get the tipping point to go the other way. Positive peer pressure—you can get the rest to flip with you."

The Needles schools share a belief that behavioral expectations are part and parcel of academic expectations. Both are reinforced at every turn, and in every classroom. During a class change at the Cleveland School of the Arts, for instance, I saw three women—Kendra Halloway, the assistant principal, Doris Allen, English teacher, and Tess Clark, a guidance counselor—surround a tall young man, as if it were a rugby scrum. As other students crowded by, the educators gave him some no-nonsense advice—"You're better than that, now buckle down!"—without yelling.

At the same time, a few yards down the hall, Alexander Hickson, an English teacher with a reputation for being a no-nonsense instructor, has summoned a young woman over and is quietly lecturing her about dozing off in class. "You gotta get with it, girl," he says sternly.

All of our Needles schools have programs to help students succeed, both academically and behaviorally. Says Cleveland Arts senior Cushon Crump, "There are a lot of people that students can turn to for help, even outside of academics. It's a really cool environment."

"When I go to conferences or meetings with other teachers in the district," says Terri Sorrell, chair of the math department at Stivers in Dayton, "I realize how lucky I have it here. Other teachers in the district are discouraged."

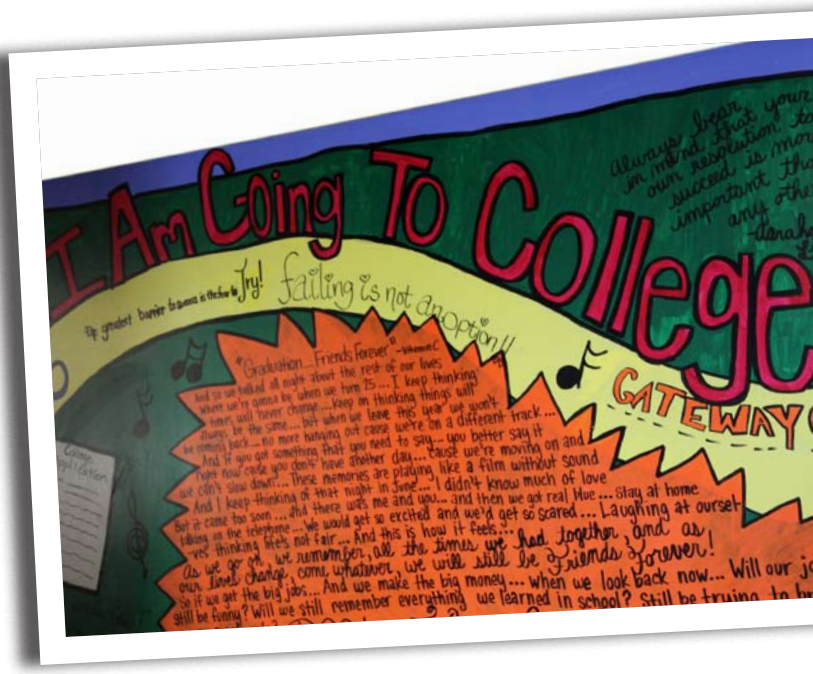
It's Okay to Be Smart

AT CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, THE HALLWAYS ARE SPRINKLED WITH POSTERS AND SIGNS, INCLUDING ONE ON THE SECOND FLOOR ANNOUNCING A "DOT FREE ZONE," URGING STUDENTS TO USE PROPER GRAMMAR IN WRITING AND SPEECH. Just below that sign is a handwritten note on green paper announcing an "SAT vocabulary word: Abrogate = Cancel, Deny, Repeal" and, on brown paper, a little farther along, "Nullify = to counter." Dozens of the hand-scrawled sheets are tacked up on the walls all along the corridor.

These are not the canned, beautifully framed posters that every school seems to have (and which no child or teacher actually sees after a couple of months, if ever); these are living, breathing (and changing!) invitations to academic excellence—windows into the classroom, where such things are taken seriously. In addition to the Ivy League college banners that hang in almost every high school in the land, our Needles schools also hang pictures of their students who are National Merit scholars. Real people, real classmates, real accomplishments.

> *What we do is not for nothing. We have National Merit scholars, we have kids in the Ivy League colleges. When kids question what they're doing, we can say, "It's working. This place is a game changer."*
>
> – Sarah Thornberg, Columbus Alternative (teacher)

Copies of letters of acceptance from Ivy League colleges—and dozens of other colleges as well—are also framed and displayed. Sarah Thornburg of Columbus Alternative says that, "What we do is not for nothing. We have National Merit scholars, we have kids in Ivy League colleges. When kids question what they're doing, we can say. 'It's working. This place is a game changer.' You see where they've come from. They learn what this school can give them; rather than what they can take from it."



At John Hay Early College in Cleveland you'll see a trophy cabinet with silver and bronze statuettes holding books instead of tennis rackets, standing behind podiums instead of clutching a football (though some students participate in campus-wide extracurricular activities, including football). At Dayton Early College you'll find "I'm going to college" stickers stuck on the mirrors in the bathroom. It is common to find announcements like this one from Columbus Alternative on our Needles schools' web pages:

Kudos to our In The Know Academic League team, and their advisors Mr. Jones and Ms. LaAsmar, for being City League champions for a second year in a row. The team also deserves credit for receiving 4th in the state and 46th out of 576

teams internationally, in the Knowledge Master International Computer Quiz competition.

> ***It's cool to be a nerd. It's cool to question. It's cool to actually provide the teacher with the answer.***
>
> – Sarah Thornberg, Columbus Alternative (teacher)

"One of the most important messages we give to students here," says Judy Hennessey, former principal and current superintendent at DECA, "is that it's okay to be smart." As Sarah Thornburg of Columbus Alternative pointed out, "It's cool to be a nerd. It's cool to question. It's cool to actually provide the teacher with the answer."

At the Needles schools, thanks to a safe, orderly and nurturing environment, excellence has a chance to thrive despite the poverty of the neighborhoods where the children live. And it produces bumper crops of excellence by the standards of high-poverty urban high schools. In 2011 Columbus Alternative graduating seniors pulled in $7.6 million in college scholarships; at Dayton Early College Academy, it was $1.2 million; and at Centennial High, over $6 million. This just in: Stivers class of 2012 received $4.8 million in scholarships (not including any grants, loans, or federal aid).

"Academics is number one here," says educator Cheryl Stewart at Centennial High School in Columbus.

Dayton Early College Academy just hired its first alumna, who completed her undergraduate degree at Miami University (Ohio) and will teach chemistry. "It's coming full circle," says Hennessey. "We also have a graduate in law school, two with master's degrees and one who will enter med school!"

It's About Rigor

In the Needles schools it is clear that academic excellence comes from teachers and administrators pushing students hard to excel in their studies. But it does not arrive wrapped in a neat Fed Ex package at the school's front door. It must be sought out, wrestled to the ground, and brought, kicking and screaming, to the school. It requires knowing what "excellence" means, appreciating the difference between world-class programs and provincial ones, and separating the wheat from the chaff. And hunting it down is not a one-time expedition; the search for academic excellence is constant.

For instance, though all our Needles schools are proud of their students' achievements on the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) in math and English (routinely scoring twenty and thirty points above their urban peers), none of them is satisfied with meeting those standards.

Dave Taylor, principal at Dayton Early College, says that Ohio's content standards, on which the OGT

tests are based, "don't stretch students enough." That was made clear with the data: DECA students are getting high pass rates (over 95 percent) on the OGTs, but scoring only seventeen or eighteen on ACT, below the national average of twenty-one. "We have to do much better," he says. "We need more rigor."

> ***My goal is to make the ACT and SAT our standard, not the state graduation test.***
>
> – Terri Sorrell, Stivers (teacher)

Andrew Koonce at the Cleveland School of the Arts agrees. The OGT, he says, "is written in seventh-grade language."

"My goal is to make the ACT and the SAT our standard, not the OGT," says Terri Sorrell, chair of the math department at Stivers. She's not yet convinced that the Common Core will help. "That's just part of a seven-year cycle," she says. "Every seven years we get something new." This is why the good schools stick to the longstanding national benchmarks of the ACT and SAT.

All of John Hay's graduates in Cleveland take the SAT and ACT college entrance exams.

Because the Needles schools have their sights set beyond the OGTs, very few teachers feel that they are "teaching to the test" by following state standards. Randall Risner at Dayton's Stivers says, "I don't teach to the test. The kids are coming in at so many different levels—it is not a fair apples-to-apples comparison."

Teaching students well at various levels of proficiency was a common challenge across the Needles schools. And each school expressed a desire to reach students before they got to them in middle school or high school, to smooth out the differences in performance proficiencies sooner rather than later.

DECA's Dave Taylor says, "formative assessments are a big emphasis: they have to be something that's continuous and dynamic. They carry zero weight (no grades) and won't count against you." Cleveland School of the Arts has its benchmarks for tracking its student progress, including midterms, finals, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) diagnostic, OAA [Ohio Achievement Assessments], Accelerated Reader (three times a year), and Stanford Achievement Test Series (the SAT 10). "The testing required by NCLB was only surface deep," says Koonce. "But it helped teachers get in a testing mode." And it has helped to create a culture where data can drive instruction.

Putting teachers in "testing mode" is definitely swimming against the current. But none of the Needles schools confuses this with "teaching to the test." In this they are proactive. They teach far ahead of the state standards, understanding that, at the end of the day, it is content knowledge that counts.

Two of the Needles schools are "early college" high schools. This means their students are already taking courses at nearby colleges. The schools offer lots of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and, in the case of Columbus Alternative, International Baccalaureate (IB) classes. All are putting an emphasis on the ACT and SAT tests and on preparing their students for college readiness. All cover what are considered the basics—reading, writing and 'rithmetic—but they do it with a vengeance.

"Only three students passed the English AP course in all of [the other] Dayton Public Schools last year," says Rachael Murdock, an AP Language and Literature teacher. "Forty-five Stivers students passed it."

"We're focusing on moving our ACT program forward," says Andrew Koonce of Cleveland School of the Arts. "An average score of seventeen is not good. A lot of the kids didn't take it seriously. And if you ask the ones who struggle in college, what they weren't prepared for, they'll say they didn't do enough writing, didn't read enough of those top one hundred books."

At Dayton Early College the curriculum is being modified to incorporate the Common Core academic content standards in English language arts and mathematics, but "the backbone" of the curriculum, says Judy Hennessey, is the Revised Ohio Content Standards: four years of English language arts and math, at least three years of science, and two years of foreign language. After the students are assessed, each specific course is developed around the academic needs of the student, she explains.

Additionally, students are required to pass six milestones (called Gateways) that allow DECA to embed "college-going" behaviors into its performance requirements. DECA's students learn to multi-task because they have to: (1) take rigorous academic coursework, (2) take college classes, and (3) complete independent work required of each Gateway (job shadows, non-paid internships, ACT prep courses, college visits, etc.). The school created Gateways after learning that even college courses in high school—every year DECA students earn some five thousand college credits, an average of twenty per student—were not enough to sustain graduates when they got to college. DECA tracked its alumni into college and found out that many were dropping out before graduation.

"All students are expected to leave DECA college ready," says Judy Hennessey. "But it's more than just earning college credits."

The six Gateways combine traditional academic coursework requirements with very specific skill set standards, such as attendance, writing of research papers, "self-discernment" exercises, book reports, community service, job shadows, ACT prep courses, college visits, and oral presentations. "Kids didn't have resilience in college even if they did well at DECA," says principal Dave Taylor. "Gateways are meant to prepare them for college in ways that are more than academic."

"Gateways, more than anything else, develop a well-rounded student," says Anne Rasmussen, the school's director of community involvement. "The public speaking preparation alone is great. Knowledge empowers the kids. And the coursework builds that sense of self-esteem."

> *Art is work. Art is discipline and practice. Our academics here are approached the same way. We work. We don't play. It is not come and feel good—it is come and learn.*
>
> – Liz Whipps, Stivers (arts magnet director)

At Centennial in Columbus, along with ten AP courses, three choral ensembles, a career center, and a "Poetry Slam," the school offers a range of college-prep courses such as: "English… Exploration literature and composition; World studies humanities (9); Intro to world literature (10); Algebra and data analysis; Algebra 2, pre-calculus, college-prep math; Globalization of America (11); Spanish; French; Microsoft Word and PowerPoint and Web development." For the last four years Centennial has been using the ACT QualityCore that provides college-ready course standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and math.

These courses are about "more rigor," says Centennial principal Frances Hershey. And like the other Needles principals, Hershey says, "we need higher ACT scores." Though all these schools share the goal of

getting every student into college, each does "rigor" a bit differently.

At Stivers, for instance, you can walk into a mirrored room and see twenty students lined up in rows, in tights, practicing closed figures, reverse turns and, occasionally a plié or two. DeShona Pepper-Robertson, who was principal dancer at the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, is giving instruction; most of the time it is, "Again!" Practice, practice, practice. "Art is work," smiles Liz Whipps. "Art is discipline and practice…. Our academics here are approached the same way. We work. We don't play. It is not come in and feel good—it is come in and learn."

"The arts train you to be disciplined," says Cleveland School of the Arts assistant principal Kendra Holloway. "This is why the kids also do well in academics. They are enormously disciplined." That is the discipline of achievement—and it has the salubrious effect of helping take care of the problem of class disruption, which plagues so many of our regular urban high schools.

As with the Dayton Early College, John Hay Early College in Cleveland provides its students with the opportunity for dual enrollment at local colleges. Students can take courses at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), Cleveland State, and Kent State. "We're helping them become accountable for their schooling," says Lockhart.

At Columbus Alternative, all courses are considered "honors" level. And since 2005 the school has used the International Baccalaureate program, offering eleven IB courses. It also offers ten AP courses, more than any school in the Columbus public school district. Over 30 percent of its upper-class students are enrolled in AP courses and more than 23 percent are in the IB program. Some 95 percent of students take the SAT and ACT tests.

Traditional Methods Have Their Place

Though there are no written rules about it, classroom configurations in the Needles schools tend to be traditional: desks lined up in rows. At some of the schools it was not uncommon to see classes of over thirty students; in some of the humanities courses at Columbus Alternative there were sixty students in a classroom, with two teachers. Kids paid attention.

Teaching methods in these schools are also largely traditional: a mix of lecture, dialogue, testing, lots of homework, and group work. There are whiteboards and overhead projectors. Students are always taking notes. You see very few students with their heads down, sleeping; student engagement is the rule, not the exception. In front of Christa Oeder's ninth-grade math classroom at DECA is the day's learning target: "solve systems of equations by graphing and simple substitution." She walks the classroom talking about linear equations and will stop if not everyone is listening. "I'm going to wait," she says. "There are some distractions." Or, "I'm going to wait until I have your attention."

It is attention that demands engagement, and it is engagement that is the key to learning.

Most of the Needles schools have introduced internship or job shadowing programs. At Columbus Alternative, for example, all second-, third-, and fourth-year students are "working" every Wednesday. Leaha Mathis, a sophomore, got an internship at a law school bar association. "They teach you how to dress, talk, behave around people other than your friends," she says. But this is how the school has already changed her life. "It's so much different than my friends. My schoolwork is harder than theirs. They're always in trouble, whereas I'm always doing something. Reading, or doing AP or working on chemistry stuff." Thanks in part to her internship, she wants to go to

law school; thanks to her academic preparation, she might have a chance of getting into one.

And each of the Needles schools offers a plethora of after school extra-curriculars. Columbus Alternative has a student senate, a newspaper, an improv club, ACT prep groups, internships—all things that kids cite as being energizing and motivational. DECA's Dave Taylor rates extra-curriculars as perhaps the third-most important part of the school (after teachers and academics), in part because they include academic offerings such as mock trial, a robotics team, tutoring, and ACT prep. "The folks at Wright Patterson Air Force Base help with robotics," he says, "as well as physics and chemistry."

"Kids here don't go home after school," says Columbus Alternative teacher David Fawcett. "They stay to get their work done. Plus, most of them would have no one at home when they got there. Many of them have to babysit brothers and sisters… Many aren't eating right, many don't have good shelter. Their parents have often not had positive experiences with schools and can't give the kids support."

There are dozens of stories about our Needles schools developing programs to make up for the stresses of poverty and teachers acting as substitute parents. These schools are models of the age-old motto: Where there's a will, there's a way.

Schools Can Trump the Cycle of Poverty

ONE OF THE MORE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS SAUCE AT NEEDLES SCHOOLS IS THE SENSE OF DUTY TO EDUCATE: THE MISSION TO HELP ALL CHILDREN BE ALL THEY CAN BE. If it sounds like the Army, it is because in many ways these schools possess a disciplined focus on beating the enemy of poverty through education, defeating low expectations with high expectations, and winning over "can't do" with ***"can do."***

These schools share a sense of duty to see students succeed.

Ask DECA's Dave Taylor what the first duty of a teacher is and he says, "student engagement." Yes, that means smart boards, posters, and probing questions. But it also means understanding that there is an inquiring mind and burning ambition somewhere beneath the blanket of poverty.

There is always a debate about the importance of intrinsic student motivation and the significance of the selection process to the success of any school. (Does Harvard make the man or does the man make Harvard?) But there is little doubt in these schools that just about every student has the ability to be motivated and every staffer has the duty to motivate.

At one of his weekly Transformation Team meetings, DECA's Taylor led a group in discussion about each senior who is "in trouble." "This is a situation we're in every year," says Taylor. "We have seniors not ready to get through Gateway 4 as the deadline approaches." You need to pass six Gateways to graduate. Students have to pass all six within forty-five days of one another and complete all six to graduate. "It happens each year," he says, "and it's a huge headache." He turns to the teachers at the table. "Advisors, talk to me about students you're concerned about." Someone says it's a very subjective process; and up to a teacher's discretion. "Admittedly, it's subjective," says Taylor, "but this is the way life is…how you treat people affects what they're willing to do for you later on." He urges his teachers to teach the kids the unfairness of life now.

He then goes over the list of the troubled:

Shawntel: She must be at 75 percent to pass the Gateway and she's at 69 percent. She's working, but it's a big hurdle…. She's high-risk, not getting it.

Leroy: He's at 66.67 percent. Got to change his behavior. He's being disrespectful, defying his mother. He has to make up old grades and teachers have to do a mini-course for him. It's a lot of work for the team.

They talk about Dierdre, who's at 64.29 percent, and Jasmine, who's trying to complete a seminar at Sinclair Community College.

Taylor is tapping on his laptop, making notes directly into the data system for each student. "Fifty-seven percent?" he says, looking at one student's file. "Oh jeez! That's not good. He said he was doing okay. Can't trust a word that comes out of his mouth."

"Anybody else? How 'bout Woodie?" Someone says, "He's okay."

Taylor explains, "Sometimes we have to push these kids across the stage! We give them every chance, but we also hold them accountable…. But that is easily the most depressing meeting of the year."

The Kids Get It, Most Of The Time

Toney, an eleventh grader at DECA, says, "teachers are invested in us, they go the extra mile to help us…. They call home."

Columbus Alternative senior Michael Golden, who initially didn't want to attend CAHS, now gets up at 6:45 every morning, drives his '93 Saturn to school, takes a full course load, and plays football for nearby Marion Franklin High School (CAHS does not have any extra-curricular sports, except ultimate frisbee). He says his favorite course is British writers and he plans to become a physical therapist. The school changed his mind about education.

> *Teachers are invested in us, they go the extra mile to help us.*
> – Toney, DECA (student)

Sharese Gardner, another CAHS senior, also gets up at 6:45, but she takes a bus to school. "Me and my grandma decided on this school," she says, "but mostly it was grandma. She said 'You're not going to West!'" If Sharese had any doubts, she has none now. "Teachers here genuinely care." And she now has a clear career objective: She wants to be a mortician.

Christina Harris, a CAHS tenth grader, says that it can take time to like a school. "As a ninth grader I didn't buy in at all to the curriculum and rigid standards," she says. "Then it starts to click. You'll see the kids going, 'Oh, okay, I need to start doing what I'm supposed to do.' You see them buy in. It does feel good. It doesn't feel good to be the outsider and not know what the class is talking about."

> *The kind of faith and trust we have in kids creates motivation.*
> – Mike Mangan, Stivers (teacher)

It is the same at every Needles school.

We hear in student voices not the opinions and observations of the intrinsically motivated, but those of children of tough circumstances grabbed by their lapels and shown the way to achievement by dedicated adults. This is not unguided instruction.

"We want them to be successful and they know it," is a refrain heard often in these schools.

"The kind of faith and trust we have in kids creates motivation," says Mike Mangan of Stivers. "We trust these kids and have faith in what they do and what they are capable of…. You have to see potential in the kids—very few of them come in with good musical knowledge. They have to work at it—and they do…These are ordinary Dayton kids—they can do just about anything if you expect them to do it!"

The need to motivate students to learn and to keep them on track was not well understood when DECA first opened its doors in 2003. Elton Griffith has been at the school since its first year. He had been a licensed independent social worker and had worked in juvenile corrections. This was his first teaching job. "One big delusion when we created the school," he says, "was that we thought that students would show up and want to learn. We had a cool curriculum, but didn't think about crime, drugs, poverty…. There were a number of middle- and upper-middle-class teachers and their perspective on a poor urban student was different—it was a major clash."

And it didn't work.

"Early on DECA was far less structured," recalls Judy Hennessey, who took over in 2004. "In fact, it was almost lethargic."

"Judy did a 180-degree turn of the school," says her colleague Marge Mott. "She made it very quiet, serious, more structured…. She had to. The kids were so far behind."

Hennessey explains that she focused on three things: increase testing and benchmarking; more emphasis on data analysis; and more teacher training. "In the second year we introduced a real schedule, a home visit protocol and a code of conduct," she says. "We tightened things up. We began suspending kids."

> *The fact that we don't have a teachers union is very important. If we had a union we would not be able to retain many of our young, energetic teachers.*
>
> – Judy Hennessey, DECA (superintendent)

They never looked back. And though DECA receives no local tax dollars because it is a charter school, and consequently has to raise serious private support to offer the special programs that has made it successful, they have few regrets about their charter status. "The fact that we don't have a teachers union is very important," says Hennessey. "If we had a union we would not be able to retain many of our young, energetic teachers." The school has twenty-eight full-time teachers and nine student teachers.

As principal Dave Taylor says, "motivating students is job number one."

As it is at all the Needles schools.

Dayton's Stivers, for instance, has an "intervention lab," where students needing extra help, on anything from ACT prep to credit recovery, can get it. There is a monthly "Sock Monkeys" program for kids struggling academically and who need even more support.

"We give tons of intervention; lots of support," says Cleveland School of the Arts band director Robert Davis. The school has an "intervention room" and forty-six students with IEPs, the Individual Education Plans signaling special education. They have two part-time therapists with caseloads of seven to ten students each. "Kids here still go through similar experiences and traumas as they would in other Cleveland high schools," says Lauren Temple, a therapist. "But the families are more involved, so the kids get a bit more support."

"We work to keep kids here," says CSA Assistant Principal Halloway. "We are very student-centered. They have a voice…. Parents are welcome too. And we try to handle their issues in a timely fashion."

Columbus Alternative has a "How am I doing?" survey they ask all students to complete: "I have a quiet place at home to study…I am organized with folders and supplies…I complete all homework when due…I listen carefully in class during instruction…I come prepared for class…I ask questions for clarification."

Sharee Wells, the new principal at Columbus Alternative, is making an attempt to help the struggling students, instituting a twice-weekly, lunchtime program where National Honor Society students help struggling classmates.

> ***Failure is not an option. That is not just a cliché. This school can't fail kids. Kids know that they're supported here.***
>
> – Carol Lockhart, John Hay (principal)

This is one of the many ways that Needles schools help turn the vicious chain of failure into one of compounding success. Most of these kids have not been challenged academically in their earlier academic careers, and so have not learned the skills of coping with the challenge of meeting high standards. But these schools know that keeping the academic bar high comes with the responsibility of training kids to jump higher.

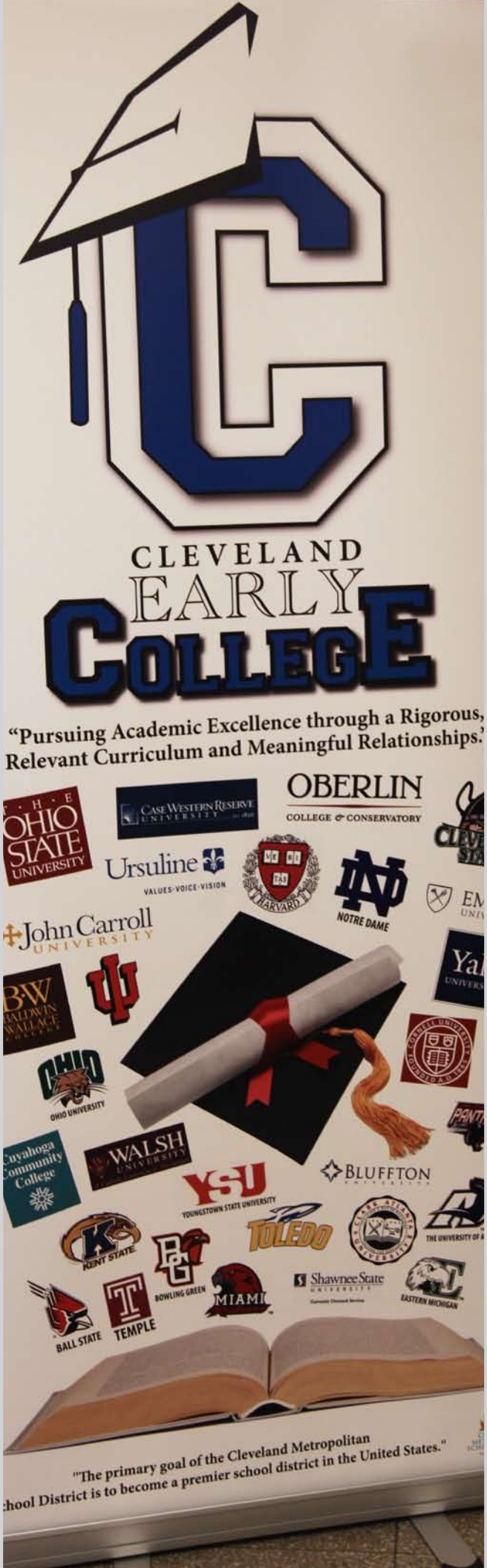
Despite their best and extraordinary efforts, kids do drop out. There were 180 students in their freshman class, says a Columbus Alternative senior; now there are 113. "Some kids do leave," says physics teacher Paul Hackworth, who is also a coach. "They go back to their home schools because it's too rigorous here; some leave for athletics."

John Hay in Cleveland has an annual attrition rate of about 8 percent. Principal Carol Lockhart attributes this low attrition level to a relatively high admissions bar that includes decent eighth-grade test scores, a solid GPA, and a successful interview. "Some kids do drop out," she says. "Mostly because of how early they have to get up, how far they have to travel. It's not because of how hard the work is. We have lots of supports for them." That includes Saturday school and tutoring. "Failure is not an option," says Lockhart. "That is not just a cliché. This school can't fail kids…. Kids know that they're supported here."

At Centennial in Columbus, principal Fran Hershey pushed to hire a third academic counselor to make sure students had help with staying on a college track. Sara Penny, who has thirteen years in education, six as a counselor, says that Centennial now has twenty-one students taking college classes—a huge incentive for staying in school. "Since the state is paying for the courses, it's a good head start on college in these hard economic times."

"We do a lot of work with the freshmen," says Owen Hickey, the school's ninth-grade counselor. In the first four weeks there are meetings with teachers and parents for SAIL (Student Assistance and Intervention into Learning). Failing two or more subjects, a student receives special counseling and a meeting with the "whole school team," which includes teachers, nurse, and an assistant principal. The parents are also expected to be in the conversation.

"Either grades or discipline will trigger a meeting," says Hickey. "If nothing has improved after nine weeks, we call the parents. Or teachers can make referrals to parents to come in." And parents respond. "We have meetings scheduled pretty much nonstop. We highly encourage parents to communicate with teachers all the time," says Hickey. "Communication is not all negative. This is not a pile-on-Johnny



meeting. We're just trying to figure out how to help the student."

Says Penny, "It's key to bring parents in; lots of insight about what's going on at home, and vice versa. The goal is keeping the line of communication open. The ultimate goal is getting this kid to graduation day."

Lauren Temple, a part-time therapist at Cleveland School of the Arts, shares the opinion that communication is important, especially for students dealing with one of the hazards of high expectation schools: stress. She says she sees more anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem at CSA than at other schools, but not as many behavioral issues. "You don't see the defiance and anger you get elsewhere," she says. "Here it's more internal struggles." And so a key part of her job is supporting the communications among administration, teachers, and parents and linking students and families with outside support services.

Parents

And speaking of parents, at the Needles schools they occupy an interesting place: "parents help, we'd like them on board, but we'll educate kids without them" is the mantra. Though all schools claim to appreciate the importance of parents in the educational enterprise, for too many of them it is mostly lip service. Engaged parents are often a failing school's worst enemy; disengaged parents, a handy excuse for student failure. For the high-performing Needles schools it is the opposite; engaged parents are welcome; not having them is just another challenge to overcome.

As Cleveland School of the Arts senior Frederick Henderson says, "At this school everyone is family…. The teachers and staff help us to be more engaged in academics, in our majors, and teachers help me with family issues, with classes. My English teacher is helping me with senior stuff, paying for my senior photos, my tuxedo, my prom."

As far as I was concerned, there was nowhere else to go. My son had to get into John Hay. Our neighborhood school had a 13 percent graduation rate. My son is smart and needs to be around kids who are smart.

– Sameka Gore, John Hay (parent)

By the same token, all of our Needles schools have active outreach and engagement programs for parents. At DECA, for instance, a parent or guardian *must* be in attendance for their student's Gateways oral presentations. And if that is not possible, students find teachers to fill the parents' shoes—as they too often have to do.

Parents I spoke with for this report were overwhelmingly happy with their children's Needles schools. "As far as I was concerned," says Sameka Gore, mother of a fourteen-year-old at John Hay in Cleveland, "there was nowhere else to go. My son had to get into John Hay. Our neighborhood school was Collinwood. They had a 13 percent graduation rate. My son is smart and needs to be around kids who are smart."

"My son didn't want to go to Heights High," says Fannie McCoy, who says that her family doesn't have a lot of money and couldn't afford private school. "The kids there were not focused. He wanted to be around kids who care about education and going to college."

Heather McMullen, who has a sophomore daughter at Columbus Alternative, also works ten hours a week as a parent consultant at the school. She has her own cleaning business and writes a weekly newsletter for the school to encourage parents to get involved. They have parent forums once a month, but participation is inconsistent (good at the beginning of the year and lousy at the end). "They have a rigorous curriculum and dedicated teachers here," says McMullen. "Some don't even take lunch. They tutor kids on their own time. And the advisors are great—every kid has an advisor."

These parents, no matter their struggles, want the best for their children. And that is a trait often overlooked in the debate about poverty and education: Low-income parents want the same for their children that high-income parents do—a good education.

Teacher Quality: It's Whom You Have on the Bus

ALL THE RESEARCH SAYS IT'S TRUE AND MOST EDUCATORS AND PARENTS WOULD AGREE: GOOD TEACHERS ARE IMPORTANT TO A SCHOOL'S SUCCESS. But no matter how important they are, they do not grow on trees and their work is not easy. And what seems almost as universally true, at the Needles high schools, is that teaching seems more a calling than a job; ***devotional*** not dutiful.

What is a good teacher? This is probably easier to answer than the next question. How do you make one?

"The students will tell us who's not up to par," says Amanda Reidenbaugh, a teacher for fifteen years and now a leadership intern at Columbus Alternative. "There is no formal student evaluation of teachers in our school, but the family atmosphere makes it hard to ignore students."

> *A good teacher is someone who's kind of mean—okay, strict—but you can have a good relationship with, who takes time out of their day to talk to you, someone who knows what they're talking about.*
>
> – Leaha Mathis, Columbus Alternative (student)

Interestingly, in these schools where student performance is above average, student opinion counts. Indeed, Needles schools tend to be a collegial, collaborative—and competitive—enterprise (yes, like a family). And students are an integral part of that enterprise and have well-formed opinions about what makes a good teacher. "She has spunk, charisma, and wants you to learn," says Zachery Bailey, a senior at Centennial in Columbus, describing a good teacher. "She lets you make up an assignment if you don't do well, but has through-the-roof-expectations. If you don't meet her expectations, something's going down." And, he adds, "students know when teachers have high expectations."

Says Columbus Alternative tenth grader Leaha Mathis, "A good teacher is someone who's kind of mean—okay, strict—but you can have a good relationship with, who takes time out of their day to talk to you, someone who knows what they're talking

about—you know when you ask them a question and they run past it."

Teachers, too, know what a good teacher is—and isn't. Remarkably, at the Needles schools their opinions don't differ too much from student opinions. "A good teacher has to have a love of the discipline that they can communicate to their students," says Jamie Foley, who teaches ninth grade Literature/Humanities and IB Literature at Columbus Alternative. "You can't ask your students to be more enthusiastic about the subject than you are. They need to see how much this matters and how little time we have. We don't have time to waste."

Gary Liebesman, who teaches AP U.S. History/American Literature at Columbus Alternative, says, "From a personal level it's that students know you care and are willing to sit down with them and help them."

> *A great teacher has to have three qualities: likes kids, is passionate, and can help kids learn.*
>
> – Frances Hershey, Centennial (principal)

Matt Hollstein, who teaches government and has been at Columbus Alternative for two out of his five years in teaching, says that "Students need to know that what you're doing is for them—that our passion and dedication is for their benefit, not ours."

Sarah Thornburg adds, "You always have your door open. You don't teach in isolation; you must be willing to throw an idea out to your colleagues—and seek help…. Collaboration…we team teach almost everything, and vertically align almost everything; you have that support, kids will get this info…can connect across classes; all those little connections you have with colleagues helps students out on their end with learning."

The moral: Kids are watching. If the adults can't get along, or don't have enthusiasm for, and knowledge about, what they do, students tend to run the other way.

Fran Hershey, principal at Centennial, says that a great teacher has to have three qualities: "Likes kids, is passionate, and can help kids learn."

The Art Of Teaching

On the "English side" of the second floor of Cleveland School of the Arts, a black man in striped blue button down collar shirt and tie, wearing a turban, sits in a director's chair in the front of a large classroom. He speaks in full and fulsome sentences, and demands—in bearing and voice alone—absolute attention at all times. A student is late and he is quizzed on the tardiness.

"You get here on time," says Alexander Hickson, who has been teaching at CSA for eighteen years. There are periods at the end of each of Hickson's sentences. The student starts to explain her tardiness, but Hickson interrupts. "I don't need to hear it." His is a commanding presence—and his ***commands*** are direct. Students work quietly at their desks, which are lined up in traditional rows, the only way to fit thirty students into the room.

When Hickson calls on a student, it is by last name. Jones! Smith! Franklin! This morning he calls three students at a time to his desk, in the front of the room, and hands them their "work folders." "Don't talk," he scolds one student trying to explain a missing paper. "The folder talks." Behind him, the blackboard is filled with assignments, goals, and homework assignments. His teaching certificates and awards are on the wall. Reading. Master Classroom. Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

You can hear a pin drop. And when Hickson starts to lecture, there is engagement—between the pin

drops—as he leads the students through a discussion from their textbook. "Let's finish up page twenty-eight," he says. "Hands!" he booms. "Brown!" he calls on a student. "Loud!" he says as the student starts to speak. "What's the difference between calling words and reading?" he asks. "Page eighty. Hands! I need more hands. I need every hand in the air!"

If there is a single teacher in all of our schools who exhibits the qualities of "teacherness" it is Hickson, a commander-in-chief of the education enterprise, which is the classroom. It is his classroom. But, in fact, he is just one of many teacher "types" who succeed in our schools. Just as each school finds its own path to excellence, each teacher finds his or her own strategy for reaching students and engaging them in learning.

Just down the hall from Hickson is Doris Allen, who commands her class, but very differently than Hickson does his. Allen marches into room 200 at 9:52 a.m. for her tenth-grade English class and is immediately surrounded by students asking questions. The room is crowded; the thirty-four kids are rowdy—until she interrupts her conversation with a student and booms, to the entire class, "You know what you have to do." And they do; they immediately sit at their desks and open their books. This is Accelerated Reading time. Students are either at their desks, reading and taking notes, or sitting at a row of computers at the back of the room, taking Accelerated Reading tests.

Where Hickson is the sage on the stage, Allen is the Damocles of the dugout. She wields her power in what seems like a swirl of activity, issuing a sharp "settle down" here or a "Mr. Johnson, are you reading?" shout out there. She wanders the room as her kids read. And they are proud to show off their books and tell visitors what they are reading.

Allen believes that there are different kinds of learners and introduces me to a student she says is an "auditory learner"; the young man boasts that he listens to "lots of books." Some kids are munching chips, some slumped over their desks. But all are reading. They chose their own books, from the list offered by Accelerated Reading for their level. That level is more often than not determined at the computer, which has a Renaissance Place dashboard and a Success Index.

A student has to score an 85 percent or better to move to the next level. Some of the kids are on their third and fourth try. The program is tied to the library system: 45,000 of the titles that are being tested are in the school's library; 200,000 books are available through the Enterprise system. Each book has a reading level number, from pre-primer to grade twelve. But the computer testing is refined enough to give the questions a level number as well.

Allen is a driven teacher. She works the room, answering questions, making sure kids are reading. "You need 100 percent on your next book," she tells one student. "Try again," she encourages another.

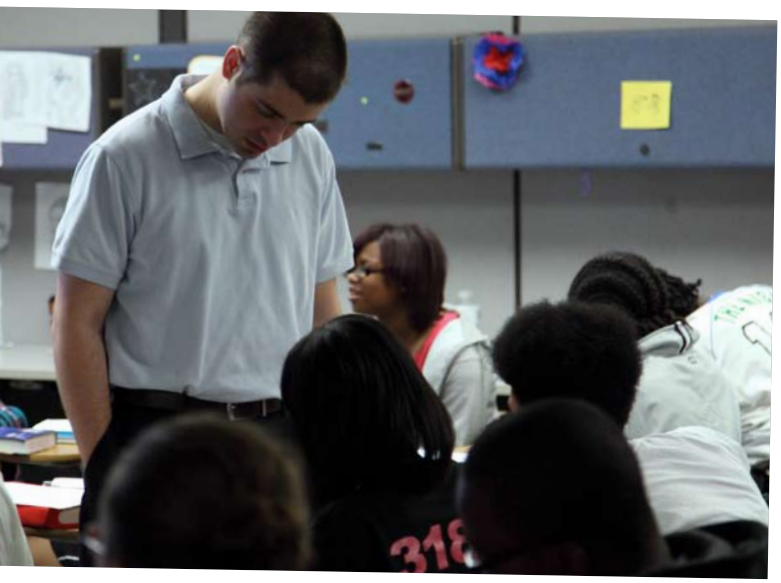
"You can track kids forever," she says. "But you can't test on the same book forever."

Effective Teaching Is Problem Solving

Hickson and Allen are the kinds of teachers that cause people to say what principal Dave Taylor at the Dayton Early College Academy says: that "the quality of the teachers is the most important attribute of the school." Not every teacher in the Needles schools is a "super" teacher—and some principals complained of having ringers—but there is no doubt that the caliber of the faculty at these schools is exceptional by just about any standard. How does it happen? That is not an easy question to answer.

Despite their reputations for demanding much of their teachers, teachers don't want to leave. Working at a Needles school is considered a plum teaching job. The school environment helps, as does their collective success.

"Teachers are problem solvers," says Taylor. "Not complainers. This, though, bleeds into culture, which is the next important characteristic of success. The culture of the school is such that everybody knows that if you come here, you'll work hard."



Oddly enough, despite their reputations for demanding much of their teachers, teachers don't want to leave; working at a Needles school is considered a plum teaching job. The school environment helps, as does their collective success.

Seventh-grade math teacher Citabria Loyle is in her second year at DECA and believes it is much better than her previous assignment at a traditional school district. "Here we're applauded for working hard; it is a culture in which hard work is appreciated…. You're never the only one here working weekends. We don't feel bad about it. It's a culture where everyone's working for students; it's not about hours or the money."

Not about hours or the money? Someone forgot to send the memo to the union reps.

It's not about you as the teacher, it's about the student. That's the bottom line: less of self and more of the kids—look through their lenses.

– Carol Lockhart, John Hay (principal))

DECA is the only charter of the six Needles schools, but the dedication and work ethic at DECA seemed no less prevalent at the unionized schools. "I have never seen teachers work as hard as here at Stivers," says Hope Strickland, a nineteen-year veteran who has taught in San Antonio, Texas, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. She is in her sixth year at Stivers. "Once a month we meet with all the science teachers in the district and you can tell that other teachers in the district are discouraged…. At Stivers we do whatever it takes to get the kids to the top level."

The ***can-do*** attitude at Needles schools is as contagious as the ***can't-do*** resignation that so often cripples other urban schools. And the former is just as apt to build collaboration and teamwork as the latter is to encourage divisiveness. At DECA, for instance, all staff are invited to interview candidate teachers and participate in the hiring decision. Even students, who are given a demo class by the prospective teacher, are asked for input. "The kids love it," says Dave Taylor. "They know what's going on and give great feedback and are really honest."

"The superstars force the others to show up, to get better," says Lockhart at John Hay in Cleveland. She agrees with the 10/40/40/10 ratio of teacher quality that seems to be the accepted truism about teachers: 10 percent are great, 40 percent are good and can be great, 40 percent are good but can't be great, and 10 percent shouldn't be there. (Of the forty teachers at Columbus' Centennial, principal Hershey says her school has five or six superstars, twenty learning to be superstars, sixteen good teachers, two not so good, but improving, and none that are bad.) But Lockhart has a counterintuitive take on the importance of teachers and teaching: "It's not about you as the teacher—you're important —it's about the student. That's the bottom line: less of self and more of kids—look through their lenses." It's not about teaching, it's about learning.

Relationships, and making connections, are a big part of what make these schools tick.

Says Katy Jo Brown, in her fourth year of teaching at DECA, "I can't imagine working anywhere else." Brown is a "STEM fellow," which means she goes to conferences and training sessions with other math and science teachers in the district. (STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.) "I hear about other teachers' experience," she says, "and it's heartbreaking. Lots of red tape…. I love our hiring process…We have the ability to hire our own. It's not a remote office somewhere that is sending us a new teacher."

The democratic spirit is part of what drives all decisions at DECA. "When you're new on staff you have just as much say as anyone else," says Samantha Oberski, who teaches seventh-grade English at DECA. "The administration asks you your opinion and actually cares what you think. You are an equal. Seniority doesn't give you more weight." Teachers have to carry their weight no matter where they are in their career path.

Teacher Unions And Barriers To Overcome

While attributing much of the success of the Needles schools to "hardworking teachers," administrators will admit to feeling constrained by union rules. Some 75 percent of Andrew Koonce's teachers are "necessary transfers," he says, meaning he didn't have a choice in their hiring. Teacher quality is important, Koonce says, but "we have little control over it." They don't like it, but they have learned to live with it.

Cleveland School of the Arts has a total staff of sixty, twenty-five of whom are teachers. Koonce says that 25 percent of his teachers are "highly effective," but at least 5 percent "need to go…. I would like more autonomy, especially over hiring and firing…. You're trying to run a building with people you haven't chosen…. How do you get people to work for you when they know you have no real authority?"

Mike Unger, a Stivers teacher, is outspoken about the sorry state of teacher education and teacher unions: I will not be part of any organization that keeps bad teachers and kills kids.

Assistant principal Kendra Halloway agrees with Koonce on the teacher quality count: 50 percent are highly qualified, she says, 25 percent are marginal and "5 percent shouldn't be here." The teacher union's proclivity to protect weak teachers angers Mike Unger at Stivers. A teacher for more than thirty years, Unger is also a Vietnam veteran (who came out of the jungles unscathed, but was shot and locked in the trunk of a car in Dayton after he returned). He had been a retired teacher when Erin Dooley asked him to come to come back to Stivers, where he now teaches history (again). But he is outspoken about the sorry state of teacher education and teacher unions. "I will not be part of any organization that

keeps bad teachers and kills the kids," he says matter-of-factly.

The collaborative cohesion of the Needles schools subverts some of the criticism of the union rules, but they clearly remain an open sore. Paul Hackworth, a physics teacher at Columbus Alternative, says he lost his job at Brookhaven during staff reductions only because two science teachers had more seniority than he did. "I understand the district has financial concerns they need to meet," he says, "but it shouldn't always be done on district seniority; building seniority would be better."

One of Erin Dooley's biggest victories, she says, was helping negotiate the end of the "transfer rule" in Dayton. That was the union contract policy, which allowed senior teachers to move to schools without the principal having much say in the matter. For a high-achieving school like Stivers it was, says Dooley, "a huge deal."

Unions or no unions, all of the schools in this report have professional development and teacher evaluations. "Even in a school that 'works,' there is room for improvement," says Andrew Koonce.

At one of her weekly teacher meetings, John Hay principal Lockhart looks on as one teacher leads a discussion about *Good to Great*, the classic management success book by Jim Collins. Collins famously wrote, "Those who build great organizations make sure they have the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the key seats before they figure out where to drive the bus." What does this mean for our school? asks the teacher leader. "We chose to be on the bus," says another teacher. "We hire five people, work 'em like ten people, pay 'em like eight people," says another. "I like the sound of that," says Lockhart.

Someone calls attention to page fifty-one. "You put greater weight on character attributes when you're hiring than on practical skills, knowledge or work experience."

"How can I make my students good to great?" asks Lockhart. "We have a choice here, to get the right people in here, whereas most schools don't have that opportunity." Lockhart is referring to the school's student selection process, which allows her to select students based on recommendations, test scores, and grades.

"It's important to have the right people on the team," she says, referring to teachers, over whom, because John Hay is one of fourteen "innovation schools" in Cleveland, she actually has some say in hiring.

As for compensation, someone else offers that "Sometimes it's not about money but it's about the type of person; people don't do it for the money." Another teacher adds, however, that you'd get a better selection of candidates if you paid better.

"More pay isn't going to make mediocre people better," responds another teacher. "You've got to put in extra effort…. But extra pay is not going to keep you on the team if your work is mediocre."

John Hay Early College utilizes teacher teams by grade level. The ninth-grade teacher team, for example, meets two to three times a week and works hard at helping new students understand and embrace the culture of academic excellence at the school. They discuss strategies for meeting the individual needs of students, taking into consideration both their academics and their emotional and social needs.

"There are a lot of teachers here who really care about the kids," says Fannie McCoy, mother of a fourteen-year-old student.

"They're here after school and on Saturday mornings," adds another parent, Beverly Perez. "They are

dedicated. As Mr. [Louis] Gliha, [a math teacher] says, 'a day without math homework is a day without sunshine.'"

All this passion, dedication, and hard work helps crush the underlying assumptions of teacher contracts, which, for the most part, are written for widgets and assume that everyone is the same—a sameness that passion defeats. Teachers at the Needles schools look the other way because they seem to know that the contracts are meant to protect the least effective teacher. They grudgingly go along only because their schools have managed to weed out, through pure peer pressure, those teachers that fail to deliver results.

Failing Teacher Preparation Programs

I asked a group of veteran teachers at Columbus's Centennial what they thought of their teacher education programs. Did the programs prepare them for teaching in an urban school?

> ***I was grossly disappointed by the lack of rigor in my master's degree program. You don't get the highest qualified people coming out of those schools.***
>
> – Lynn Taylor, Centennial (teacher)

English teacher Lynn Taylor responded, "I was grossly disappointed by the lack of rigor in my master's degree program. You don't get the highest qualified people coming out of those schools. There's not enough time in the classroom; a lot of my student teachers now are coming out with the same complaints. One semester of student teaching is just not enough." Several teachers around a conference table agreed. They also all nod when Taylor says she works eighty hours a week—this in a traditional public school, unions and all.

Jennifer LaPlace, in her fifteenth year, teaches social studies, world history, globalization, and AP U.S. Government at Centennial. She says, "I've never worked with people who work as hard as these teachers do."

Taylor believes that "the culture of our nation doesn't value what we do.… People with lower GREs [Graduate Record Examinations] go into education—it should be the reverse."

At Stivers in Dayton Mike Unger is convinced that we don't have enough quality urban education training programs for prospective teachers. "There are only four urban education programs in the country that are any good," he says, mocking the urban education program at his local University of Dayton. "It's in a basement, at the end of a hall, with a desk and a brochure on it.…You just can't take a kid out of Wright State or University of Dayton and put them in an urban setting and expect them to succeed," he says. "You could replicate Stivers, but it's not simple. You have to do everything—longer school day, mentoring, everything."

And that takes good teachers, which means giving schools the opportunity to recruit and retain top talent—which also means giving schools the authority to help underachievers find a different career.

Building-Level Leadership Matters

"WHAT GETS MONITORED, GETS DONE," SAYS JOHN HAY PRINCIPAL CAROL LOCKHART. "If our focus is student achievement and the student is at the center of our work, then I must monitor what teachers are doing, involve parents, and monitor the pulse of school on any given day."

This is a good summary of what the Needles school principals do in order to know whether their schools are working. They know they are responsible for student performance, for teacher performance, and for the "pulse" of the school. While policymakers continue to debate the question of whether principals should have more authority to do what they have to do to improve student performance, to get better teachers—to quicken the school's pulse—successful principals tend to be pragmatic people: they have a keen sense of what can and cannot be done in their buildings. But they are also creative: they will push the limits of the possible in order to improve their organization.

Christine Fowler-Mack, chief of innovative schools for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, says that her district believes in principal autonomy; specifically, in their "innovative schools" district, where principals do have more authority. There they need to be a "leader of leaders as well as a learner," says Fowler-Mack. "They have to share the platform of leadership. They are never quite satisfied—always have a to-do list—and are student focused."

If such autonomy is what helps make John Hay an excellent school, then more districts should provide it. Why they don't is the subject for another report. But it seems clear from our report that it is no longer enough to be a good manager, since, in most cases, you will only be managing failure. Thus, to run a successful urban public school requires not only true leadership qualities but the authority to carry out your wishes—you've got to part the Red Sea, provide food in the desert, discourage the worshipping of false gods, paint an enticing portrait of the Promised Land—and slay enemies. All of our principals seem to be part Moses, part Joan of Arc. But can they be cloned?

Below are brief profiles of the Needles schools principals and words from them about what they consider the most important parts of their job description.

The Leaders

Frances Hershey – Columbus Centennial HighSchool

"The biggest difference between Centennial and other schools," says a teacher, "is parent involvement—and Hershey runs a tight ship."

That would be Frances Hershey, who stands all of five-foot-two and represents either the rule of exceptional leaders (that it is a talent that can be learned), or the exception that proves the rule that most principals can't overcome the entropy of the status quo. In fact, Hershey has been an educator for three decades, an administrator for half that time. She is one of most senior of our group of six, which includes two principals with half her experience—and that speaks to a rule each of our principals knows well: you can't do it alone. In fact, they all know it's whom you have on the bus that will determine when and how you arrive.

Hershey, who is certified to teach all of the sciences, started out as a high school biology teacher at a Catholic school. She came to Centennial in 1980 as a teacher and in 1993 was "selected" into a leadership training program. She became a principal at Fort

Hayes, "a perfect arts high school," she says, where she stayed for eight years before returning to Centennial, as its principal, in 2001. She is most proud of having beefed up Centennial's academic rigor, adding eight AP courses (the school now has eleven) and introducing the ACT QualityCore.

"We've increased our rigor and feel that our students are now to the point where they're competitive," she says. "We were doing too much remedial."

How do you create a culture where teachers want feedback? "You seek it frequently enough and they don't mind it. And you put a statement of learning objective on the walls of each classroom."

Carol Lockhart – John Hay Early College Academy in Cleveland

Carol Lockhart is in her second year as John Hay principal, but she's been in the Cleveland district for thirteen, at seven different high schools. She says the frequent movement is part of the "pull-and-plant" strategy of leadership in Cleveland—controversial, but as we can see at John Hay, apparently not a killer app. "We train our principals well," smiles a teacher who has watched principals come and go.

Lockhart is tall, soft-spoken, and carries herself upright, head to toe, with the bearing of the probation officer that she once was. "The transition to education was something I walked into with eyes open," she says. "I wanted to make a difference on ***this*** side." She has a master's degree in education administration, a superintendent's certificate, a principal's certificate, and she taught at big, comprehensive high schools for ten years.

Lockhart appreciates the autonomy she has as principal of an innovation zone school. That includes doing zero-based budgeting, though within district-mandated staffing levels. She has memoranda of understanding (MOU) with the district that give her some autonomy over hiring and firing. (Fowler-Mack says that unions "are very influential but in a positive way—they've supported specialty schools and can work with the MOUs.")

Lockhart knows that leadership is important, but "it's not the principal who drives the school. Teachers doing what they need to do as professionals drive the school…. Professional integrity keeps it going." What she doesn't say is that leadership is what allows that professionalism to flower. "My job is largely building capacity for teachers. I want my teachers to carry on without me."

Part of Lockhart's leadership credo is simple: set a good example. "Take rigor, for example," she says. "It's important not to wither away, or sit on my laurels—it's already a good school. So part of my job is to create an atmosphere of continuity. But teacher ownership is even more important than continuity of leadership. I want teachers to see themselves as bona fide leaders in their own areas of expertise."

Andrew Koonce – Cleveland School of the Arts

Across town, Andrew Koonce, who started his career as a high school English teacher in 1995, became an assistant principal at Cleveland School of the Arts in 2005 and principal in 2007. He is white and was raised middle class in Cleveland Heights, but he has fallen for urban kids. "I would never be anywhere else," he says. And he is one of our more impatient leaders, with one of the more lengthy to-do lists.

Koonce sees his role as that of a cattle driver, getting everyone moving in the right direction. One of the biggest responsibilities, he believes, is "making the workplace somewhere the staff wants to come to." Turnover at the school is low, but he believes you would see "more consistent success academically, and artistically, if the principal had more autonomy."

(CSA is not an innovation school and so does not enjoy the same level of autonomy as John Hay.) And Koonce is also not a fan of CMSD's practice of moving principals around. "You need consistency among principals," he says. (The district's reform-minded superintendent, Eric Gordon, has promised to work on that.)

Koonce says he has hardworking teachers and emphasizes teambuilding. "Teacher buy-in is important," he says. His own leadership team is a veteran staff. "I gave them responsibility and they took it," he says. He explains that he is often away from the school at district meetings or fundraising. Thus, Koonce delegates significant responsibility to his assistant principal, Kendra Halloway. "I am very lucky," he says, "because she has been a principal."

Halloway smiles, "too much responsibility." But she offers that "planning ahead is an essential part of what a good school does. There are too many things that you can't plan for, which makes it all the more important to plan for those events you can control."

How do you know you're successful? "My supervisors measure that by looking at the Ohio Graduation Tests, attendance, and the graduation rate," says Koonce. "But that's not how I measure our success. I look at the ACTs. And they're not good. That's the next thing to push forward."

Sharee Wells – Columbus Alternative High School

Sharee Wells, principal at Columbus Alternative High School, is one of the younger Needles school leaders, but is not without considerable experience. She graduated from CAHS in 1994, earned a bachelor's degree from Ohio State, taught Spanish for four years, then got her master's degree in educational administration (also from OSU), and was an administrator for ten years (including three as a principal) in Columbus schools before landing the plum assignment of leading CAHS in 2010.

The leadership continuity question is one that CAHS staff has had to deal with. Veteran teacher David Fawcett points out that "From 1987 to 1997, we had one principal. And over the next decade we had five." He says, "It makes a difference." But Brad Oglesby, a French teacher and fifteen-year CAHS veteran, smiles. "We train our administrators well."

Wells laughs at the comment; she's comfortable with delegating. "I have a lot of people who do the work. It's a very competent staff—no matter what needs to be done, they take it and run. The staff is just like our students: overachievers."

What does it take to be a principal? "You've got to be a multi-tasker," she says. "And you have to love the kids."

But the most important part of her job, she says, is "facilitating and overseeing instruction. You've got to support teachers and provide them with resources so they can do their jobs well." The measure of her success, however, is student achievement, which is one reason she has focused attention on programs for struggling students, like National Honor Society study tables during lunchtime.

Erin Dooley – Stivers School for the Arts

Among the characteristics singled out by staff as key to Stivers success is leadership; specifically, Erin Dooley. "You have to have a fine person in charge," says veteran educator Mike Mangan. "Erin is amazing in what she does. She puts in a lot of hours in a day. She's really dedicated to making this school work. And she looks at the big picture—she always has a big vision of where we can be, what can we do to make things better."

Not all good principals are loved by their staff—except, perhaps, at schools that are successful. And like the other Needles principals, Erin Dooley has many fans. Her leadership is firm but undramatic. She is not a cheerleader but a facilitator, a doer, a delegator. But she is also a stickler for detail.

We walk by room 1210, a tenth-grade geometry classroom, and Dooley says, "that's a substitute teacher." But it wasn't ***just*** a substitute; it's the chairman of the school's math department. "The regular teacher had an ailing parent in Nigeria and had to take the rest of the year off," she explains. "We had to find a way to fill that gap with other teachers in the building because it is not fair for the students to just have a sub for the rest of year. We all work together and know that it is important for the kids to have consistency and stay on their upward learning trajectory."

Dave Taylor – Dayton Early College Academy

Dave Taylor followed Judy Hennessey as DECA's principal in 2009. He is only thirty-one years old, the youngest of the six school leaders. But he is articulate and well-versed in the duties of principalship—in part, no doubt, because his mentor, Hennessey, remains at the school as the "superintendent," maintaining a heavy if less demanding schedule of fundraising, advising, and launching a new elementary school (DECA Prep). They have a remarkably synergistic relationship, much like our other principals have with their assistant principals and leadership teams.

Taylor was happy teaching social studies—he came to DECA in 2004—and was shocked when Hennessey asked him to start training to be the principal. "I couldn't believe it—hadn't thought about it," says Taylor. "But I respected Judy so much that if she saw something in me, well, I'd go with it."

He did, and is now in his third year running the school. Taylor says that one of his major responsibilities is supporting teachers. "I make sure they're heard," he says. "I'm the servant leader for teachers."

Watching Taylor in action, you appreciate exactly what a good leader is and does. The typical day begins at 7:30, when he sends out a morning e-mail to staff. He announces what's happening in the building that day, who's out and why, what visitors they can expect (though we call them *needles in a haystack*, word does get around and all these schools entertain a fairly long line of visitors, hoping to catch a spoonful of the secret sauce), fire drills, meetings, and the like.

"We are deeply supported by each other and the administration," says Samantha Oberski, who teaches seventh-grade English at DECA. "And we have a lot of autonomy…. Dave has spoiled us. It would be hard to work for another principal, someone who would tell us what to do."

In fact, Oberski could probably work well at any of the Needles schools, since all of the principals believe in supporting their teachers.

The Secret Recipe

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE REAL SECRET SAUCE: SCHOOL CULTURE; RATHER, A CULTURE OF *HIGH EXPECTATIONS*. The distinction is an important one to make because every school, like every institution, every country, has a culture, generally defined as a pattern of belief and behavior shared by members of a group. In school parlance, then, we can say that some school cultures work better than others to deliver an educational environment where all children learn; many school cultures are cultures of failure. But no one has any doubt that culture exerts a powerful influence over the behavior of the individuals in the group—one reason why "turnarounds" are so difficult and success stories so heralded.

Thus, a culture of high expectations is both the beginning and the end of our story. All of the dozens of people interviewed for this report were asked what the most important ingredient in their school's success was. Almost everyone cited school culture as first among equals. Great teachers? Very important. Motivated students? Yes. Engaged parents? Indeed. Good academics? Of course. Leadership? A must. Safe haven? Yes. But putting it all together was what made their schools tick. More often than not, that working culture was described as a "family," a touching irony here since so many of our students come from broken families; at least, from families that are constantly challenged by an inhospitable environment.

Far too many urban high schools have failed in keeping "the neighborhood" out of their buildings. (Though there are efforts throughout the country to "fix" the neighborhoods—see, for example Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone—for now most urban schools must face the reality that the "neighborhood" is a negative force.) Creating a safe environment is essential for gaining control of the cultural air ducts. Yet that alone is not enough. You've got to pour great teaching, rigorous curricula, and pitch-perfect leadership into those airways. When teachers are allowed to teach and students allowed to learn, high expectations *may* follow. It is not exactly provable that high expectations are the result of a safe school environment, but the two surely come together in wonderful ways in our Needles schools. Safety is contagious; so are high expectations. It's not an easy task, but these schools have not only broken the cycle of failure, they have created a cycle of success. Bad habits may be hard to break; so are good habits.

The Periodic Table Of Student Achievement

We have already seen the elements of success, a kind of periodic table of student achievement that includes a safe environment, a rigorous academic program, motivated teachers, and dedicated leaders. And they all swirl around in a hothouse of high expectations. "We hold high expectations—that's what the students tell me," says Columbus Alternative teacher Dulce Condron. "Because you expected a lot of me, I've made myself do it."

"We tell kids: 'You will graduate,'" says CAHS assistant principal Davan Dodrill. "And they do."

> *We hold high expectations—that's what the students tell me: Because you expected a lot of me, I've made myself do it.*
>
> – Dulce Condron, Columbus Alternative (teacher)

"I regularly visit four high schools, including CAHS," says Sarah Pastor, a counselor for I Know I Can, a nonprofit that specializes in college prep advice and appli-

cation fees. "In other schools it is like pulling teeth to get seniors to even think about college. Not here."

That's the culture of high expectations speaking. In fact, Room 121 at CAHS is called "The College Room." The large, light-filled multipurpose space, located conveniently on the first floor, is dedicated to helping kids get to college. That is the culture of high expectations speaking.

"School culture here feels different," says Christine Fowler-Mack, speaking of the Cleveland Early College High School at John Hay. She defines that culture as "the three Rs: Rigor, relationships, relevance." She notes that the challenge is "operationalizing the vision" of getting all kids to college.

"Here," says Sarah Humphrey-Bekhouche, a John Hay French teacher, "you can be smart. It's cool to be smart. It's cool to be the one who gets a 4.0 grade point average."

One characteristic of culture is that it runs deep. "We have high expectations here," says Mary Brown, secretary to the principal at Centennial. And those high expectations are not the province of the school leaders. You'll hear the same from janitors, cooks, and security officers. The ethic is infectious, running through the veins of the school.

The culture is the secret sauce.

– Judy Hennessey, DECA (superintendent)

"What works here is the culture," says Owen Hickey, a counselor who has been at Centennial for fourteen years, six of them as a counselor. "Positive peer pressure, built over the years, works. As do high expectations…. We'll get a student who's been expelled, a gang member or wannabe gang member, and he comes here and…he finds that there's nobody to play with. We've seen these kids change…. There is peer pressure, but it's positive peer pressure. We have students who hold each other accountable…. That culture can only be built over time. One grade at a time: perfect way to build a school."

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. "The culture is the secret sauce," says Judy Hennessy. It is not for nothing that DECA's motto is "changing culture with achievement." The motto recognizes not just the importance of culture, but also the importance of

academic achievement to it. By suggesting the possibility of "changing culture," they take a huge swipe at the determinism of poverty, race, family background, crime, society, television, and a whole host of excuses for not trying. And they have reaffirmed an American belief in merit as the lifeblood of the country.

Are Needles Schools Replicable?

ONE OF THE STANDARD ARGUMENTS AGAINST ***TRYING*** TO GROW MORE NEEDLES SCHOOLS IS THAT THE SECRET SAUCE FOR THEIR SUCCESS CONTAINS INGREDIENTS NOT AVAILABLE TO ORDINARY HIGH-NEED URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS. And so we asked teachers and administrators at these Needles schools whether they thought their success was replicable. What if this staff, I would ask, could be plopped down into one of their city's worst-performing high schools? Could that school be turned around?

"I don't think so," says Christina Harris, who has been teaching for nine years, seven at Columbus Alternative. She had taught at McKinley (what is now the McKinley STEM Academy) before coming to CAHS. "There's a special dynamic here," she says. "I've never been in a place where everyone works so hard for the kids."

This was not an uncommon response to the replication question. But I got in the habit of not interrupting, letting the speaker continue to talk, usually in a group setting, letting others join in, as they invariably did on this subject. And almost always, after ten or fifteen minutes, they would come to some opinion or conclusion similar to that of Christina Harris, "Well," she concludes, "it would take several years to change the culture over at McKinley." They realized that, in fact, the successful school they worked in was not built in a day!

"The district tried to create CAHS elsewhere," offers Sarah Thornburg. "At Eastmoor, for instance. They tried…and they failed." Why? I ask. "One of the problems was getting buy-in from the teachers," she replies. "You have to teach in a new way. You have to do planning and teaching and reading in a way you've never done before. I know that as a student teacher, when I got here, I was completely freaked out, not only about the subject —which was, in my case, history—but I also had to read the novel, the play, know the artwork that went with it as the history teacher. This is what our humanities curriculum requires."

When I reminded her that my initial question presumed that the school would have this staff, she understood. "Oh sure, it's replicable," she said.

> ***I think the big question is how you do it—how do you create a new culture. You have to have a culture of success. And it has to start freshman year. And it has to be in all subjects and for everyone.***
>
> – Gary Liebesman,
> Columbus Alternative (teacher)

Many teachers at these high-performing schools said they were not prepared for teaching at a school where students were so far behind their more affluent peers in the suburbs, in part because of the many challenges facing the students and in part because of the rigor of the curriculum and the expectations they faced in these high-performing schools.

There are limits, of course. As David Fawcett suggests, "if you took the Harvard faculty and put it into Muskingum University, you're not going to turn those kids into Harvard students. You might bring them up a notch."

Wouldn't bringing them up a notch be a start?

"I taught at a fantastic school in New York City," says Gary Liebesman of Columbus Alternative. "But it took them ten years to develop from being one of the worst schools in the city to a really good one…. Now it's an unbelievable school. But it took plan-

ning, focus, vision—and it is bought into by students and teachers. I think the big question is how you do it—how do you create a new culture. You have to have a culture of success. And it has to start freshman year. And it has to be in all subjects and for everyone. You may not be reading at college level, but you will have read *The Odyssey*, cover to cover."

And if you ask the question a bit differently, you get some interesting insights into the dark side of the issue: Why aren't other schools doing well with poor kids?

"Maybe teachers are in survival mode," says Amanda Reidenbaugh. "Students aren't being held to high standards? Climate issues? I can't tell you what it is…other than our staff has a common belief that our students can and will achieve. You ***will*** graduate. You ***will*** be exposed to college level coursework."

Forget *The Odyssey*. Every teacher and administrator and student and parent needs to have a copy of *The Little Engine That Could*.

Afterword:

What Policy Lessons Can Ohio Learn from the Needles Schools?

THESE HIGH SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATE THAT ALL CHILDREN, NO MATTER HOW DISADVANTAGED, CAN LEARN IF THEY ATTEND SCHOOLS THAT FOCUS RELENTLESSLY ON STUDENT SUCCESS, HIRE AND RETAIN GREAT TEACHERS, AND ARE RUN BY LEADERS WHO KNOW HOW TO BUILD AND PROTECT SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CULTURES.

Grit and determination is a large part of the success of these Needles schools. And that, in part, is why many of the leaders and teachers we spoke with were initially reluctant to believe that their success was replicable; each person's effort, whether that of a student or a teacher, is a very personal experience. Their successes and their efforts thus would seem to defy a policymaker's effort—whether in the central office or the statehouse—to write a policy or a law that could extend the successes elsewhere.

But, in fact, as noted throughout this report, teachers, administrators, students, parents, and staff have all offered their thoughts on how that effort is applied to best effect. Their insights—it would not be an overstatement to call it wisdom—come from, in many cases, decades of experience; together, the dozens of people interviewed for this report represent an awe-inspiring amount of education expertise. And that is where we find commonalities that can begin to guide policymakers to wiser decisions about how to spend the public's money to best educate our children.

While there are commonalities across these schools, they do not follow the exact same recipe, and district leadership and policymakers should not try to clone them. Rather, state and local policymakers should embrace policies that create the conditions in which more such high schools can develop and thrive. But that won't happen by following just one or two of the six policy lessons that follow, for the truth is that all of these conditions are essential. The lessons are inextricably entwined, meaning that if Ohio wants more such high schools to serve its neediest students successfully, it must go about the hard work of creating all six of these conditions.

Needles high schools are rare and creating more of them is no simple matter. But one thing is certain: What's currently in place isn't working for far too many high school students in Ohio's urban schools. The graduation rate for the class of 2011 in Cleveland Municipal was only 56 percent; in Columbus City, 76 percent; in Dayton, just 66 percent.

Are we willing to consider a new course of action? From this study of high-performing, high-need urban high schools, we believe there are six actionable lessons for policymakers, educators, and others in the Buckeye State.

1 Significantly increase the number of new high-performing high schools, both district and charter, while closing or substantially restructuring failing schools.

The students at Needles high schools benefit from their parents' or guardians' decisions to enroll them in these high-performing schools of choice. Both district- and state-level policies should be crafted to encourage Ohio's urban districts to offer more quality school options to more students. Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) is moving in this direction quickly and its efforts should be encouraged, supported, and replicated in other high-need school districts.

Since 2006, CMSD has opened thirteen new schools, including several high schools that have shown solid student enrollment gains and high academic performance, and CMSD authorizes six independent charter schools. These schools are some of Cleveland's top

performers. The Dayton Early College Academy was launched as a magnet school in partnership with the Dayton Public Schools in August 2003. It became a charter school in 2007 and is now the city's highest-performing high school.

School districts could sponsor more quality charter schools or work with other authorizers to do so, and they should work to create more magnet programs such as the art magnets Stivers and the Cleveland School for the Arts. Thematically focused high schools with high academic standards work for kids—but districts can go even further by experimenting with online courses and hybrid models of learning (a mix of traditional schooling and online coursework). Further, school districts, with philanthropic and state support, could recruit high-performing charter models to their cities (e.g., KIPP, Uncommon Schools, Carpe Diem and Rocketship), and set up charter incubators. Charter incubators are organizations that intentionally build the supply of high-quality schools and charter management organizations (CMOs) in cities or specific geographic regions by recruiting, selecting, and training promising leaders, and supporting those leaders as they launch new schools.

State lawmakers could further expand quality options by closing persistently troubled schools and replacing them with new models. Just as Ohio's academic death penalty closes chronically failing charter schools, the state should devise an "automatic" protocol for closing the very worst district schools. Shutting schools is painful but sometimes it's the best of bad options. Note, though, that "closing" a school doesn't mean padlocking the building. It means (assuming enrollment numbers justify this) creating a start-from-scratch school—with new staff and curriculum—in that same building, to which children may return for a completely different educational experience.

Further, the state could create a "Recovery School District" (RSD) that would take direct control of the state's most troubled schools. Louisiana, Michigan and Tennessee have all created such recovery school districts; the oldest of these is the Louisiana RSD, which has seen significant student achievement gains and improved performance in the schools it has run. RSDs take the decision making around school closures and new start-ups away from traditional districts and place it in the hands of a state authority that is focused solely on closing troubled schools and opening better new schools. This is oftentimes accomplished by recruiting top-flight operators to replace the existing school staff in its entirety.

In tandem with closing failed schools, the state could continue encouraging school district and charter school operators to expand and scale up other promising models, namely Early College Academies and STEM schools. Both have shown success delivering high levels of academic achievement to disadvantaged high-school-age students and preparing them for college. Even if these models are charter schools they should receive the same level of funding and support as traditional district schools.

2 Encourage school-based principal training programs.

Principals and leadership teams in Needles high schools are highly effective in running successful academic programs, managing student behavior, and ensuring that all students learn. Why aren't they also training others in such competencies? We were stunned to find that only the Dayton Early College Academy was strategically working to develop a future school leader. None of the other school leaders had "understudies" working next to them to learn how to run an effective urban high school. That's because most school leadership training in Ohio takes place not in high-performing schools but in university classrooms.

This is a missed opportunity, as highly effective high school leaders are in great demand in Ohio and across

the country. Recall that 15 percent of Ohio's high schools have been identified as "dropout factories"—schools that fail to graduate more than 60 percent of their students on time. Developing school leaders who can help turn these buildings around, or who can open new schools to replace the failing ones, is job one if we expect more of our young people to graduate. There is no better place to learn how to run a great high school than from those already doing the work.

If Ohio is to develop more Needles-type leaders, they need the opportunity to learn from the best of today's leaders via residencies in highly successful schools. The knowledge, lore, and skill sets of Needles leaders, which are keys to their school success, are difficult to impart via coursework, lectures, or textbooks. But by observing and learning alongside successful school leaders, much like doctors in training, talented educators who want to become crackerjack principals can arrive at a deeper understanding of the pillars of leadership that drive schools to consistently achieve at high levels.

3 Adopt a "tight-loose" approach to accountability by setting clear, data-specific goals for schools, then directing funds to schools, relaxing mandates, slashing regulations, and cutting strings so that school leaders have the control and operational freedom to meet those goals using strategies that work for them, their teams, and their students.

No "magic bullet" solution for successful urban education emerges from the study of these Needles high schools. Though we have tried to identify common traits among these schools, there are also important differences in how they operate. One essential factor that Needles schools share is the freedom to do what works ***for their students***. Such freedom is sometimes a matter of right (as in the charter sector), and sometimes a matter of experience and deft navigation. But it is never easy to get and keep, even for charters.

The state should not be in the business of telling individual high schools how to operate. Rather, it should set clear standards and goals, put in place accurate, timely, and transparent systems for monitoring performance against those goals, and then provide the support and resources to help schools attain them in ways that may differ considerably from place to place. To support this, Ohio needs an accountability system that can better gauge high school success. The current Ohio Graduation Test is set at or below a ninth-grade achievement level in both math and reading. A more meaningful approach to measuring high school student success could be using a basket of indicators, such as ACT/SAT scores, college entrance rates, remediation rates, and the persistence of student in higher education. For graduates who don't go to college, the state could use Department of Labor and other data systems to track what happens to students who enter the workforce or the armed services.

Further, a well-designed system of weighted student funding would permit school leaders to determine how to spend the money—essentially all the money—that accompanies their students to their schools. This resembles the fiscal autonomy already accorded charter schools. As this report shows, school principals are best equipped to know and address the needs of their students. They need greater autonomy to allocate available resources in the most efficacious ways, including making personnel decisions.

4 Discourage administrative churn in high-achieving schools.

Consistency, stability, and an attention to detail are hallmarks of the Needles high schools. District leaders and state policymakers should heed this and invest in strategies to retain and reward talented school leaders. Consider that many school leaders make less than their senior teachers on a per-hourly basis. In Dayton, for example, there is a building where the principal was certified in 1977

and makes $302 dollars a day, while eleven of her teachers have the same or higher average daily salaries. Such numbers are not unusual for principals across the state.

Top-flight school principals typically work sixty-hour weeks, eleven months a year. Much as we should value and reward excellent teachers, it is a fact that those who lead them will need to be paid more if Ohio wants to get serious about finding and keeping great leaders over the long haul. As a starting point, school districts should set their principals' base pay at least 150 percent of what their schools' highest paid teachers receive, with the possibility of an additional 50 percent in performance-related bonuses to encourage principals to work in high-need schools. Money for this could be found by shrinking central offices and distributing both the resources and the responsibilities to building-level leaders.

Moreover, strategies to equitably distribute principals should be devised so that highly effective school leaders are not uprooted abruptly from their schools without a transition plan. If a principal transfer is necessary, a strategy should be in place that would put up-and-coming deputies in schools to train alongside successful leaders and take charge when the veteran principal leaves. (Top-notch charter schools like KIPP do this well and strategically, as they have an incentive to grow leaders to launch new schools. This is an innovation districts should steal from charters.) This form of principal mentorship would require thoughtful succession planning by school districts, but it promises to expand the pool of talented principals capable of running successful high-need schools.

Finally, district (and state) leaders should consider alternative management structures so that successful building level leaders can have the opportunity to lead a second or third school, or even a "mini-district." Additional responsibilities would be matched with commensurate compensation, as well as a new form of career mobility that many school leaders may seek. With enrollment declining in many of Ohio's cities, consolidating leadership so that principals can work across multiple schools makes good fiscal sense and maximizes leadership talent.

5 Empower schools to hire and retain the best talent available.

The Needles high school leaders profiled here have developed ways to select teachers they think will best fit their school cultures. As a charter school, the Dayton Early College Academy can do this by right. The others, as district schools, have to learn to "work the system." DECA enjoys near-total autonomy over hiring and firing (not required to abide laws of seniority, forced transfers, etc.), although it is still constrained by Ohio law prescribing strict certification standards for charter teachers. Meanwhile, district-operated Needles high schools rely on their reputations for going above and beyond the required workload, as well as rigorous interviewing processes, to hire talented staff that can best meet their students' needs.

To its credit, the CMSD has worked with Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson to change state law so as to provide the district with more flexibility in its personnel practices. Specifically, the law eliminated seniority as the sole or priority factor in any employment or assignment decision including Reduction in Force situations. The changes also require a differentiated compensation system to attract and retain excellent teachers and principals aligned to an evaluation system that rewards performance. In order to have more Needles-type high schools, these are the sorts of personnel changes that other high-need school districts should seek for their schools. Such flexibility is especially important for low-performing or low-income schools that need more freedom to successfully recruit, hire, and retain needed talent.

6 Engage parents.

The successful Needles schools profiled here work extraordinarily hard to engage the parents of their students. Needles schools understand that engaged parents are welcomed and helpful to improving student performance and that not having them engaged is just another challenge for the school and its staff to overcome. All six Needles high schools profiled here have active outreach and engagement programs for parents, and some even require parents to attend certain activities. Parents in these schools know they are welcomed and that their voices will be heard.

Again, CMSD is trying to show the way here. In his State of the Schools address in 2012, CMSD superintendent Eric Gordon told his audience that success means "re-engaging families, including assisting parents in selecting the school that best meets the needs of their children, developing meaningful opportunities for families to actively participate in the education of their children and ensuring families have multiple ways to connect with their teacher and school, through such things as parent portals and online grade books."[5]

The state can help facilitate the engagement of parents by ensuring that its annual report cards, which grade school and district performance, are easy to understand, come with a simple composite score of A-F, and are widely available to all parents.

[5] Eric Gordon, "State of Schools Address," September 27, 2012.

Appendix A:

Performance of Needles Schools vs. Home Districts

Table I: Academic performance of Needles high schools versus home districts, 2010-11, Black students

ORGANIZATION	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	10TH GRADE READING 2010-11	10TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	11TH GRADE READING 2010-11	11TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	GRAD RATE 2009-10
DECA						
	Advanced	22.9%	37.1%	4.3%	34.8%	>95%
	Accelerated	40.%	22.9%	39.1%	34.8%	
	Proficient	37.1%	40.%	56.5%	30.4%	
	Basic					
	Limited					
Stivers School for the Arts						
	Advanced	15.3%	24.5%	20.5%	38.6%	>95%
	Accelerated	38.8%	28.6%	32.5%	24.1%	
	Proficient	34.7%	25.5%	45.8%	32.5%	
	Basic	10.2%	15.3%	1.2%	2.4%	
	Limited	1.0%	6.1%		2.4%	
Dayton Public Schools						
	Advanced	5.8%	11.4%	5.5%	14.4%	86.3%
	Accelerated	20.1%	18.9%	13.8%	15.9%	
	Proficient	41.7%	33.3%	62.5%	47.7%	
	Basic	20.1%	16.7%	10.8%	11.1%	
	Limited	12.3%	19.7%	7.4%	10.9%	
Centennial High School						
	Advanced	25.7%	27.1%	12.7%	41.3%	93.0%
	Accelerated	25.7%	20.0%	28.6%	17.5%	
	Proficient	45.7%	44.3%	58.7%	39.7%	
	Basic	1.4%	7.1%		1.6%	
	Limited	1.4%	1.4%			
Columbus Alternative High School						
	Advanced	25.9%	40.0%	19.4%	40.3%	>95%
	Accelerated	25.9%	25.9%	44.4%	20.8%	
	Proficient	41.2%	24.7%	34.7%	36.1%	
	Basic	4.7%	8.2%	1.4%	2.8%	
	Limited	2.4%	1.2%			
Columbus City Schools						
	Advanced	7.8%	11.1%	3.6%	13.2%	77.5%
	Accelerated	19.1%	18.5%	15.3%	17.5%	
	Proficient	48.5%	34.6%	66.5%	44.2%	
	Basic	15.0%	17.0%	10.5%	14.6%	
	Limited	9.6%	18.8%	4.2%	10.5%	

ORGANIZATION	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	10TH GRADE READING 2010-11	10TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	11TH GRADE READING 2010-11	11TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	GRAD RATE 2009-10
Cleveland School of the Arts High School						
	Advanced	17.2%	23.0%	4.5%	30.7%	>95%
	Accelerated	33.3%	28.7%	36.4%	31.8%	
	Proficient	46.0%	35.6%	56.8%	34.1%	
	Basic	2.3%	9.2%	2.3%	2.3%	
	Limited	1.1%	3.4%		1.1%	
John Hay Early College						
	Advanced	26.9%	71.2%			>95%
	Accelerated	53.8%	28.8%			
	Proficient	17.3%				
	Basic	1.9%				
	Limited					
Cleveland Metropolitan						
	Advanced	5.3%	10.9%	2.0%	11.9%	75.1%
	Accelerated	17.5%	16.3%	12.5%	16.2%	
	Proficient	43.0%	29.2%	64.6%	41.7%	
	Basic	20.5%	19.9%	13.6%	15.8%	
	Limited	13.7%	23.6%	7.3%	14.4%	

Table II: Academic performance of Needles high schools versus home districts, 2010-11, economically disadvantaged students

ORGANIZATION	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	10TH GRADE READING 2010-11	10TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	11TH GRADE READING 2010-11	11TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	GRAD RATE 2009-10
DECA						
	Advanced	16.7%	33.3%	7.7%	42.3%	>95%
	Accelerated	43.3%	30.0%	50.0%	30.8%	
	Proficient	40.0%	36.7%	42.3%	26.9%	
	Basic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	Limited	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Stivers School for the Arts						
	Advanced	19.3%	25.3%	17.3%	29.3%	>95%
	Accelerated	33.7%	22.9%	29.3%	28.0%	
	Proficient	33.7%	26.5%	50.7%	34.7%	
	Basic	10.8%	16.9%	1.3%	4.0%	
	Limited	2.4%	8.4%	1.3%	4.0%	
Dayton Public Schools						
	Advanced	5.5%	10.8%	5.4%	14.9%	87.9%
	Accelerated	19.4%	18.1%	14.7%	17.0%	
	Proficient	40.7%	32.4%	62.0%	45.4%	
	Basic	20.7%	18.1%	10.6%	11.7%	
	Limited	13.8%	20.5%	7.2%	11.1%	
Centennial High School						
	Advanced	23.9%	28.3%	21.4%	40.0%	88.9%
	Accelerated	21.2%	18.6%	20.0%	20.0%	
	Proficient	46.0%	36.3%	52.9%	34.3%	
	Basic	5.3%	12.4%	4.3%	4.3%	
	Limited	3.5%	4.4%	1.4%	1.4%	
Columbus Alternative High School						
	Advanced	29.3%	40.0%	23.9%	46.3%	>95%
	Accelerated	26.7%	28.0%	44.8%	22.4%	
	Proficient	34.7%	21.3%	29.9%	29.9%	
	Basic	6.7%	9.3%	1.5%	1.5%	
	Limited	2.7%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	
Columbus City Schools						
	Advanced	7.9%	12.1%	4.4%	13.9%	75.3%
	Accelerated	19.1%	18.3%	15.0%	18.0%	
	Proficient	47.7%	34.0%	65.3%	43.0%	
	Basic	15.4%	16.6%	11.2%	14.3%	
	Limited	9.9%	18.9%	4.2%	10.8%	

ORGANIZATION	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	10TH GRADE READING 2010-11	10TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	11TH GRADE READING 2010-11	11TH GRADE MATH 2010-11	GRAD RATE 2009-10
Cleveland School of the Arts High School						
	Advanced	19.8%	25.7%	5.3%	33.0%	>95%
	Accelerated	33.7%	29.7%	38.3%	30.9%	
	Proficient	43.6%	32.7%	54.3%	33.0%	
	Basic	2.0%	8.9%	2.1%	2.1%	
	Limited	1.0%	3.0%	0.0%	1.1%	
John Hay Early College						
	Advanced	32.4%	71.6%			94.7%
	Accelerated	47.3%	28.4%			
	Proficient	18.9%	0.0%			
	Basic	1.4%	0.0%			
	Limited	0.0%	0.0%			
Cleveland Metropolitan						
	Advanced	6.4%	13.0%	3.2%	15.2%	65%
	Accelerated	18.7%	17.6%	13.7%	17.1%	
	Proficient	45.5%	28.1%	64.1%	41.3%	
	Basic	19.2%	19.1%	12.4%	13.9%	
	Limited	13.1%	22.2%	6.5%	12.6%	

Appendix B: School-Selection Methodology

Identifying the "Needles"

Using data from three consecutive school years (2008-09 through 2010-11) we identified public high schools in Ohio that met at least of one of the following criteria:

- ***High-performing, high-need schools***

Public high schools that, for all three years:

- Served a student population at least 50 percent economically disadvantaged (ED), and achieved an overall Performance Index (PI) score of 90 or greater; OR
- Served a student population at least 50 percent ED and ranked in the top 10 percent of low-income high schools based on PI score.

- ***Best schools for poor students***

Public high schools that, for all three years:

- Served a student population at least 30 percent economically disadvantaged (ED) and achieved a graduation rate for ED students that was greater than 90 percent for two of three years, and a tenth-grade Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) pass rate for ED students in reading and math of 80 percent or greater; OR
- Served a student population at least 30 percent economically disadvantaged and achieved a graduation rate for ED students that was greater than 90 percent for two of three years, and eleventh-grade OGT pass rate for ED students in reading and math of 90 percent or greater.

- ***Best schools for black students***[6]

Public high schools that, for all three years:

- Served a student population of at least 30 percent or more black students, and had a graduation rate for black students that was greater than 90 percent for two of three years, and had a tenth-grade OGT pass rate for black students in reading and math of 80 percent or greater; OR
- Served a student population of at least 30 percent or more black students, and had a graduation rate for black students that was greater than 90 percent for two of three years, and had an eleventh-grade OGT pass rate in reading and math for black students of 90 percent or greater.

Selecting the schools to feature

We started with the 818 public high schools for which three years of data were available. After applying the performance criteria stated above, fifty schools met at least one of the above criteria (forty schools met one criterion, four schools met two, and six schools met all three). For logistical reasons and in attempt to ensure that a variety of school types (charter, magnet, and neighborhood) were represented in the study, we ultimately settled on the six schools profiled in this report.

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[6] Our initial research question for this criterion was "which schools serve minority students well?" We changed the question to focus on black students for two reasons. First, several affluent high schools serve a large percentage of Asian American students, and while these schools are educating minority students to high levels of achievement, they do not represent the challenged public high schools we were seeking for this report. Second, there are high schools with significant populations of Hispanic or multi-racial students; however, those schools also serve large populations of black students. Therefore, we used black student percentages as a proxy for identifying schools that serve non-white/minority students well.

About the data

The Performance Index

The Ohio Department of Education summarizes a school's achievement using a "Performance Index"—a weighted average of student performance in all tested subjects and grade levels. Scores range from 0 to 120. The higher a school's score, the better its students are performing across the board on the state's annual assessments. A score of 100 or better indicates, on average, school-wide proficiency.

Graduation Rate

Because Ohio lags its graduation rate by one year to allow districts to include summer graduates in the calculation, the graduation rates used in this report are from the 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10 school years. We did not use the new "four-year adjusted cohort" graduation rate (which the federal government required states to being using in 2010-11) as the data were not available for all three years.

Economically Disadvantaged

The Ohio Department of Education provides demographic information about Ohio public schools, including the percent of students who have disabilities, are economically disadvantaged, and have limited English proficiency as well as the racial composition of the student body. The percent of a school's population that is considered economically disadvantaged is guided by rules in the Education Management Information System (EMIS) used by districts to submit these data.

There are four factors that districts can use to identify a student as economically disadvantaged: student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch; resident of a household in which a member is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; receiving public assistance; or Title I application. These data also rely on self-reporting by schools, so they are subject to data entry discrepancies; as such, we verified the data with the schools featured in this report.

Ohio Graduation Tests pass rates (tenth and eleventh grades)

The Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) are five exams (in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies) that students must pass in order to receive a diploma. Students first take the test in the spring of the sophomore year. They have the opportunity to retake sections of the test that they do not pass throughout their junior and senior years. The state reports two pass rates for the OGT. The tenth-grade pass rates represent the percent of sophomores who passed the tests on the first attempt. The eleventh-grade pass rates represent the percent of juniors who have passed the tests, regardless of how many times they took the exams.

Student Racial Demographics

The definitions of and terminology for student race/ethnicity used in this report mirror those used by the Ohio Department of Education. The department groups students into six racial categories: Black, non-Hispanic; American Indian or Alaska native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Hispanic; Multi-Racial; and White, non-Hispanic.

Table III: Academic performance of all schools meeting Needles criteria, 2010-11

School Name	Type	District	City	Designation	PI Score 2010-11	10th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	10th OGT Math % at or above proficient	11th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	11th OGT Math % at or above proficient	Graduation Rate
Akron Early College High School	District	Akron City	Akron	Excellent	110.4	100	98.9	100	100	NC
Alliance High School	District	Alliance City	Alliance	Continuous Improvement	93.1	81.1	71.6	94.1	87.6	79.6
Ansonia High School	District	Ansonia Local	Ansonia	Excellent	104.5	93.5	93.5	97.1	95.7	100
Arts & College Preparatory Academy	Charter	Arts & College Preparatory Academy	Columbus	Excellent	101.4	89.1	82.1	96.6	98.3	98.4
Barberton High School	District	Barberton City	Barberton	Effective	98.1	89.7	84.3	93.9	90.2	91.9
Blanchester High School	District	Blanchester Local	Blanchester	Excellent	101.7	91.7	90.8	>95.0	>95.0	94.4
Bucyrus Secondary School	District	Bucyrus City	Bucyrus	Effective	90.4	87.9	80.8	94.3	86.7	86
Centennial High School	District	Columbus City School District	Columbus	Excellent	103.1	94.2	89.4	97	95.8	94.1
Charles School at Ohio Dominican University	Charter	Charles School at Ohio Dominican University	Columbus	Effective	96.9	90.2	81.7	100	97.6	NC
Clark Montessori High School	District	Cincinnati City	Cincinnati	Effective	97.1	>95.0	88.9	>95.0	>95.0	93.4
Claymont High School	District	Claymont City	Uhrichsville	Excellent	101.1	86.1	88.6	94.1	95.4	96.1
Clearview High School	District	Clearview Local	Lorain	Effective	99	90.1	80.9	93.8	91.1	94.1
Cleveland Heights High School	District	Cleveland Heights-University Heights City	Cleveland Heights	Effective	91.7	82.2	75.4	92.8	87.1	92.9
Cleveland School Of The Arts High School	District	Cleveland Municipal	Cleveland	Effective	96.3	97	88.1	97.9	96.8	98.9
Columbus Alternative High School	District	Columbus City School District	Columbus	Excellent	106.1	92.5	92.5	99.2	98.3	98.8

School Name	Type	District	City	Designation	PI Score 2010-11	10th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	10th OGT Math % at or above proficient	11th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	11th OGT Math % at or above proficient	Graduation Rate
Conneaut High School	District	Conneaut Area City	Conneaut	Excellent	101.3	89.9	85.2	97.8	94.8	95.7
Coshocton High School	District	Coshocton City	Coshocton	Excellent	96.5	85.1	76.3	95.2	95.2	95.8
Coventry High School	District	Coventry Local	Akron	Excellent	99.2	91.5	88.7	94.7	93.8	>95.0
Dayton Early College Academy	Charter	Dayton Early College Academy	Dayton	Excellent with Distinction	100.5	100	100	100	100	97
Eastmoor Academy	District	Columbus City School District	Columbus	Effective	98	90	80	94.8	87.7	97.9
Fort Hayes Arts and Academic HS	District	Columbus City School District	Columbus	Effective	94.1	87.3	70.7	93.7	85	89.1
Frontier High School	District	Frontier Local	New Matamoras	Effective	92.2	79.2	73.6	89	80.8	89.1
Garfield Heights High School	District	Garfield Heights City Schools	Garfield Heights	Continuous Improvement	92.7	80.6	78.6	91.6	87.8	93.1
Girard Sr High School	District	Girard City School District	Girard	Excellent	103.4	93.1	93.1	99.2	95.3	95.8
Hamilton High School	District	Hamilton City	Hamilton	Effective	96.4	85.4	82	95	93.2	96.7
Horizon Science Academy Columbus	Charter	Horizon Science Academy Columbus	Columbus	Excellent	102	88.6	91.1	91.8	89.2	86.9
Indian Valley High School	District	Indian Valley Local Schools	Gnadenhutten	Excellent	105.2	97.1	91.9	100	96.7	96.3
John Hay Early College High School	District	Cleveland Municipal	Cleveland	Excellent	112.2	98.6	100	--	--	94.7
Lancaster High School	District	Lancaster City	Lancaster	Excellent	105.2	92.7	92.1	95.4	95.1	88.7
Leetonia High School	District	Leetonia Exempted Village	Leetonia	Effective	95.9	88.2	78.9	93.8	91.7	92.9

School Name	Type	District	City	Designation	PI Score 2010-11	10th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	10th OGT Math % at or above proficient	11th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	11th OGT Math % at or above proficient	Graduation Rate
Leipsic High School	District	Leipsic Local	Leipsic	Excellent	100.6	94.6	89.3	100	100	92.2
Manchester High School	District	Manchester Local	Manchester	Excellent	99.4	88.2	92.2	91.8	91.9	100
Maysville High School	District	Maysville Local	Zanesville	Excellent	103.1	90.4	90.4	98.7	99.3	100
Meigs High School	District	Meigs Local	Pomeroy	Effective	93.1	83.7	75	89.2	86.5	83.4
Nelsonville-York High School	District	Nelsonville-York City	Nelsonville	Effective	98.7	92.7	76	91	85	97.3
New Miami High School	District	New Miami Local	Hamilton	Effective	96	89.7	87.9	95.6	95.6	96.9
Northwest High School	District	Northwest Local	Mc Dermott	Effective	98.6	91.3	85.6	92.9	88.4	97.5
Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School	District	Cincinnati City	Cincinnati	Excellent	97.7	93.4	93.3	100	100	91.4
St Bernard-Elmwood Place High School	Charter	St Bernard-Elmwood Place City	Saint Bernard	Effective	93.1	86.6	82.1	96.7	95.6	83.1
Start High School	District	Toledo City	Toledo	Excellent	100.2	93	87.6	93.8	91.6	89
Stivers School For The Arts	District	Dayton City	Dayton	Effective	95.8	90.3	82.5	98.7	96.2	95.7
Struthers High School	District	Struthers City	Struthers	Excellent	100.6	91	85.6	94.7	90	92.9
Toledo School For The Arts	Charter	Toledo School For The Arts	Toledo	Excellent	105.7	100	94.9	100	98.6	100
Valley High School	District	Valley Local	Lucasville	Excellent	103.2	88.6	94.3	91.3	93.8	100
Vinton County High School	District	Vinton County Local	Mc Arthur	Effective	93.1	82.3	81.6	93.8	93.2	88
Walnut Hills High School	District	Cincinnati City	Cincinnati	Excellent	111.8	99.5	99.5	99.4	99.4	97.6
West Union High School	District	Adams County/Ohio Valley Local	West Union	Effective	92.9	82.9	81	85	81.8	92.8
Western High School	District	Western Local	Latham	Effective	93.5	82.1	89.3	91.8	91.8	91

School Name	Type	District	City	Designation	PI Score 2010-11	10th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	10th OGT Math % at or above proficient	11th OGT Reading % at or above proficient	11th OGT Math % at or above proficient	Graduation Rate
Whetstone High School	District	Columbus City School District	Columbus	Excellent	101	92.5	82.6	89.2	85.2	88.1
Youngstown Early College	District	Youngstown City Schools	Youngstown	Excellent	104.1	96.4	98.2	100	100	100

Table IV: Needles-eligible schools, by criteria met (2008-09 to 2010-11)

	Criterion 1A: Majority ED† & High performance	**Criterion 1B:** Majority ED & Top ten % in ED	**Criterion 2A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED sophmores	**Criterion 2B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED juniors	**Criterion 3A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black sophmores	**Criterion 3B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black juniors
Akron Early College High School	✓	✓				
Alliance High School	✓					
Ansonia High School			✓			
Arts & College Preparatory Academy	✓					
Barberton High School	✓					
Blanchester High School			✓			
Bucyrus Secondary School	✓					
Centennial High School	✓	✓			✓	✓
Charles School at Ohio Dominican University	✓					
Clark Montessori High School				✓		
Claymont High School				✓		
Clearview High School	✓					
Cleveland Heights High School	✓					
Cleveland School Of The Arts High School	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Columbus Alternative High School	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conneaut High School	✓	✓		✓		
Coshocton High School	✓					
Coventry High School			✓			
Dayton Early College Academy, Inc	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Eastmoor Academy	✓					
Fort Hayes Arts and Academic HS	✓					

	Criterion 1A: Majority ED† & High performance	**Criterion 1B:** Majority ED & Top ten % in ED	**Criterion 2A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED sophmores	**Criterion 2B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED juniors	**Criterion 3A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black sophmores	**Criterion 3B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black juniors
Frontier High School	✓					
Garfield Heights High School	✓					
Girard Sr High School				✓		
Hamilton High School				✓		
Horizon Science Academy Columbus	✓	✓				
Indian Valley High School			✓			
John Hay Early College High School	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Lancaster High School			✓			
Leetonia High School				✓		
Leipsic High School			✓			
Manchester High School	✓					
Maysville High School			✓	✓		
Meigs High School	✓					
Nelsonville-York High School	✓					
New Miami High School				✓		
Northwest High School	✓					
Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
St Bernard-Elmwood Place High School	✓					
Start High School					✓	
Stivers School For The Arts				✓		✓
Struthers High School	✓	✓				
Toledo School For The Arts			✓	✓	✓	

	Criterion 1A: Majority ED† & High performance	**Criterion 1B:** Majority ED & Top ten % in ED	**Criterion 2A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED sophmores	**Criterion 2B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, ED juniors	**Criterion 3A:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black sophmores	**Criterion 3B:** High grad rate & High test pass rate, black juniors
Valley High School			✓			
Vinton County High School	✓					
Walnut Hills High School					✓	✓
West Union High School	✓					
Western High School	✓					
Whetstone High School	✓	✓				
Youngstown Early College	✓	✓	✓		✓	

* See Methodology in Appendix B for full criteria definitions and data notes.

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