

FUTURE SHOCK

Early Common Core implementation lessons from Ohio

Ellen Belcher, Author

Foreword by Terry Ryan and Emmy Partin

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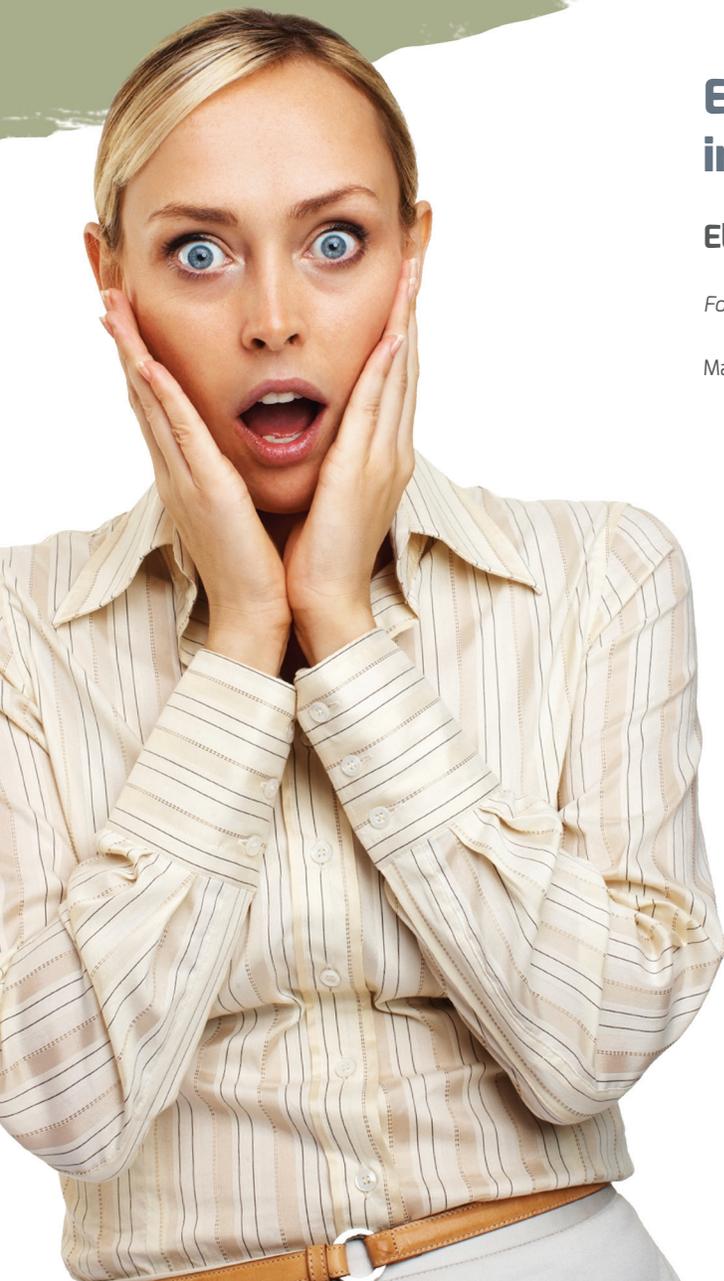


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Ellen Belcher is an award-winning journalist and former editorial page editor of the Dayton Daily News, where she frequently wrote about education issues. Currently, she is a freelance editor and writer and teaches at the university level.

The **Thomas B. Fordham Institute** is a nonprofit organization that conducts research, issues publications, and directs action projects in elementary and secondary education reform at the national level and in Ohio, with special emphasis on our hometown of Dayton. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and this publication is a joint project of the Foundation and Institute. For further information, please visit our website, www.edexcellence.net or write to the Institute at 1016 16th Street, NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036. This report is available on the Institute's website. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute

37 W. Broad Street, Suite 400

Columbus, Ohio 43215

614-223-1580

614-223-1494 (FAX)

www.edexcellence.net/ohio-policy/

Foreword

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute has long advocated for high quality academic content standards nationally – and in our home state of Ohio. In fact, the first report ever issued by Fordham, in 1997, was *State English Standards* and rated English language arts standards across 28 states, including Ohio. Just as we've long called for high quality academic standards, the Buckeye State was an early leader in embracing standards-based education.

So it is not surprising that Ohio committed itself to adopting more rigorous academic content standards in 2010: Ohio is one of 45 states and the District of Columbia that has committed to implementing the Common Core standards in math and English language arts by the start of the 2014-15 school year. In 2011, Ohio joined 23 other states in adopting the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment consortium. These are significant decisions for the Buckeye State, its schools, and its children because it has committed to elevating big time the expectations and performance of its children in coming years.

For example, under the state's current accountability system 61 percent of third graders in Columbus (Ohio's largest school district) are deemed proficient in reading. Under the Common Core standards coming online in 2014-15, it is projected that closer to 37 percent would be proficient. By eighth grade, just 29 percent would be proficient under the Common Core, despite 69 percent being deemed proficient today. Yes, these are shocking numbers, but the first step to improvement is acknowledging the problem.

Ohio has made an audacious commitment to delivering significantly higher levels of academic performance for all its children. This is absolutely the right course for the Buckeye State to take, but there is a lot of necessary work to accomplish in the next two years if the promise of the Common Core is to be met. This work includes developing new curriculum, revamping the state's accountability system to align with new assessments, and ensuring that professional development and teacher preparation programs are suitably aligned to the new system.

Taken as a whole, this amounts to an entire system reboot – a major undertaking but worth the effort if it leads to higher performing students in the Buckeye State in coming years. Most of this work will fall on the state's superintendents, curriculum coordinators, principals, classroom teachers, and students.

With the 2014-15 Common-Core transition looming, we wondered: How are Ohio's educators preparing themselves for this big change? Who is doing this work well and what can other schools and districts learn from the early adopters? What are the lessons, hopes, and fears facing those on the frontlines who have to lead Ohio's embrace of significantly more rigorous academic standards?

To answer these questions and others, we commissioned Ellen Belcher -- former editorial page editor of the *Dayton Daily News* -- to interview educators from select school districts, county educational service centers, and charter schools that are considered leaders in Common Core implementation in the Buckeye State. Their stories and comments are the basis of this report.

Belcher's findings are largely encouraging. Educators are not shying away from embracing the rigor of the Common Core and many are well down the path of setting the conditions for success in their districts and schools. Yes, educators see the Common Core as a major challenge. They worry whether all the moving parts and pieces will come together by 2014. They also worry that the changing political winds in Columbus and/or Washington, D.C., could impact or even set back their work. But, they see the move towards more rigorous and focused academic standards as positive and much-needed change. Said one interviewee, "The Common Core is the right work we should be doing as a country."

For those of us who have long advocated for more rigorous academic standards and expectations, the early lessons and experiences in this report demonstrate that transitioning to a new system of common standards is possible -- and actually wanted by frontline educators. For the tens of thousands of teachers, school leaders, and state administrators in Ohio doing the hard work of transitioning toward the Common Core, this report offers sound guidance and appropriate cautions about implementation going forward.

Terry Ryan, vice president for Ohio programs and policy

Emmy Partin, director of Ohio policy and research

Acknowledgments

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Thanks are first in order to the local educators who agreed to be interviewed for this project (see the full list in Appendix A). We appreciate their time and candor in sharing their Common Core implementation stories.

Thanks much to Ellen Belcher for her hard work and journalistic excellence on this report – we are pleased she agreed to apply her considerable talents and experience to this important project. We also thank Sasheen Phillips, senior executive director in the Center for Curriculum and Assessment, and Michael Sponhour, executive director of Communications and Outreach, at the Ohio Department of Education; the staff of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools; and Mary Peters of Battelle For Kids for their recommendations of schools and districts that are leaders in Common Core implementation. At the Fordham Institute, we thank Adrienne King for her research and editing assistance. Additionally, we are grateful to our talented graphic designer Andy Kittles.

Introduction

In 2014-15, Ohio's school districts will be graded for the first time based on tests aligned with the Common Core. The Common Core academic standards in English language arts and mathematics are significantly more rigorous than Ohio's current academic standards. The move to teach the Common Core – if done well – will be a watershed moment in Ohio education history.

In anticipation of the change over, instructional leaders and teachers are re-writing curricula and creating new units and lesson plans that demand more of students. At the same time, they are developing their own interim assessments to determine what students are and are not grasping. This is occurring at every grade level.

What's going well? What's not going well? What are those on the ground learning? What are administrators and teachers losing sleep over? What's getting in the way of success? What are the early lessons? What are educators saying is the smartest thing that they have done? These are questions this report addresses.

Fifteen educators and administrators were interviewed in spring 2012 for this snapshot of Ohio's implementation of the Common Core. Five interviewees are superintendents, one is an assistant superintendent, two are principals, three are curriculum specialists, and four are teachers (three of whom are especially active in their unions) – see the full list of interviewees in Appendix A. Though this group does not a scientific study make, the individuals' comments were stunningly similar. Whether speaking about the nitty gritty of the standards, the execution of the change over, or their worst fears, the interviewees often echoed each other.

Their observations are:

- ▶ Professional development aimed explicitly at explaining and “unpacking” the Common Core is essential – *and* is being given to teachers. More is needed.
- ▶ Professional development is most effective in small, collaborative learning communities, ideally peer to peer.
- ▶ The Ohio Department of Education and district administrators can't over communicate. Their messages have to be repeated. (“This is an example of where knowledge is power and lack of it is panic.” – Superintendent Dan Doyle, Noble Local Schools)

Some other important take aways:

- ▶ A common language around the Common Core is being widely used. The educators spoke of “rigor and relevance,” “formative assessments,” “short cycle assessments,” “formative instructional practices,” “professional learning communities,” “curriculum-based assessments,” “curriculum alignment,” “curriculum maps,” “project-based learning,” “portfolio-based assessments,” “higher level thinking,” “performance-based testing,” and “critical thinking skills.”
- ▶ Teachers want and appreciate tools they can “see.” What does “rigor and relevance” look like? (Good curriculum models are “very calming...in a sea of turbulence.” –Shelia Radtke, Cincinnati seventh and eighth grade math teacher)
- ▶ Everyone understands that data is king. Interviewees believe data is the secret to identifying and eliminating achievement gaps at the district level, the classroom level, and the student level.
- ▶ Emotions are high and run the gamut. Teachers are excited that they are being asked to “go deep” and that standards are being raised. At the same time, there is fear about whether the new summative assessments will get it right, whether the tests really will be good measures of what students have learned. (That fear can’t be separated from the fact that Ohio is also implementing “pay for performance” evaluations – meaning that getting the tests right affects people’s wallets in addition to their professional sense of self-worth.)
- ▶ Even as interviewees worry about whether the tests will be accurate measures, they have confidence in the process for developing the tests. They believe the effort is a sincere and genuine attempt to measure student achievement at a higher level than the current assessments.
- ▶ Collaboration has become standard operating procedure among schools, among districts, and with other entities such as the Council of Great City Schools, Battelle for Kids, the Gates Foundation, the General Electric Foundation, the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative, the American Federation of Teachers, and local educational service centers. No one feels like they’re working in a vacuum – or thinks that would be smart.
- ▶ Though virtually all interviewees said *their* district or school is on track to implement the Common Core well, everyone can point to other districts or other schools that they believe don’t understand the urgency of transitioning now. (Others are saying, “We just want to wait until we see the tests ... before we tackle these standards.” – Dee Martindale, Reynoldsburg principal)

- ▶ Interviewees give the Ohio Department of Education positive reviews, particularly State Superintendent Stan Heffner. Many were sharply, sometimes bitterly, critical of the governor and legislative leaders.
- ▶ These interviewees all see the “big picture,” the “global” problems that the Common Core aims to address, i.e. U.S. students’ lackluster performance among their international competitors and the large number of high-school graduates who are not prepared for college or a career.

State-level implementation efforts

Following Ohio’s adoption of the Common Core standards in June 2010, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has developed model curricula aligned to the standards that local educators can access and implement. ODE began targeted, statewide professional development in the Common Core standards in fall 2011. ODE trains math and ELA teachers directly and via regional “train-the-trainer” offerings. To date, at least 7,000 educators have been reached through this training, and more than ten thousand individuals around the state have attended presentations about the Common Core. The state also offers extensive online and web-based resources to support local Common Core implementation. From March 25 to April 24, 2012, more than 50,000 unique visitors accessed these online resources. In-person training and online support will continue through the 2014-15 transition and beyond.

Source: Ohio Department of Education staff

What are we getting right? What are we learning?

Don't wait, train hard

When asked what is going well, every interviewee mentioned the quality and/or the amount of professional development that is occurring and the fact that his or her district or school is starting early to implement the Common Core.

High School Principal Anna Trachsel said her staff began preparing for the Common Core two years ago. Trachsel, who's with the online charter school Ohio Connections Academy, said the school's mantra is, "We are 2014," in anticipation of the first testing year. Many of the school's weekly professional development meetings have been devoted to the Common Core, and that is over and above other training. The emphasis has been, "What does teaching the Common Core look like?" she said.

In the wake of those discussions, Trachsel said she watched a teacher lead a lesson about obtuse and right angles, asking students how that knowledge would apply to buying a flat screen TV and mapping football plays. One student, she said, applied the lesson to determining whether a cell phone would fit in a pocket. "When they relate it (a concept) to their lives, they remember it," she said.

Ohio Connections Academy math teacher Mark Scott echoes the emphasis on professional development: "We are continuously educating everybody."

Oakwood School Superintendent Mary Jo Scalzo and Kimbe Lange, director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, said that teachers in the affluent suburban district have been deeply involved in writing new curricula standards based on the Common Core, which has helped teachers understand the Common Core in a "deeper way."

In Cleveland, Karen Thompson, deputy chief of curriculum and instruction, and Mark Baumgartner, a seventh grade English teacher and Cleveland Teachers Union trustee, said that focusing on the Common Core early – a year and a half ago – has ensured that teachers understand the magnitude of the change. The communication drive started in late 2010 with multiple "open call" Saturday meetings to introduce the Common Core.¹

Then in spring 2011, K-2 teachers met in small groups to "unpack" the standards. In a morning training, they familiarized themselves with the standards; in the afternoon, they focused on one particular standard and how it can be taught.

¹ Cleveland is one of the major urban districts adopting the Common Core standards early with help from the Council of Great City Schools. That work is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which is also the sponsor of this report.

Grades 3-5 are participating in similar training this spring, and grades 6-8 will engage in a like exercise next spring. The approach has been to make a “big district small,” Thompson said. “People listen to colleagues,” she added. “We’re doing it (preparing for the adoption) together. We’re not doing it to them.”

The district also has named a “Common Core Advocate” in each building, and he or she is responsible for informing colleagues about Common Core updates. Meanwhile, instructional coaches – who are members of the union – are leading model lessons based on Common Core standards.

Finally, the district is continuing a practice it started four years ago of bringing together teachers the week after school is out to identify what specific standards for their grade and subject areas will be taught during each of eight five-week blocks (early first quarter, late first quarter, etc.). Dividing the year in “chunks” and setting a “pacing” schedule ensures that the same standards are being covered in all classrooms – a strategy that’s critical in a district with high student mobility.

In Cincinnati, the district has appointed a “Common Core Content Specialist” for each building. This individual receives specialized training each month and is responsible for bringing that knowledge back to his or her school. The goal is to create a “cadre of expert teachers,” said Katie Hofmann, a Race to the Top lead teacher. She said that districts want people on site who can preach, “I really have to change” how I teach. Teachers respond better to that message if it’s delivered by other teachers, Hofmann said.

Sheila Radtke, a seventh and eighth grade math teacher and math curriculum chairperson for Cincinnati, said the intensive Vermont Math Initiative has been transformative in preparing the district’s math teachers to teach the Common Core. Teachers who successfully complete the four-year program receive a master’s degree. Though she already had a master’s, Radtke was one of sixteen who finished the program this year. (All but the final year is paid for by the school district, in part with support from the General Electric Foundation.) All math teachers have been asked to complete at least one year of the program at the district’s expense; sixty have done so.

Laura Mitchell, Cincinnati’s deputy superintendent, emphasized that her district has benefited hugely by being a “GE District,” and receiving GE Foundation support. The district received \$20

million over five years to improve the city's schools, and, when that award ended last year, the district was given another three-year \$5 million grant. Much of this money has gone for professional development aimed at implementing the Common Core.

Dan Doyle, superintendent of Noble Local Schools, said that the rural district's teachers spend a half hour per day working in learning communities, and that much of that time has been devoted to understanding the Common Core. In May, each grade level will come together for two hours of work around the new standards. The Ohio Appalachian Collaborative and Battelle for Kids, specifically Battelle's Common Core instructional materials, have had "tremendous value" in educating teachers, he said.

In Reynoldsburg, Superintendent Steve Dackin said his teachers see the move to the Common Core as an extension of the district's adoption of the ACT Quality Core Standards, which occurred a year and a half ago. That has made the transition less overwhelming. Kindergarten and first grade students currently are being taught from the Common Core standards (with the exception of the district's STEM school where grades K-4 have adopted the Common Core).

Reynoldsburg also is developing quarterly common assessments for teachers to measure whether students have mastered the requisite material. Those tests, said Dee Martindale, principal of Summit Road Elementary (the district's STEM school), "get to what ... teaching the Common Core looks like."

Data rules

Oakwood's Scalzo said that mining achievement data in anticipation of teaching the Common Core has been "a positive." "We were a district that didn't know why our kids scored as well as they did. ...We have to know why we're being effective or ineffective," she said.

Ohio Connections Academy has created "data teams" that identify "holes and gaps" at the grade band level, the grade level, and the student level. High school teacher Paul Scott explained, "I need to know where my kids are before I start every unit, so I can customize their learning. ... The whole point is that the student needs to have mastery over content. ...We need to get out of the mode that we need to get through the book," he said.

Belpre Superintendent Tony Dunn said he tells teachers that he is done using what he dubs "autopsy data" – scores from the Ohio Graduation Test and the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

Instead, the focus is on quarterly benchmarks. He likened teaching using formative instruction to driving a car. “You make adjustments even when you’re going straight,” he said. Short-cycle assessments allow for small, as well as significant, course corrections in the classroom before it’s too late.

His district’s “mantra,” Dunn said, has become, “If they (students) didn’t get it, you didn’t teach it.”

Teachers want to ‘dive deep’

Noble Local’s Doyle said teachers “love the idea of going an inch wide and a mile deep,” a point that was made by others. Getting rid of the “thousand” indicators that are represented on the Ohio Achievement Assessment, Reynoldsburg’s Dackin said, is an important statement that depth is the goal. “The horror of having too much to teach is less (under the Common Core),” he said.

In Cleveland, Eric Gordon, chief executive officer, said teachers have “confidence in the Core. ... They believe that less is more.”

Cleveland’s Baumgartner agrees. “Teachers like that you can spend time differentiating instruction,” he said. “You can make sure students know the material rather than saying, ‘Tomorrow’s Tuesday. We have to do another thing.’ ”

Cincinnati’s Hofmann said, “I’m very inspired. Finally, we’re being allowed to do what we knew was right.”

Carolyn Pedapati, the social studies curriculum manager in Cincinnati, agreed that teachers feel “buy-in.” The Common Core is “not seen as an updated version of the same old standards,” she said.

No one’s going it alone

Reynoldsburg Principal Martindale said she and her staff understand that the Common Core is a national movement designed to raise expectations for students. “Our network has increased. Now we can tap into other states,” she said.

Cleveland's Gordon said that as a result of the Common Core, his district is having conversations with similar districts that have never talked before, including Atlanta and Philadelphia.

Belpre's Dunn said the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative has been essential to "opening up the world of education to small districts. ... It's critical to be able to talk to colleagues outside of your neighborhood," he said.

Cincinnati's Radtke, who is on the American Federation of Teachers' team of writers for the Common Core, said the AFT has provided excellent workshops that have benefitted that district.

'Big picture' isn't lost

Reynoldsburg's Dackin said that the Common Core is forcing the realization that the former tracks of college preparatory, vocational education, and Advanced Placement have "become one," that the different curricula in each of these have merged. As a result, "This is not your Mom and Dad's high school," he said. "We're raising the bar for all kids."

Dunn, Belpre's superintendent, said, "We have finally realized that kids in America don't live in a small bubble anymore; they're competing in the international arena. We need to standardize things so children are not crippled by their zip code."

Cleveland's Baumgartner said teachers see the benefits of standardizing curriculum nationally. "A suburb of Toledo," he said, "is Michigan."

Cleveland's Thompson added that the Common Core is "the right work we should be doing as a country. ... But let's not make this the metric system of our time...and all of sudden stop," she said.

What's *not* going well? What's standing in the way of success?

What to do first?

Invariably, interviewees said they feel they are caught between two worlds: They understand the need to begin preparing for the Common Core now. But they are torn between preparing students for the current academic standards and the Ohio Achievement Assessments that go with them – which they continue to be held accountable for – and teaching the Common Core standards.

Ohio Connections Academy's Trachsel said of the tension, "It's a juggling act."

Oakwood's Lange said the frustration over what to teach is particularly intense in elementary school where teachers are adopting new standards not only in the Common Core subjects of English language arts and mathematics but also in science and social studies.

Reynoldsburg's Martindale pointed specifically to the third-grade and fourth-grade Ohio Achievement Assessment tests, which she said have a large number of indicators for data analysis and probability. Under the Common Core, 19 indicators have been condensed to seven. The principal of a STEM elementary school where the Common Core standards have already been adopted in grades K-4, she said teachers are reluctant to go "full steam ahead" with the Common Core, lest they set up their students for failure on the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

Cleveland's Baumgartner, a middle-school English teacher and a union trustee, said that due to that district's layoffs (approximately 500 in 2012 and 643 in April 2011, with 365 recalled in August 2011), a significant number of teachers are being assigned to new grade levels or new classes. Teaching new material *and* teaching to new standards is doubly challenging.

In Reynoldsburg, where kindergarten is just a half-day, some teachers fear they won't have enough time to teach the more difficult Common Core material.

In Cincinnati, where principals are on limited contracts, administrators feel they can't start concentrating on the Common Core yet because it could cost them their jobs, Hofmann said.

She pointed to the Fairview German Language School, a high-performing magnet school that parents camp out in front of at enrollment time to secure a spot for their children. Its scores on

the Ohio Achievement Assessment have dropped, Hofmann said, so teachers have had to write “35 day plans” on how they’re going to increase the number of students who do well.

Show us the ‘end game’

Almost all interviewees want to “see” what their students are going to be judged by.

“We have very little to enlighten us about the standards,” said Gordon, Cleveland’s CEO.

“We don’t know what the assessments are; we don’t have an understanding of what the end game is yet,” Reynoldsburg’s Dackin said. Teachers are asking, will the standards I’m teaching be aligned to the assessments? Will they really show what kids know? Will they be sophisticated enough?

In the absence of actual assessments, multiple interviewees said the Ohio Department of Education’s “Crosswalk” documents have been helpful. The graphic presentation helps teachers identify important differences between the Common Core and the Ohio Achievement Assessment content standards. (Cincinnati Public Schools created their own “Crosswalk” documents and did so prior to the creation of the department’s.)

But multiple interviewees said some teachers have decided that the differences are not huge, when, in fact, the Common Core expectations are much more rigorous. Cleveland’s Gordon said the “Crosswalk” documents “talk nothing about the depth,” leading educators to focus on the similarities. “I’m worried that teachers think they’re already teaching to the depth. ... We are aligned in what students learn, but we have a lot more to do in depth and rigor.”

The interviewees have confidence in the commitment of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to develop valid tests, but they worry about the grading.

Reynoldsburg’s Martindale said that first graders, for instance, will be asked to write an opinion, stating a reason for it and finishing with a closing thought. She said many first graders are still mastering writing complete sentences. How will their work be judged, she asked? Is that goal too “lofty”?

The Ohio Department of Education, Martindale said, needs to give “good models” to show “what

quality work looks like.”

Cincinnati’s Radtke, a teacher and the district’s math curriculum chair, said she is concerned that some elementary teachers don’t have the grounding in math content to teach to the higher Common Core standards. She said some are afraid of math or chose to teach elementary grades because they enjoy teaching reading. Under the Common Core, teaching addition and subtraction will not be sufficient. She said third graders will need to be fluent in simple multiplication, and, as compared to current Ohio standards, that’s not “a mile wide – that’s two miles wide.”

Oakwood’s Scalzo and Lange agreed that certain content changes concern teachers. Their first-grade teachers, for instance, are taken aback that coins will not be taught in first grade and instead the emphasis will be on numeric place values. We’re not going to teach first graders about nickels and quarters, they asked skeptically. Scalzo quipped that parents will have to put dollar bills, not change, under their children’s pillows when they lose their teeth.

Scalzo and Lange also emphasized that current texts and other materials are not rigorous enough for the Common Core standards – a complaint Cleveland’s Gordon also raised.

“Our materials are not designed for the depth of the Common Core,” he said.

To address this problem in reading, Cleveland is working with the Council of the Great City Schools to write new instructional materials for its basal readers.

Cincinnati’s Radtke urges caution about buying new materials too quickly. “It’s really important to understand the workings of the (Common) Core,” she said. “I don’t think the vendors understand it yet, even though they say they do.”

Reynoldsburg’s Dackin said that in his district, the sophistication of the middle school content has created anxiety.

Finally, interviewees lamented that older students who weren’t taught to the higher expectations of the Common Core standards when they were younger will likely do poorly on assessments for multiple years because they’re behind on the content scaffolding from the start. Will districts be doomed to poor report cards for years to come, they asked.

“Yes, we’re growing our kindergartners,” said Reynoldsburg’s Martindale. But what about the sixth graders who have not been taught the Common Core standards and will be tested in eighth grade based on the cumulative learning that should have occurred earlier under the Common Core, she asked.

Cincinnati’s Hofmann said she believes the changes that are required for the Common Core are “far more dramatic” for urban and high-poverty districts because their students have struggled harder to do well under the state’s current academic standards and assessments, and she believes more time has been spent in these districts teaching test-taking strategies than teaching to the standards. Districts with less poverty have not devoted so much effort to teaching to the test, she said.

Don’t promise what you can’t deliver

Some interviewees said they worried that the Ohio Department of Education doesn’t have the capacity or resources to provide the support it’s promising.

“ODE has a directive to push,” Oakwood’s Scalzo said. “But it doesn’t have the workforce to push, and it can’t give you the support you need.”

This concern was emphatic around the administration of the Common Core tests. Numerous interviewees said they don’t have the technology (hardware, software, or bandwidth) to give the tests online (which will be required by the testing consortium Ohio has joined).

Reynoldsburg’s Dackin said, “I’m concerned about the technological infrastructure” needed for testing.

Noble Local’s Doyle said that he struggles to get reliable cell phone service and that at certain times of the day, the school district’s Internet connection “bogs down tremendously.” (Noble Local uses the equivalent of T-1 lines.) “We’re putting our hope in Connect Appalachia,” Doyle said.

Kimbe said that Oakwood was asked to pilot a test this spring, but the district doesn’t know if its computers are compatible. “We all get the big picture,” she said, “but the devil is in the details.”

Notwithstanding the concerns about the state education department's resources, the department's staff is appreciated and respected. Said Cincinnati's Hofmann of state Superintendent Stan Heffner, he's "absolutely approachable, he's absolutely with us." "Our biggest problem is our budgets," she said.

Keep preaching to the non-believers

Multiple interviewees worry that some colleagues believe the Common Core is a "passing fad."

Belpre School Superintendent Tony Dunn said he hears educators saying that "the standards don't affect me" and "we've got until 2014."

Teacher Scott of the Ohio Connections Academy said he has heard teachers say standards will be "another thing we tried."

Cincinnati's Mitchell said that administrators need to communicate that the Common Core is about more than standards, that "it is really designed to significantly change the way teachers teach. ...The instruction should look different." She spoke of capstone projects and project-based learning, noting that Cincinnati is requiring its sixth graders, seventh graders and eighth graders to produce "problem-based learning projects." (Each school's best teams will be presenting at the GE Aviation Learning Center in May.)

Don't leave principals behind

Several interviewees doubted if principals are as steeped in the Common Core as teachers. Cleveland's Baumgartner, for instance, said it was an "overlook" by his district not to include principals in the Common Core training that teachers received.

Cleveland's Gordon agreed, saying principals are telling him that "there's so much to learn about what teachers have learned." "They do feel somewhat disadvantaged," he said.

Cincinnati's Hofmann said administrators and principals will have to change their expectation of what a classroom should look like. "If you go into a classroom and kids are working quietly, you better question what's going on," she said.

Cincinnati's Radtke agreed. "Administrators are going to have to learn how to look at what are good instructional practices," she said. "They better hear some noise."

Teach the next generation of teachers

Multiple interviewees fear that colleges and universities are not preparing the next generation of teachers to teach the Common Core. Ohio Connections Academy's Scott said that effort is essential to ensure the Common Core takes hold. "That's where it will be brought to life," he said, referring to younger teachers.

Cleveland's Thompson said, "We're (higher education) preparing new teachers who haven't had any deep work around this."

Cincinnati's Hofmann said that so many teachers are retiring, the district is particularly investing in "younger teachers who we know are going to be here."

Don't throw us under the bus

There was unanimous agreement that the public is not prepared for the fact that the 2014-15 report cards likely will be ugly.

Belpre's Dunn, however, has a different complaint. He criticized Ohio's political and educational leaders for saying that "our scores are going to stink." "I think it (that message) is really damaging, and I'm disappointed," he said. The Ohio Department of Education is telling taxpayers – whose support he needs – that "public education is not worth investing in," he said.

Reynoldsburg's Dackin suggests that the state department "hammer home" the message that the previous rating of "proficient" was grossly dishonest, that getting, on average, just over a third of the answers correct on an exam is not "proficient." "We created a false sense of security because cut scores were so low," Dackin said.

Said Ohio Connections Academy teacher Scott, "Parents won't understand how severe it (the change) is until that report card is on the evening news."

Oakwood's Scalzo said she and many teachers resent that legislators and policy makers were unconcerned about the poor grades public schools are projected to get on the new report cards,

but became alarmed when the grades threatened charter schools. She said many educators believe Ohio's leaders are trying to "dismantle public education."

"That's the conversation that's going on," she said. "That distracts us."

Cincinnati's Mitchell does not think that report cards "will automatically drop." "If that's what you expect, that's what you will get," she said. She said that prediction is a "nice crutch" to excuse poor performance.

Reynoldsburg's Dackin had a final caution about the new report cards: "We can't ever lose sight that the kids have to follow their passion; there still has to be a discovery process that allows for that. We can't lose sight of the drive and motivation of the learner...the kid behind the standard," he said.

Appendix A: Interviewees

Mark Baumgartner, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, seventh grade English teacher and Cleveland Teachers Union Trustee

Stephen D. Dackin, Reynoldsburg City Schools, superintendent

Dan Doyle, Noble Local Schools, superintendent

Tony Dunn, Belpre City School District, superintendent

Eric Gordon, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, chief executive officer

Katie Hofmann, Cincinnati Public Schools, Race to the Top lead teacher, coordinator of Teacher Incentive Fund

Kimbe Lange, Oakwood City Schools, director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Dee Martindale, Reynoldsburg City Schools, principal, Summit Road Elementary

Laura Mitchell, Cincinnati Public Schools, deputy superintendent and accountability officer

Carolyn Pedapati, Cincinnati Public Schools, social studies curriculum manager

Sheila Radtke, Cincinnati Public Schools, seventh and eighth grade math teacher for behaviorally challenged students, seventh and eighth grade traditional classroom teacher

Mary Jo Scalzo, Oakwood City Schools, superintendent

Paul Scott, Ohio Connections Academy, high school math teacher

Karen Thompson, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, deputy chief of curriculum and instruction

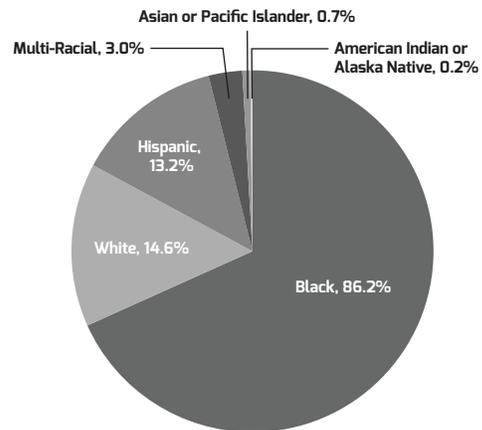
Anna Trachsel, Ohio Connections Academy, high school principal

Appendix B: Districts featured in this report



Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Enrollment: 43,202



- 100% economically disadvantaged

- 6.1% limited English proficient

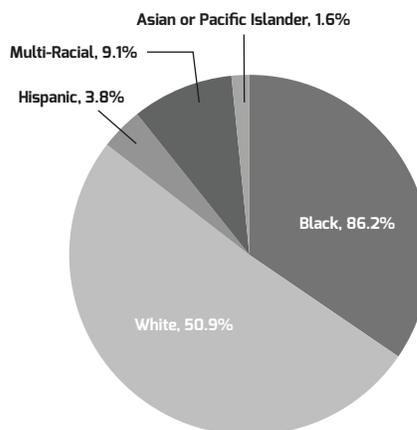
- 22.9% students with disabilities

Current state performance rating: Academic Watch (aka D)

Projected rating under the Common Core: D

Reynoldsburg City Schools

Enrollment: 5,811



- 41.6% economically disadvantaged

- 4.9% limited English proficient

- 14% students with disabilities

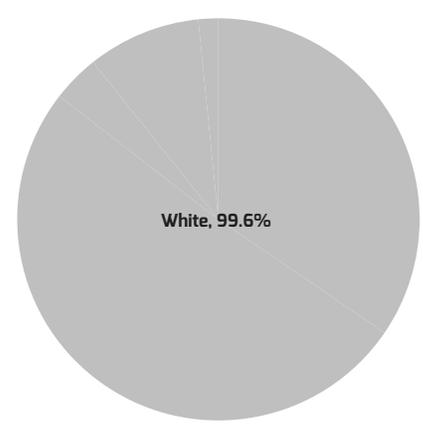
Current state performance rating: Excellent (aka A)

Projected rating under the Common Core: B



Noble Local Schools

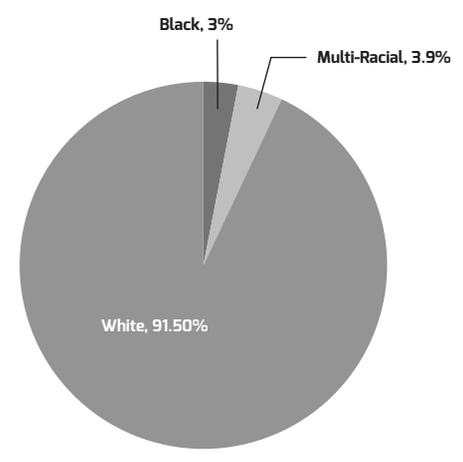
Enrollment: 1,052



- 47.2% economically disadvantaged
- 12.4% students with disabilities
- Current state performance rating: Effective (aka B)
- Projected rating under the Common Core: C

Belpre City School District

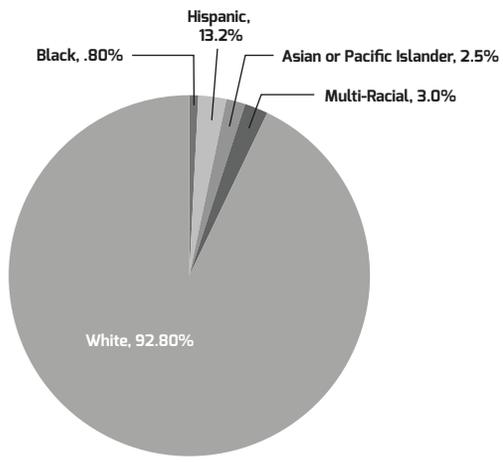
Enrollment: 1,015



- 50.5% economically disadvantaged
- 19.3% students with disabilities
- Current state performance rating: Effective (aka B)
- Projected rating under the Common Core: D

Oakwood City Schools

Enrollment: 2,075

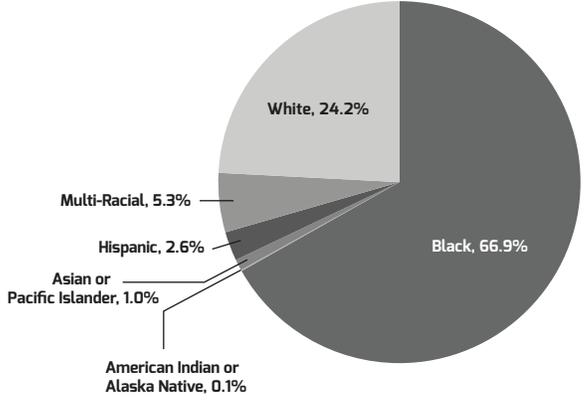


- 4.3% economically disadvantaged
- 10.2% students with disabilities
- Current state performance rating: Excellent with Distinction (aka A+)
- Projected rating under the Common Core: A



Cincinnati Public Schools

Enrollment: 32,009

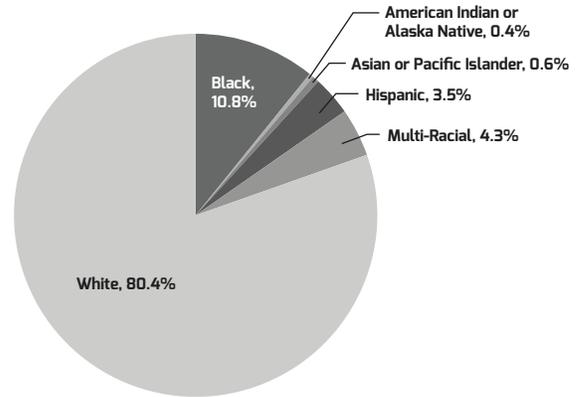


- 69.7% economically disadvantaged
- 3.7% limited English proficient
- 21% students with disabilities
- Current state performance rating: Effective (aka B)
- Projected rating under the Common Core: C



Ohio Connections Academy

Enrollment: 2,676



- 54.1% economically disadvantaged

- 9.7% students with disabilities

Current state performance rating: Effective (aka B)

Projected rating under the Common Core: D

** All data are from the 2010-11 school year, the most recent year for which information is available. Source: Ohio Department of Education interactive Local Report Card*