

Models for Statewide Reform

The Committee examined the conditions of education in several other states and the work being conducted there to improve educational achievement. Committee members were struck by the similarities of California’s own problems to the problems in other states, as well as by the near uniformity of consensus about the nature of remedies required to fix those flawed systems. The findings of three recent models for integrated systemwide reforms — from Ohio, Delaware, and New York City — that seek to link greater local control, enhanced accountability that is built on high standards; fair and rational funding; and enhanced quality for professionals, were particularly instructive to the Committee. Those plans are briefly described here.

Ohio

In October 2006, the Ohio State Board of Education requested from Achieve, Inc. a comprehensive perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the state’s K–12 public school system, compared to the best systems in the world, seeking to understand what it would require to close any gaps. The report *Creating a World Class Education System in Ohio* found that in the aggregate Ohio’s students achieved impressively 10th among U.S. states on *Education Week’s* comprehensive achievement index (including overall National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP] performance, Advanced Placement test scores, and graduation rates). But these results “mask large and persistent achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged, Black, and Latino students,” identified as “particularly acute amongst urban districts.”

The report described three common attributes exhibited in the world’s highest-performing educational systems, which “reinforce each other to ensure system alignment and focus on delivering high levels of student achievement.”

- **High challenge.** Sets high expectations for student achievement for those people most responsible for student achievement (students, teachers, principals, and superintendents).
- **High support.** Provides the necessary resources to and builds the capabilities of those same people to ensure that they can meet those high expectations of student achievement.
- **Aligned incentives.** Includes both positive incentives and negative consequences for meeting (or failing to meet) those expectations of student achievement.

Simply put, these systems offer an important and balanced deal to students, teachers, principals, and superintendents: In exchange for accountability for delivering high levels of student achievement (high challenge and aligned incentives), they provide the resources, opportunities, information, development, and targeted help (high support) necessary so that these expectations can be met.

The report then listed six key recommendations for implementation in a “holistic, integrated manner.”

- 1. Ensure readiness for college and the global economy by continuing to raise Ohio’s standards and improve assessments.**
- 2. Empower principals to function as instructional leaders.**
- 3. Align clear expectations for teachers with evaluation, professional development, and consequences.**
- 4. Motivate and holistically support students to meet high expectations by addressing their unique needs.**
- 5. Ensure that funding is fairly allocated and linked to accountability.**
- 6. Increase effectiveness of school and district ratings and interventions.**

These six key recommendations are explored in detail here.

1. Ensure readiness for college and the global economy by continuing to raise Ohio’s standards and improve assessments

The report set out as the first defining feature of any high-performing education system “the existence of a high challenge to students,” which “takes the form of clearly articulated content standards benchmarked to those of the highest-achieving countries in the world.” Curriculum accordingly “aligns with standards though teachers use diverse instructional methods to impart the knowledge.”

The report explained that, “although Ohio has led in the arena of standards, curriculum, and assessments, the state needs to move to the next level — one that makes it globally competitive.” As a consequence, “its K–12 standards need to more closely bridge to those of higher education and match those of world-class systems, and its assessments need to become more accurate predictors of student readiness for college and work.” The report offered the following proposals:

Align Ohio’s academic content standards more tightly with real-world expectations through a rigorous review and benchmarking process.

The report criticized the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), the centerpiece of Ohio’s high school testing system, for failing to “test advanced knowledge and skills that students will need to make a successful transition to college or 21st century careers,” and “not aligning well with courses students will soon be required to take as part of the Ohio CORE implementation.” It found, for example, that OGT primarily measures content and skills learned in middle school and early high school. When viewed through an international lens, the OGT assesses math skills that students in most other countries learn in the 7th or 8th grades. In its current form and in the grade it is currently administered, OGT is simply not capable of measuring students’ readiness for postsecondary pursuits. According to one Ohio college president, “The OGT results don’t tell me anything useful about students’ abilities when they come from 12th grade into [my] college.”

More particularly, the report pointed out that “because the OGT is a cumulative test given at the end of grade 10, it is not a very good mechanism for measuring performance in the CORE courses. Nor is it the most useful means for providing schools and students with feedback on performance in CORE courses.” It offered the following proposals:

Ohio should improve the quality of curriculum and instruction in high school courses through a series of end-of-course exams. End-of-course exams are tests that align with academic standards and are taken at the end of specific courses. Currently, 13 states use such exams; 15 more plan to do so.

Ohio should include assessments of college readiness as a required part of its high school assessment system. At present, students in Ohio who attend college do not learn whether they are prepared to succeed in credit-bearing work until they have already enrolled in college and taken placement exams. Many learn that they lack the preparation to succeed and must take remedial or developmental classes. Students in Ohio should be able to find out while they are still in high school if they are ready to do college-level work, so they can fill in any skill deficiencies before they leave high school, saving the state and their families the cost of tuition. The California State University (CSU) system has pioneered the development of such assessments in partnership with the California State Department of Public Instruction. Together, they worked to augment the existing 11th-grade exams in mathematics and English to incorporate additional questions that reflect the needs of the CSU system and are fully aligned with the state's academic standards. Students receive exam results in the summer between their junior and senior years. Students who want to attend CSU take the augmented exam in grade 11. Those who meet the standards are notified that they will be placed in credit-bearing rather than remedial courses. Those who do not meet the college-ready standard have their senior year to make up deficiencies. CSU campuses are working with high schools in each region to develop senior-year courses to help those students who did not meet the standards fill in the skill gaps identified by the tests.

2. Empower principals to function as instructional leaders

The report stated that “high-performing systems recognize the importance of strong school leadership and work to attract, develop, and empower principals to be strong instructional leaders through a combination of high-challenge, high-support, and aligned incentives.” It thereby concluded “to move in that direction, Ohio should clearly articulate high challenge by defining the principal’s role as an instructional leader and support that set of expectations with resources, authority, training, and aligned incentives (e.g., financial incentives, recognition, and opportunities for advancement).”

Significantly, the report pointed out that, while “much of the work focuses on improving student achievement highlights the importance of teacher quality,” nevertheless “it presupposes the presence of strong building leadership.” It cited a 2006 survey showing that 37 percent of Ohio teachers identified leadership as the factor that most affected their willingness to remain in their school.

The report made the following proposals in support of principal empowerment:

Adopt clear, appropriate expectations and align evaluations for the principal as instructional leader.

To implement this recommendation, it suggested incorporating statewide Standards for Principals into districts’ performance management systems and creating fair, timely, and rigorous evaluation processes. The report advocated using “value-added student achievement data” to “allow principals who work with students of varying levels of

achievement to be evaluated on a level playing field” and, “if principals are to be accountable for student performance,” making certain “that principals have the resources and authority to effect the conditions for student learning.”

Ensure that high-quality professional development, focused on instructional leadership, is accessible to all principals.

The report acknowledged that “not all principals and superintendents have sufficient access to high-quality professional development” and that, therefore, “this limitation affects principals’ ability to build both skills and a sense of community among themselves.” It cited the national Commission on Teaching Success as reporting that “principals often feel isolated in their jobs — that they thirst for more opportunities to network, share, and collaborate with peers.”

The report called for expanding access to quality professional development and creating programs that are research-based and promote data-driven decision making in the context of the particular school. It expressed concern that existing programs lacked relevance and sufficient quality to permit “opportunities to learn through study groups, action research, and the sharing of experiences in support groups.”

Ensure that leaders have time and authority to lead by providing core support and autonomy.

The report cited the findings of the Commission for Teaching Success that “... many principals feel their biggest obstacles to success are lack of time and lack of authority and that too often, their jobs evolve into never-ending struggles between being an effective building manager and serving as the instructional leader.” It concluded that “Ohio principals are ... constrained in ways that make it more difficult for them to create learning environments.”

Some are limited in their freedom to hire the teacher of their choice, and almost all face obstacles in trying to fire underperforming teachers or employ resources as they think most appropriate. The report recommended that “districts should provide principals with the tools and increased authority they need to become instructional leaders,” holding that they must possess broad powers for “hiring, firing, budgeting, and curriculum.” At the same time, it recognized that “more authority for principals does not mean that principals should be authoritarian leaders” or “that there are not essential leadership roles for teachers.” The report stated: “teachers have important leadership roles to play as well, particularly with respect to professional development, mentoring new teachers, and instructional development.”

It also advocated that “the state should help districts free up principal time” by, for example, “collecting and disseminating best practices” relating to support for principals and piloting programs likely to relieve non-instructional duties.

Motivate strong principal performance through financial and non-financial incentives.

The report stated that “principals currently face the threat of negative consequences for failure but seldom experience rewards for a job well done.” It recommended providing incentives, including experimenting with “financial compensation or other forms of reward with school-based indicators that directly measure student achievement.”

3. Align clear expectations for teachers with evaluation, professional development, and consequences

As is well-documented, “high-performing systems share four common characteristics with regard to performance management of teachers through a combination of high-challenge, high-support, and aligned incentives.” First, they establish clear and appropriate expectations. Second, they use regular, rigorous evaluations based on evidence tied to those expectations. Third, they provide robust and ongoing professional development opportunities linked to specific individual needs. And fourth, they apply consequences, both positive and negative, for meeting or failing to meet expectations.

The report presented several reinforcing proposals to address what educators regard as “the single most important factor affecting student achievement: teacher quality.” It promoted institution of a “career lattice” that would “enable accomplished teachers to take on new responsibilities without leaving the classroom” and “help create a more collaborative environment in another classroom becomes less foreign and professional learning requires less of a cultural shift.” Absent such an approach, “teachers can expect to be doing roughly the same job on the day they retire as on their first day in the classroom.”

The report made the following recommendations to improve teaching:

Adopt clear and appropriate expectations in every district for teachers that focus on the components of effective teaching and appropriate measures of student achievement.

For example, “New Zealand sought to establish national consistency in performance management while still allowing individual schools the flexibility to adapt standards to their own needs.” The report also noted that “like New Zealand, Ontario outlined a basic framework for professional expectations, which served as its baseline, allowing local school boards the flexibility to build on this foundation by incorporating additional competencies into their expectations.” As summarized: “This approach has promise in a decentralized environment [with local control over schools] like Ohio. By building on the baseline present in the Standards for the Teaching Profession, districts can create a set of expectations, particularly as the standards link to a career lattice that is specific to their unique needs. At the same time, districts, unions, and other key stakeholders should take the opportunity to collaborate on a vision for advancing the district’s needs through the performance expectations articulated in the career lattice. This collaboration should ensure that expectations focus on student achievement and that if teachers are held accountable for a result, they have the resources and authority to achieve it. Given the importance of fairly assessing whether teachers are impacting student achievement, districts should explore quantitative measures of effective teaching, including value-added data. Once districts have adopted a set of performance expectations, they must develop a process for letting teachers know how they are performing relative to those standards.”

Create evaluation processes that are rigorous and consistent so that evaluation can be used as a developmental tool.

Because teacher evaluations were found to be infrequent and uneven, based often on vague criteria, the report recommended that “districts should work with teachers’ unions to develop a strong evaluation process based on clear, appropriate expectations.” One model suggested is described as follows: “To ensure that the evaluation is fair and

sufficiently detailed to serve as a development tool, strong processes base evaluations on multiple data points by using multiple in-person observations or multiple forms of appraisal. In New Zealand, for example, boards of trustees are encouraged to consider using peer appraisal, parent or student feedback, students' performance results, and documentary evidence (e.g., lesson plans, assessment records, resources) in the evaluation process. Additionally, best practice evaluation systems provide teachers with an opportunity to receive feedback prior to their actual review, ensuring that teachers have a chance to address issues before their formal evaluation. Finally, once the evaluation has taken place, teachers have an opportunity to discuss the evaluator's findings. This ensures that teachers understand their evaluation and are clear on what they should do to improve. Hong Kong takes this aspect of the evaluation process a step further, having evaluators assist teachers in translating their evaluation into development plans.

Develop a range of tools that will provide teachers with regular feedback on student achievement.

The report explained that "if teachers are to be held responsible for student achievement ... they need tools that will allow them to chart a course for supporting student achievement." It stated that the state Department of Education "should collect and disseminate information on successful teaching tools that have been developed by districts." In line with other recommendations, the report encouraged "offering grants to best practice districts" so as to "recognize the front runners in developing teaching tools and ... continuing their efforts." Additional benefits would accrue: First, it is much faster than developing tools from scratch. Second, having been created and tested by districts that differ in size, student demographics, and curricular approach, these materials are more likely to meet a range of needs than a single tool developed centrally.

Address individual teachers' needs by moving toward a professional learning system that is formally linked to individual evaluation and is classroom-centered.

The report emphasized that "numerous national studies of what would otherwise seem to be strong programs have found that too many professional development programs are disconnected from actual classroom practice, resulting in little change to instructional practices on student engagement." It recognized adoption of "contextual professional learning" by which "schools must reconfigure their master schedule to provide teachers with common planning periods and the ability to sit in on others' lessons."

Practices seen in China and England, such as reducing teaching loads and administrative burdens to allow teachers to spend time on lesson planning, preparation, and assessment, both individually and collaboratively, would further reinforce this shift. According to Ohio teachers, increasing the amount of available non-instructional time would most impact their ability to improve student learning and is one of their areas of greatest concern. However, the effectiveness of non-instructional time depends on teachers using it in small groups to plan and evaluate lessons and to assess student work collaboratively.

Thus, "in many countries, including Singapore and Japan, teachers regularly observe others' classrooms as part of professional learning. In Japan, teachers work collaboratively to develop detailed lesson plans, then stage and refine the lessons based on the team's evaluation of the lesson's strengths and weaknesses." It results that "these lessons are then published, creating a national knowledge base," thereby reinforcing "emphasis on continuously improving lesson planning and pedagogy."

Link rewards and penalties in teachers' evaluations.

In Ohio, as in California, “evaluations rarely result in rewards or penalties” for teachers. As a consequence, the best teachers are not paid more than their peers, nor do they regularly have opportunities to take on greater responsibility while also remaining in the classroom. Underperforming teachers do not always receive the targeted assistance they need to improve and, even when necessary, underperformers are not consistently removed from their positions.

The report noted that, in contrast to the proposed link to evaluations, “traditional salary schedules link teachers’ pay increases nearly exclusively to their years of service, coursework, and degrees rather than to student achievement.”

The report accordingly recommended that the state should work with teachers’ unions to “support districts in developing and piloting career lattices and other forms of performance-based incentives, such as performance bonuses.” As one example, it promoted “tying performance levels to additional responsibilities that contribute to the larger mission (e.g., coaching less-accomplished teachers, developing and refining lesson plans or evaluation tools), [so that] schools can amplify those strengths for the good of the school.” This “apprenticeship approach to developing teachers ... institutionalizes the interactions between more accomplished teachers and their less-experienced peers.” Further, “linking compensation to merit through a career lattice also has the benefit of being in line with the stated preferences of new teachers.” The report cited a 2006 report released by the Center for American Progress, quoting a poll “that indicated that 69 percent of new teachers [in the United States] agreed that highly effective teachers should receive higher salaries than other teachers.” It made clear that performance bonuses need not be limited to individuals who made significant contributions to a school’s success but could be, as a matter of determination by schools, put toward such alternatives as group rewards or needed school improvements.

Finally, the report encouraged the state to work with teachers’ unions to explore the use of performance-based penalties as a means for securing teaching improvement when teachers do not meet reasonable expectations, focusing initially on what it takes to remedy underperformance. It conceded that “while a sensitive topic, negative consequences are a necessary part of ensuring that all students are taught by high-quality teachers.”

4. Motivate and holistically support students to meet high expectations by addressing their unique needs

The report concluded that “high-performing educational systems take proactive steps to encourage and motivate students to reach high academic standards and provide them the level of support — tailored to their unique academic and nonacademic needs — they need to be successful.” It pointed out that “this requires that students and their families recognize the importance of high academic achievement, that students with academic or nonacademic needs receive extra support, and that all students are meaningfully rewarded for meeting expectations.”

The report made the following proposals to strengthen student support:

Develop a systemic approach for diagnosing academic and nonacademic needs.

The report addressed the academic and nonacademic needs of students, underscoring the necessity of “a set of indicators that can identify students on an individual basis.” It thereby recommended state “development of diagnostic

tools to detect students who are at risk of failing to meet academic expectations for either academic or nonacademic reasons.” The report identified these tools “as including academic indicators such as grades, test scores, and number of times failing a class or grade, as well as nonacademic indicators, such as absences or disciplinary issues.”

Ohio law already requires that districts provide academic intervention services to “students who score below the proficient level on a reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, or science proficiency or achievement test or who do not demonstrate an academic performance at their grade level based on the results of a diagnostic assessment.” The report advocated mandating student intervention plans conforming to the format of the tools employed. Where called for, these plans could intersect with programs for nonacademic services such as dropout recovery programs, community outreach, enrichment, and other activities.

Ensure that all students with identified needs receive effective support from the most appropriate entity, among schools, districts, ESC’s, or other governmental and nongovernmental entities.

The report stated that “if students are to receive the best help available, governmental agencies, businesses, community-based organizations, and communities must provide coordinated services.” Acknowledging that this is “no small task,” it cited the example of Scotland as a leader in coordinated student supports: “Scotland’s Additional Support for Learning Act accomplished this by first requiring educational authorities to identify and meet “additional support needs” for all students. These needs could include anything from a mental handicap, to being a teenage mother, or the victim of bullying. Scottish schools create “coordinated support plans” for these students, drawing on the resources of other government agencies. As reinforcement, the Act also requires health and social agencies to cooperate with education in “assessment, intervention, planning, provision, and review” for students needing support. It also gave parents the right to request additional diagnostics for their children or mediation services to help coordinate the services. Ohio could learn from this pragmatic and coherent approach, which puts the school at its heart.”

Establish tangible incentives for students to demonstrate high academic achievement.

It is a core precept of any plan for systemic reform that “the people who have the greatest influence over student success are students themselves.” A well-documented finding, then, is that “especially in middle and high school years, students make real choices about the level of achievement they want to attain” such that “the difference between success and failure often hinges on whether a student thinks he or she will gain something from doing well in school.” As stated by the report: “That means they need to see how they will benefit in the years immediately after high school.”

One recommendation that follows is that the state “should provide college scholarships to lower-income students who take a college-ready load and demonstrate strong performance on standardized tests.”

Mount a statewide public campaign to promote a culture of high educational attainment.

The report noted that “surveys make clear that most Ohioans value education and believe that raising the educational level of a community will lead to better social and economic conditions in that community.” Yet it also cited the fact that “more than 20 percent of Ohio’s students silently opt out of the system, indicating either a failure to recognize the urgency of obtaining an education or an inability to find the support that would allow them to succeed.”

The report concluded that “Ohio has strong incentives to overcome the disconnect between the larger community and the students who are dropping out or performing below their ability.” It recommended the following:

A coalition of key stakeholders — business and community leaders, legislators, education policymakers, and educators — should provide a unified front in a public campaign on the theme that “high achievement for all students is an imperative for Ohio.”

All stakeholders have unique and compelling perspectives about the need for high achievement. One unified argument for high achievement should be developed that will resonate with audiences at every level of the system. A variety of channels should convey this message broadly and continuously, eventually infusing it into the popular culture.

In 1998–99, England supported its national reading initiatives through a yearlong media campaign. To support schools’ focus on literacy, parents were urged to spend time reading with their children. Literacy themes appeared in the plot of ongoing television series, on popular consumer products, and on billboards. Libraries promoted their services rigorously, and government provided financing for schools to restock their bookshelves. Having the same message reach every segment of society in multiple ways had an impact — polls indicated that more parents read to their children at bedtime and students’ literacy levels rose.

5. Ensure that funding is fairly allocated and linked to accountability

The report found that “financial support for principals, teachers, and students is the bedrock of high support for an education system, but it is well-established that Ohio’s school funding system is broken.” To make all other reforms possible, the report recommended that the state first “increase the transparency of school fiscal data and hold schools accountable for improving efficiency.” This is necessary to “assure Ohioans that their tax dollars are being spent well in schools and to help policymakers to better understand the true costs of a high-quality education.” The report next called for “implementing a weighted student funding program to ensure that dollars follow students to the public school building where they are educated.” In this way, this restructuring, “along with the devolution of budget authority, will give principals the support that they need to deliver results.” The common sense objective may therefore be succinctly expressed: to simplify and redesign the state’s funding formula to account for the true costs of efficiently educating each student to the level of the state’s academic standards. Reform will then both increase stability and reduce inequities in district revenue. The report said two principles define all high-performing education systems:

- First, they assume a certain minimum amount of money required to educate a student.
- Second, they acknowledge that some students, because of disadvantages and specific needs, will cost more than the minimum amount.

These successful systems then organize their school finance policies to:

- Assess the minimum cost per student and the additional cost of educating different students with their various needs and disadvantages;
- Design a formula to identify, provide, and track funding to each student, according to their minimum and additional costs;
- Raise sufficient revenue to fund that formula on a predictable and stable basis;
- Distribute that revenue to schools to ensure that it follows the student to the public school where they are educated;
- Evaluate and benchmark how well school officials use funds allocated to their students to drive achievement; and
- Provide technical assistance and targeted interventions to help school officials use their resources more effectively and efficiently.

The report concluded that unless Ohio reconfigures its school finance system to efficiently channel additional resources to schools with its most disadvantaged students, “its funding system will not be internationally competitive.”

It made the following proposals to strengthen the state’s finance and accountability policies:

Measure, benchmark, and evaluate school-level efficiency.

The report found “almost no usable fiscal data existing on Ohio’s schools,” denying policymakers any solid basis to assess how resources are managed at the state level. The “opacity of the system” also means that the state “does not have the information it needs to provide technical assistance with resource management.” It recommended that Ohio first “should make school operations transparent and measure school efficiency” by “establishing standardized reporting procedures for collecting detailed financial data at the school and district levels.” To ensure relevance, the standards ought to be designed with inputs from principals and officials responsible for state and local finances.

At the same time, the report recommended that the state hold schools accountable for their fiscal performance by “benchmarking schools’ efficiency and value.” Low-efficiency schools “should be subject to targeted interventions to improve resource management.” Thus, in England: “The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), the agency responsible for school inspection, evaluates financial as well as academic performance. In terms of technical assistance, England has established a Center for Procurement Performance to identify and encourage adoption of better procurement programs across all parts of the system; currently, the center is launching an e-procurement market system for schools and has adopted an “efficiency goal” of saving 1.4 billion pounds (about \$2.7 billion) by March 2008. Within the United States, numerous services are available to help Ohio design a robust efficiency benchmarking system and the technical assistance capability to support it. Firms like Alvarez & Marsal have had a great deal of success in working with school districts to use resources as effectively as possible to drive student achievement, most notably in St. Louis. In neighboring Michigan, the state government has contracted with Standard

& Poor's to provide a range of information services to the public that include both academic and fiscal performance measures. Ohio can and should begin to evaluate and improve school performance in this more holistic manner."

Ensure that every public school building receives resources based on the number and needs of its students.

The report recommended that "Ohio should implement weighted student funding and building-based budgeting," citing the practices of a "long [and growing] list of high-performing school systems." As examples, "in Edmonton [Canada], England, and Victoria [Australia], the percentage of funding distributed to each school on the basis of a weighted formula is 92 percent, 85 percent, and 85 percent, respectively ... And in the United States, New York City has just unveiled a plan to distribute funding between its schools on the basis of a weighted formula." It stated that: "Ohio should require that districts use a state-funding formula to distribute nearly all of their money directly to their schools ... This shift aligns with a proposal ... to give principals control over their budgets and increased accountability; together, principal autonomy and weighted student funding would ensure that newly empowered principals have the resources they need to rise to the performance challenge they face."

Change the funding formula to more accurately account for the true costs of educating each student.

The report recommended institution of a four-tier funding formula, defined as follows:

1. "Fixed costs" contain a minimum amount of funding for each school based on economies of scale, as well as a "sticky cost" amount based on lagged pupil counts. This allocation for students who have left should be limited to one to two years as the school adjusts to lower enrollment. England uses a similar system of actual and lagged pupil counts to cushion schools temporarily from funding losses when many students depart. In addition, the State Board of Education has recently adopted recommendations for adjusting Ohio's determination of average daily membership (pupil counts) in schools, which suggests the inclusion of a similar provision.
2. "Base costs" contain the per-student funds necessary to educate a student to the level of the state standards under the best possible circumstances (i.e., no disadvantages, school operating with best practice efficiency).
3. "Student disadvantage funds" contain extra weighting for each student based on the specific characteristics, such as grade level, socio-economic and family characteristics, disabilities, and special needs. This weighting would be a variable to account for the fact that educating the first student with a specific disadvantage requires a different amount of funding than educating the 50th. These funds would subsume all predecessor programs with similar purposes, such as PBA.
4. "Discretionary grants" contain the only funds distributed outside of the formula and would be reserved for specific innovation and targeted support efforts. They should take up a relatively small proportion of total funds.

Ensure that Ohio’s revenue system provides the formula funding amount to each individual school on a predictable and stable basis.

The report noted that the state revenue system suffers from instability of local revenue so that many districts must “constantly (and only sometimes successfully) search for funding from local sources to just keep up with inflation.” It identified two very negative effects: “It makes long-term planning almost impossible as no one knows what level of funding may [or may not] be available. It also means that school officials must spend more time campaigning for the passage of new taxes and may have less time to focus on improving student performance.”

As such, the report discussed alternative methodologies to remedy the instability and uncertainty in the current finance system — either by increasing the stability of local funding or relying on state funding.

Use a dynamic data-driven process to periodically adjust Ohio’s funding system.

The report stated that “even the best designed funding system needs to adjust to students’ changing needs and new data.” It noted that “districts like Cincinnati and Edmonton regularly met with stakeholders to revise their weighted student funding formula.”

6. Increase effectiveness of school and district ratings and interventions

The report declared that “to ensure consistently strong student performance in all schools, Ohio educators must turn around the state’s underperforming institutions.” It reviewed high-performing educational systems and identified a three-step improvement process typically followed to accomplish this objective:

1. Rating schools and districts based on student performance and attaching consequences to those ratings through law or policy.
2. Diagnosing the root causes of underperformance and determining the most appropriate interventions.
3. Intervening effectively in struggling schools and districts.

The report made the following proposals to strengthen school and district accountability:

Better align Ohio’s ratings and consequences to focus on those schools and districts most in need of support, based on all relevant measures of student performance.

While the report concluded that Ohio effectively incorporated several important measures of student performance in rating schools and districts, it said the measures were not appropriately aligned with consequences. Each school and

district is given a yearly rating on a five-point scale (Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, Academic Emergency), with identified consequences for years of missing the adequate yearly progress (AYP) required by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Because AYP does not reveal degrees of achievement or underperformance, Ohio applied to the U.S. Department of Education to incorporate a growth model into its AYP calculations. Absent a more sensitive measuring device, schools on the verge of requiring serious corrective action will not receive adequate support to prevent such an occurrence. The report also expressed concern that the state's ratings do not sufficiently register subgroup performance. As such, differentiated strategies for relief may be missed.

The report also recommended further prioritizing interventions, targeting first those schools with unacceptably low graduation rates. In particular, it noted that, "Robert Balfanz and Nettie Letgers of Johns Hopkins University, in *Locating the Dropout Crisis*, have used an estimated measure of four-year cohort graduation rates to identify about 2,000 high schools across the country that graduate 60 percent or fewer of their students. In Ohio, 75 high schools (representing fewer than 9 percent of the state's high schools) serving more than 72,000 students fit this definition. State intervention and support for this relatively small subset of all Ohio high schools in which the education pipeline is ruptured is both necessary and achievable. Taking significant action, starting with a careful diagnosis of the conditions in the school, would put Ohio on sure footing to improve the state's graduation rate. "

Strengthen the state's diagnostic function to uncover root causes of underperformance and identify necessary improvement actions.

The report recognized that "in order to decide which intervention options are most appropriate, Ohio educators need more specific information about the challenges facing individual institutions." It prescribed the following criteria: "This information should be based on expert identification of root causes through both quantitative analysis and qualitative observations of schools and districts. Whoever collects this information should have significant experience in school improvement and be objective and credible. "

In fact, the report pointed out that Ohio lacked the necessary expertise and objectivity "to determine the root cause of problems with schools and districts." It expressed concern that "it is all too easy for districts to take an intuitive approach to diagnosing the causes of underperformance based on their historical experiences with their schools." As a result, "districts may be prescribing lighter than appropriate measures given the challenges of removing personnel or closing a school. In addition, asking districts and (the Ohio Department of Education) to diagnose problems in the institutions they oversee poses a potential conflict of interest: identifying serious needs may reflect poorly on their own performance."

The report thus recommended going beyond test results to ensure that "diagnosing a school or district's core challenges ... involve classroom observations, interviews with leaders and teachers, and analysis of key indicators against an agreed-on framework that sets out the characteristics of effective schools and districts." It called for "centralizing the state's diagnostic function in a single organization so that reviewers can bring the best knowledge and expertise to bear."

The report cited examples and results of highly effective inspection models operated by England's Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and New York City:

The English approach to diagnostics more closely identifies root causes of underperformance than does Ohio's. OFSTED's review takes account of each school's day-to-day working and its capacity for change. Thus, the qualitative reviews allow a more incisive understanding of a school's challenges and also help inspectors determine the extent to which the school is able to improve under current management. When OFSTED finds poor student outcomes and poor quality leadership, for instance, it calls for stronger measures than it would for a school with bad test scores but competent leadership.

Furthermore, the English inspection model operates efficiently. Schools conduct their own self-review against the inspection framework prior to the formal inspection. OFSTED subcontracts with private businesses to conduct most of its inspections; competition among these businesses helps maintain high quality while limiting costs. Inspectors work quickly, typically spending no more than two days in a school. Within six weeks from the inspection, OFSTED issues and finalizes a rating, and the Local Education Authority (or LEA, England's equivalent of a district) creates a plan for intervention where this is required.

Between the 1998–99 and 2005–06 school years, England's approach resulted in a 53 percent reduction in the number of schools requiring serious intervention and an 85 percent reduction in the number of schools requiring moderate intervention. From the 1994–95 to 2001–02 school years, England also cut the time required for a successful intervention from 38 months to 18 months, and it has since fallen further. Ohio could achieve comparable results by adopting a similar process.

New York City — the nation's largest school district with more than 1.1 million pupils — recently instituted a quality review process based on the English model as part of its "Children First" initiative. The quality reviews are intended to provide a more thorough assessment of each school's capabilities for self-management and improvement. New York has hired Cambridge Education Association (CEA) — one of the largest inspection contractors used by OFSTED in England — to lead the process in this phase, and CEA is training New York reviewers so they can assume full control in the coming years. Since spring 2006, the city has performed approximately 700 quality reviews, and it is currently expanding the process to include all 1,456 schools. Although it is too early to see results, New York officials report that city principals are highly satisfied with the reviews.

The report emphasized that the diagnostic function should be organized to ensure objectivity either by creating a group of reviewers within (or contacted by) the state Department of Education or by establishing a separate office.

At both the state and district level, build the capacity to intervene effectively in underperforming institutions.

The report explained that "intervention is the final step in the institutional improvement process." It recommended that the state Department of Education "should increase its capacity to intervene in underperforming districts." As part of this process, it advocated that states oversee the execution of school improvement plans and take responsibility for collecting and disseminating best practices among districts and schools.

Delaware

In October 2006, a 28-person Steering Committee of Delaware’s education, business, government, and community leaders, having spoken with several hundred teachers, principals, parents, students, and citizens, announced a program for statewide education reform. Titled Vision 2015, the Committee described the program as “demonstrating an unprecedented commitment by Delaware to address the most urgent issue of our time: securing a high-quality education for every child in the state by 2015.” Referring to educational opportunity as the “economic and moral challenge of our time,” the Steering Committee declared, “as the data shows, we face formidable challenges at home and abroad. ... Unless we accelerate progress, we risk dooming our children and society to a second-class future, stuck with a growing share of low-wage, low-opportunity jobs. Equally important are the moral stakes. For too long, too many of our citizens — notably low-income and minority families — have been denied the fruits of the American Dream. The fact that only 1 in 10 Black and Latino students earns a postsecondary degree is unconscionable. Who are we — as mothers and fathers, as grandparents, as citizens — if we let these gaps persist? Who are we if we do not stand up for excellence and equity — not just for our own children, but for all of Delaware’s children? ”

On a national level, it noted that “countries such as Finland, Latvia, and South Korea are ahead of us educationally” and concluded that “educationally we are largely stuck in a time warp, ‘doing school’ the way our parents and grandparents did.” The Steering Committee further noted that “we use a nine-month calendar that was originally intended to free up students to work during the summer. Learning schedules are based on a factory model that assumed most graduates were headed to life on the assembly line. Teacher pay is based on seniority, degrees, and years of experience, rather than on levels of teaching effectiveness and success. Unnecessary rules and policies inhibit teachers, principals, and families. There is little incentive to innovate. The structure of our system means that too many decisions are made too far from the individual student. Too many students have been neglected.” Or, as the committee otherwise put it, “our current system and structure were built for another time; we are still using the equivalent of vinyl records in an age of iPods.”

Notably, the program for “bold” reform responded to a public education system producing results superior to outcomes achieved in California: among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Delaware ranked 27th in performance. Other results for Delaware students were roughly comparable: for example, only 30 percent of 8th grade students meet national standards in reading and math; only 25 percent of students who are behind in 3rd grade catch up by 10th grade; while half of Delaware’s White 4th-grade students are proficient in math and English, only 15 percent of Black students are; only 1 in 10 students of color earns a postsecondary degree; and only about one-third of high school students are appropriately prepared for college.

Delaware’s Steering Committee researched the world’s highest-performing school systems, drawing the following lessons from these programs:

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Principals control more than 90 percent of their operating budgets, placing decisions closest to the student, and the district offers a wide array of school choices to serve the diverse needs of students.

England: A three-phase improvement strategy — stronger standards and curriculum; major investments in improving teacher recruitment, training and pay; and expanded public-private partnerships — is yielding results.

Japan: The school year is 40 days longer, plus more than half the students at all levels spend more than two hours studying each night.

Victoria, Australia: The professional development of school teams is focused on delivering continuous improvements in student performance. A performance-based culture is emerging.

Vision 2015 concluded about these systems: “Their standards are more rigorous. They respect their teachers more highly. Their students work harder and go to school longer. Their systems are better organized. Their structures and rules are focused on performance. They have been willing to be bold and innovative to benefit their students and society.”

Plan for reform: Vision 2015

Vision 2015, the Delaware program to create a new public school system, was designed to “answer the central question: How can we best tailor learning so that each student succeeds?” Its objective was to assure that all solutions reinforce one another and position “students at the center ... [so that] the main changes must occur closest to the students — in schools and classrooms.” The Steering Committee defined six building blocks upon which it premised Vision 2015 in a “systemic and holistic way,” similar to the foundational recommendations endorsed for Ohio, as follows:

That means **setting our sights high**, with challenging expectations for every child, coupled with high-quality curriculum and additional instructional time to give students a good shot at meeting the higher standards.

It means **investing in early childhood education**, targeting more resources to high-needs children. We know that such experiences translate directly into long-term success.

It means **developing and supporting great teachers** who are able to customize instruction to each and every child. We know that great teachers are the most important influence in producing high-achieving students.

It means **empowering principals to be great school leaders** with enough knowledge, authority, and flexibility to get results. We know that exceptional principals are needed to support effective teaching in every classroom.

It means **encouraging instructional innovation** because we know that one size does not fit all. It means involving families to support their children’s learning. And it means **requiring accountability**, so that all involved — teachers, principals, parents, administrators, business and community leaders, legislators, and students themselves — are clear about their own responsibility for improving achievement and are rewarded for doing so.

Finally, our student-centered approach means **establishing a simple and fair funding** system in which resources follow individual students and are allocated based on their needs. We know some students, whether struggling or accelerating, will need more resources than other.

Each of these elements and the resulting recommendations by the Steering Committee is examined here.

1. Set sights high

The Committee found that only five states have academic standards “aligned with real-world demands of college and work,” only eight have “graduation requirements showing that students have taken rigorous courses such as Algebra II” and only six have “high school tests that are connected to college admission or placement requirements.” It noted that only four states “hold high schools and colleges accountable for preparing their graduates for 21st century success.”

The Steering Committee concluded that “students will need additional time to meet these higher goals.” It noted that, “Delaware students do not spend enough time focused on academics — partly because of increased noninstructional demands, partly because of an obsolete nine-month, 180-day school year. Students in many other countries spend more time in school on academic subjects. Here in the United States, we have similar examples, including the KIPP Academies, one of the nation’s most successful school networks, which are open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays and Saturday mornings, with several weeks of mandatory summer school. This helps explain why achievement at KIPP schools has soared. We also can better leverage technology to enable more individualized instruction. In Florida, some 31,000 students now can access their coursework online around the clock; students and parents alike say the learning is better.” The Steering Committee made the following recommendations regarding setting sights high:

Make sure our standards are as challenging as those that the highest-performing countries expect their students to meet. Review the standards regularly for relevance and rigor.

Establish and electronically distribute research-based statewide curricula.

Ensure that all schools use this curricula and a variety of learning tools to enable their students to meet the standards. **Some high-performing schools may opt out** and use their approaches.

Align content-specific teaching tools (diagnostic assessments, model lessons, pacing guides, etc.) and **classroom-based professional coaching** so teachers get the support they need to deliver high-quality instruction to every student.

Implement assessments that measure individual student gains over time, including fall-to-spring progress. Make sure tests are offered online as well as in traditional form and are tightly aligned with the state’s academic standards.

Require state funding for 140 additional school hours a year (from 1,060 to 1,200 total hours). Guide districts and schools in how to use this additional academic time to meet the needs of their students.

Implement the state’s stronger graduation requirements that prepare all students for college or good jobs, the kind that can support a family.

Expand distance learning to allow true 24/7 online learning opportunities.

2. Invest in early childhood education

The Steering Committee found it essential to ensure a strong early start for all our students,” noting that, “it is not surprising that studies show that attending preschool helps more children enter kindergarten ready to learn and leads to long-term educational success, such as increased high school graduation rates and college attendance. The impact of this is particularly strong for children from low-income backgrounds.” It cited national longitudinal studies showing that 67 percent of low-income students who attended pre-kindergarten graduated from high school, compared to 51 percent of low-income students who did not; 36 percent versus 13 percent attended four-year college; and 31 percent versus 55 percent repeated grades.

While participation in Delaware’s early childhood education programs is high compared to most states — the ninth highest overall participation rate in the nation, its subsidized pre-kindergarten programs serving about 95 percent of 4-year-olds from low-income families — the Steering Committee nonetheless expressed concern that “most child care providers have not received high-quality preparation.” It pointed out that in Delaware, “only about 27 percent of child care providers have earned a postsecondary degree, and just 12 percent have a degree in early childhood education or a related field.” But 5 percent of Delaware children under age 5 enroll in nationally accredited preschool programs.

The Steering Committee made the following recommendations to improve early childhood education:

- Expand the scope of state support for early childhood education** by providing tuition subsidies for all 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families (families within 200 percent of the poverty line).
- Require all providers to participate in the Delaware Stars for Early Success Program.** Over time, provide state subsidies only for programs that achieve high ratings.
- Mandate annual license renewals** for all early child care and education providers to improve the quality of early childhood education.
- Support the professional development** of early education staff.
- Build data systems to enable pre-kindergarten and K–12 programs to share information seamlessly** and track the educational progress of students.
- Encourage greater coordination of services** across agencies for children birth to age 3.

3. Develop and support high-quality teachers

The Steering Committee found that “the research is clear, compelling and not surprising: Students with good teachers do well in school. This is true for all students, regardless of race, income or other characteristics.” It stated that Delaware must “do more to attract and retain the best teachers by creating a more professional environment — including relevant professional development, an opportunity to work with colleagues and less red tape that distracts from quality instruction.” In particular, it noted that, “many of our best teachers say their training often lacks continuity and follow-up support and is not customized to meet their individual needs. Evaluations seldom produce actionable recommendations. Our teachers have few opportunities to work with each other or to advance their careers, unless they want to leave the classroom and become administrators. Pay is based mainly on seniority, not on a teacher’s ability to raise student achievement or mentor younger colleagues. ... We also have challenges hiring and retaining great teachers. As a nation, fewer of our most talented young people are entering the teaching profession, and almost 50 percent of new teachers leave within the first five years.”

The Steering Committee underscored that, “while more states now provide incentives for teaching certain subjects, such as mathematics and science, or teaching in high-need, low-performing schools, Delaware does not.” It also explained that 11 states tie part of a teacher’s evaluation and compensation to student achievement or improvement and identified, “encouragingly, school districts in cities such as Chattanooga, TN, and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and systems in countries such as England, Japan, and South Korea as having totally transformed their approach to training and career development,” producing “strong and rising” outcomes in student performance and teacher satisfaction.

It made the following recommendations to improve teaching quality:

Treat teachers as professionals with increased pay and a new career path, whereby salary advancement and career opportunities are based on performance according to clear standards, rather than years of service and degrees. Performance measures should take into account gains in student achievement. Link both pay and advancement to progress along the career path, which includes positions such as mentor and master teacher.

Move to a negotiated statewide teacher salary structure to reduce inequities across the state. **Provide incentives** to attract teachers to high-need subjects and high-need schools. **Give bonuses for strong school performance.**

Clearly define what it means to be an outstanding teacher. Revise the formal evaluation process to measure teacher progress against this standard. Include measures of gains in student achievement, student and parent feedback, and skills as observed by trained in-class evaluators. **Ensure that the evaluation process provides teachers with specific and actionable feedback on ways to improve.**

Significantly increase in-classroom coaching and mentoring to replace isolated professional development workshops. Closely align coaching with the state's curriculum and individual teachers' needs.

Strengthen higher education's teacher preparation and professional development programs to help fulfill Vision 2015's commitment to having the highest-quality teachers and leaders in every school.

Establish professional development centers to allow teachers and principals to share best practices.

Use a creative new statewide approach to hire teachers earlier and recruit and train an expanded pool of teachers from multiple sources, strengthening district efforts, and targeting high-need areas and subjects.

Create incentives and supports for schools to help new teachers succeed: realistic course loads, class sizes, and assignments.

4. Empower principals to lead

The Steering Committee stated that "principals must have the authority, resources and know-how to meet the individual learning needs of each child." It observed that "principals believe that their most important role is that of instructional leader, but most spend so much of their time managing a hodgepodge of other activities — such as day-to-day building operations — that their ability to provide valuable leadership and guidance is often compromised." Its conclusions focused on expectations for principals and the means for achieving accountability, stating that, "principals must be accountable for the performance of their school and given authority over the key elements of their school: people, resources, and time. Greater flexibility will further enable principals to work collaboratively with their school teams to use resources so that they best meet the highest educational standards. ...

Access to timely and more detailed information about student performance would help principals and their staffs target interventions more precisely. Delaware’s testing system, although it has many strengths, is limited; for instance, it does not measure individual gains in student performance from fall to spring, and results come back too late in the year to help teachers modify their instruction. Just as troubling, principals are stifled by a federally mandated accountability system that is based largely on compliance, rather than one that is focused laser-like on student results.”

The Steering Committee made the following recommendations to empower principals:

Give skilled principals broader control of decision making related to people, resources, and time, and in return, **hold them accountable** for student achievement and the performance of their school.

Allow school leaders to choose among approved providers of educational services.

Create a statewide base salary schedule for principals, with significant performance bonuses tied to the achievement of goals as measured on a standardized principal scorecard.

Provide the technology that principals and their school teams need to improve instruction, strengthen management, and raise student achievement. Create a single, user-friendly centralized data bank, which includes student performance, human resources, and financial data from across the state.

Make appropriate information instantly accessible to all users: principals, teachers, parents, students, state and district-level administrators, school boards, and the general public.

5. Encourage innovation and require accountability

The Steering Committee recognized that “a results-based system changes the focus and redefines roles for policymakers, school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, families, community groups, and business alike,” noting, for instance, that “struggling schools do not always receive the expert assistance they need.” As “the business of learning cannot be the business of educators alone,” it is essential that “schools and families ... support one another.” It follows that the state “must empower families with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be full partners in their children’s education.”

The Steering Committee made the following recommendations to promote increased innovation, accountability, and parental involvement:

Offer leadership and advocacy training to families and institute school-based family liaisons to strengthen school-family ties.

Strengthen online tools and outreach programs to inform parents about their children’s progress and school’s academic standards and to help families reinforce classroom learning at home.

Create a statewide Office of Innovation to disseminate best practices and new programs to schools and communities where these innovations can be most effective.

Appoint an “equity advocate,” working within the Office of Innovation, to ensure that the special needs of students and communities are identified and matched with effective resources and programs.

Create a pool of funds to strengthen school-community and school-business partnerships to provide students with the necessary supports.

Define what it means to be a world-class school. Use a common scorecard measuring individual student achievement gains over time, student engagement and retention, family-school interactions, fiscal accountability, and “customer satisfaction” among students, parents, and teachers.

Establish a stronger school accountability system, increasing focus on student achievement, not just compliance with state and federal regulations.

Conduct regular on-site reviews of all schools, using teams of experienced educators and parents, and evaluating lower-performing schools more frequently. And **create “school improvement teams”** to help principals, teachers, and parents rapidly improve low-performing schools.

Identify and provide funding to start and replicate best practice schools that work.

Clearly define effective family and community engagement and determine how it can be measured.

6. Establish a simple and equitable funding system

The Steering Committee found that “educating all students to high, world-class standards will require that we rethink how education funds are raised and spent” so that “some programs will require additional resources” and the state “must redirect millions of dollars in current spending into more productive uses.” It pointed out that “because teachers’ salaries increase with education and experience, resources for schools can vary widely based on where more experienced teachers serve” and “as a result, schools with high percentages of low-income or special education students do not always get the resources they need.”

The Steering Committee also criticized the restrictions placed on educators by the Delaware school finance system, noting that “virtually all state funds come with strings attached.” It noted that “district superintendents can choose how to spend only 8 percent of state funds, with the rest earmarked for specific efforts. School principals receive zero discretionary funds from the state.” Thus, it concluded: “If we believe that the best decisions are made closest to the student, this current structure must change.”

The Committee made the following recommendations to transform education funding:

Create a weighted student funding formula to provide different funding for students with different needs. Students who need more support to meet the standards (such as special education students, low-income students, and English learners) should receive additional funding. We also must recognize the special needs of the gifted and talented so that changes to our system benefit each and every child, compromising no one.

Distribute these funds directly to districts and schools, giving principals flexibility in how these funds are spent, along with accountability for results.

Set the state share of education funding high enough so that schools do not need to rely on local funding referenda to educate all students to Vision 2015 standards.

Set statewide salary bands, linked to the new career path. This will provide flexibility at the school level and help ensure that all districts can attract and adequately compensate high-quality teachers and principals, thus increasing the quality of instruction statewide.

Ensure that budget information is transparent, understandable, and readily available to all interested parties, from principals to taxpayers.

Engage in a careful analysis of how our current education dollars could be spent more effectively or allocated differently.

Use a common scorecard to hold schools and districts accountable for the academic results of their spending choices.

A coherent system, focused on change

The Steering Committee saw these six building blocks as an interrelated set of instruments for systemic reform. Once implemented, it foresaw that “these changes will help us become a system driven by results, not compliance, with a tighter focus on *how* money is spent, not just on *how much* money is spent.” It summarized: “We know that some investments, such as early childhood education and quality support for teachers, have higher payoffs than others; Vision 2015 will allow us to target funding most effectively. These changes also will allow us to provide additional resources to those who need them most, including students with special needs, who do not speak English, who start school two or three years behind, or who have special talents. Giving principals additional spending flexibility will enable them to target resources where they can make the most difference. And giving everyone inside and outside the schools access to timely and understandable budget information will encourage a new level of openness and accountability.

To lay the foundation for a phased-in implementation, the Committee defined its early work as “focusing on the training and recruiting of principals and teachers” and establishing “stronger standards, curricula, assessments, and data systems.” It committed to “developing indicators to track how effectively money is being spent” and meeting the following benchmarks of systemic improvement:

Today, just **4 out of 10** low-income 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

By 2010, **6 out of 10** will be.

By 2015, **10 out of 10** will be.

Today, in both mathematics and reading, only **30 percent** of Delaware 8th-graders score “proficient” or “advanced” on NAEP, a test given to students across the United States. On both tests, Delaware ranks 27th among U.S. states.

By 2010, **35 percent** will be proficient or advanced, and we will rank in the **top 20**.

By 2015, **60 percent** will be proficient or advanced, **100 percent** will be above “basic”, and we will rank in the **top 5**.

Today, the achievement gap in mathematics proficiency between Black and White 8th-graders as measured by NAEP is **27 percentage points**.

By 2010, we will reduce the gap to **18 percentage points**.

By 2015, we will reduce the gap to **0 percentage points**.

Today, just **63 percent** of students graduate high school in Delaware.

By 2010, **70 percent** will.

By 2015, more than **90 percent** will.

In January 2008, a follow-up report by the Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware (LEAD) Committee, appointed by the governor, identified between \$86 million and \$158 million in annual cost efficiencies within the state’s \$1.65 billion education budget. The study made 16 efficiency recommendations in seven categories: Transportation, Purchasing, Energy, Salary and Benefits, Construction, Administration and Central Support, and the state Department of Education. The public-private group said the savings could be reallocated to efforts that more directly impact student achievement.

New York City

In January 2007, the New York City Department of Education issued *Children First: A Bold, Common Sense Plan to Create Great Schools for all Children*. The publication referenced progress achieved in New York City schools over the past few years, but acknowledged the “enormous scope of the continuing challenge.” Citing numbers comparable or superior to California results, it noted that 4 in 10 students do not earn a high school diploma on time; 4 in 10 students do not meet or exceed basic standards in mathematics or English language arts, and in 8th grade, 6 in 10 remain below grade level; and the situation is “far worse” for Black and low-income students, who on average score several grade levels below their peers.

Children First is premised on three ideas:

- 1. Those closest to the students should get to make the key decisions about what will best help their schools succeed.**
- 2. Empowered schools must be accountable for results.**
- 3. Schools should be able to count on funding that is fair and transparent.**

Each of these foundational ideas is examined in more detail here.

1. School site decision making

The plan prescribed that “the only way we’ll educate all students to high standards is by having a strong leader in each of our 1,400 schools.” It defined the necessary conditions to reach this outcome: “To attract the best and the brightest, we must give them greater control over what matters most: staffing, instructional strategies, budget, and an entire system of external supports to meet their needs. It is not fair to hold principals accountable for the performance of their students without also giving them the freedom to organize their schools for success.”

The report underscored the importance of good teachers, referencing research showing that an average student with three consecutive teachers in the top 25 percent of all teachers, as opposed to the bottom 25 percent, will rise from the 50th to the 60th percentile, instead of dropping to the 40th percentile. It attributed progress made to date to: a 43 percent increase in teacher salaries; the creation of housing bonuses to help recruit teachers in shortage areas such as math and science; and the lead teacher program, which rewards outstanding teachers with an additional \$10,000 a year to mentor and coach other teachers. A related significant reform included establishment of an “open market hiring system” by which experienced teachers could apply for vacant jobs and be selected by principals across the system. The plan also describes a new peer intervention program to assist poorly performing teachers improve their work in the classroom, agreed to as part of the most recent contract negotiation with the United Federation of Teachers.

Children First expanded the flexibility of principals to choose “the support services that give [their] students the best chance of succeeding and are most consistent with the priorities and focus of the school.” Under such approaches, for example, principals can gain: authority over key educational decisions in their schools, including instructional practices, professional development, organization, school schedules, and summer programs; greater discretion over their budgets; and additional discretionary resources. The plan had already redirected more than \$200 million from department bureaucracy to schools and classroom and was planning to reallocate an additional \$129 million dollars by fiscal year 2008. The result is that over time billions of dollars are no longer spent centrally “on behalf of schools” on resources school administrators and teachers may not find useful for school achievement.

2. Accountability for empowered schools and leaders

The plan states that “in return for increased autonomy, flexibility, and resources, we are holding school leaders accountable for educating all of their students to meet the [state’s] challenging standards.” Piloted in the city’s 332 Empowerment Schools, the accountability system has three main components — School Progress Reports, Quality Reviews, and Benchmark Assessments:

- **School Progress Reports:** “Starting next fall, every school will receive an overall letter grade (A–F) and subscores that compare it both to similar schools and to the city’s best schools. ... The grade will be based on performance (numbers of students at or above proficiency on tests in reading and math), progress (how much learning has taken place since the student entered the school, what educators call “value-added”), and the school environment (attendance, safety, and parent/student/teacher satisfaction). Schools will get additional recognition for improving the learning of low-performing students enough to close the achievement gap between them and other students.”
- **Quality Reviews:** All schools are required to be “evaluated by skilled educators who spend up to three days observing the teaching that occurs in classrooms and interviewing the principal, teachers, parents, and students.” The end product is a brief report summarizing the observations, an overall score and marked subcategories of special focus. The reports will be made available in 10 languages on the school Web site.

- **Benchmark Assessments:** Students’ proficiency will be measured four or five times a year in each academic subject and subset (for example, fractions, vocabulary, etc.) broken down by grade, school, and classroom. The data system used for these periodic assessments, known as the Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) answers such questions as “which schools and classrooms are models of effective practice” and “do certain school conditions, such as specific curriculum or specific type of teacher development, influence student performance more than others.” Specifically, “this online system, designed to be the most powerful in the nation, will help take the guesswork out of what good teaching looks like. It will allow us to closely monitor the progress of each individual student as he or she advances through the grades and moves from one school to another. And it will help principals and teachers to continue to transform our schools from a culture of uniformity, where every student gets the same instruction even if he or she already knows the material, to a culture of customization, where teachers use the best methods and thinking available throughout the city to tailor instruction to the learning needs of each individual student.”

The plan provides intensive training to help principals, teachers, parents, and students master the new data tools needed for effective accountability. “An emphasis of all our work here is to transform data and information into action, focused on “the main thing” — improved student achievement. Too often in the past, principals, teachers, and parents either didn’t have access to timely information, didn’t understand it, or just as troubling, didn’t know what to do with it. That will change.”

3. Funding that is fair and transparent

The plan recognizes that “if we want principals to meet the needs of each and every one of their diverse students, then our funding system also must treat students as individuals. ... Common sense and research show us that some students need more funding than others to meet our high expectations. Funds should follow individual students, not be tied to arcane funding formulas that often have more to do with long-ago political deals than with meeting our current educational goals.”

The report concluded that “today’s system is rife with inequities” and “our process for allocating funds is impossibly complex” so that “many students are chronically underfunded, most educators and parents are in the dark, principals feel that their hands are tied by centralized budget mandates, and it is easy to blame low performance on lack of funds when that may not be the case at all.” The phased solution adopted was “to join the growing number of school districts that are choosing to ‘fund the child’ ” by providing schools with a base allocation for each student enrolled, then adding dollars depending on the needs of students. The chart “Proposed Weight Ranges for Fair Student Funding” lists the proposed set of funding ranges, assigned to various characteristics, that undergirds what Children First calls its Fair Student Funding System:

Proposed Weight Ranges for Fair Student Funding

	Dollars per student
GRADE-LEVEL WEIGHTS	
K–5	\$3,000–\$3,750
Grades 6–8	\$3,000–\$3,750
Grades 9–12	\$3,000–\$3,750
NEEDS-BASED WEIGHTS	
<i>Poverty</i>	
K–5	\$450–\$750
Grades 6–8	\$150–\$600
Grades 9–12	\$150–\$600

English learners	
K–5	\$180–\$300
Grades 6–8	\$270–\$450
Grades 9–12	\$360–\$600
Low academic achievement	
K–5	N/A
Grades 6–8	\$450–\$1,050
Grades 9–12	\$450–\$1,050
Special education	
\$1,500–\$6,000	
Transfer under NCLB	
\$750–\$1,500	
UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR 2008–09	
Students with interrupted formal education	
Gifted and talented students	

Note: Fair Student Funding is a proposal for city tax dollars that are on school budgets. Figures do not include important school resources such as funds not on school budgets (like food and maintenance) or not from the city (federal- and state-targeted programs such as “Title I” for high poverty schools or “Title III” for English learners).
Source: NYCDOE (2006)

The report summarizes its new funding system this way: “Our new Fair Student Funding system is equitable. It is easy to understand; about two-thirds of a school’s budget will be presented on a single, simple page. It is empowering; principals will have more control over their budgets and additional incentives to welcome new students. Parents will know that, no matter which school their child attends, the resources will follow. And it makes good common sense; if we’re moving to meet the needs of students in the classroom, we must do the same with funding.”