

In 1999, the Ohio Department of Education commissioned a study to learn what Ohio schools had to do to improve our standing in the nation. At the time we ranked 23 among the states. Using the information, the state worked to create and align standards with accountability, raise expectations, and help local districts align their curriculum and teaching practices with the state. Today, we rank 10th among the 50 states in K-12 education.

The problem is, other nations are educating more of their citizens at higher levels than in the past. These better educated citizens of nations where workers are paid lower wages than are needed in this country create intense competition for our economy. Our only hope is to focus on developing our education system to enable our citizens to compete with the world. We never had to do that before.

In 2006, ODE again commissioned an extensive study, paid for by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to learn what we must do for our education system to produce graduates who compete against the best in the world. Ohio is the first state to ask, "What must we do to educate our children to succeed in the unknown future?"

The report and recommendations presented to the State Board of Education in February by the Achieve organization, formed by the National Governors Association to study education throughout the nation, describe three attributes that must reach every level of the system (classroom, school, district and state) to affect student achievement. These three attributes, which all highest performing education systems exhibit, are: High Challenge (set high expectations for everyone responsible for student achievement – students, teachers, principals, and superintendents) High Support (provide the necessary resources and build the capabilities of all to ensure their ability to meet those high expectations), and Aligned Incentives (both positive and negative consequences for meeting or not meeting those expectations).

Using these three attributes and looking at Ohio's current strengths and challenges the researchers found seven key implications for us to consider.

1. Continue to raise Ohio's standards and improve assessments to prepare Ohio's students to succeed in postsecondary education and the global economy.
2. Empower principals to function as instructional leaders rather than building managers and support this role with performance standards and incentives.
3. Align clear expectations for teachers with evaluation, professional development, and consequences with opportunities to provide educational leadership, diagnose student needs and self evaluation and growth.
4. Motivate and holistically support students to meet high expectations by addressing their individual needs, both academic and non-academic, with the cooperation of all community resources.
5. Ensure that funding is fairly allocated and linked to accountability in order to make the other six reforms possible. Researchers found Ohio's school funding system to be "broken".
6. Increase effectiveness of school and district ratings and interventions once excellent support is established both professionally and financially.
7. Provide all students with access to high quality, publicly funded school options that are all thoroughly evaluated with poor performers eliminated.

The complete report with supporting details can be read on the internet: www.achieve.org. Click on the "Publications" tab. On this page, click on "State Reports". The report, "02/2007- Creating a World Class Education System in Ohio" can be read there.

For the next few months we want to think about this report, encourage discussion among all our citizens, and evaluate the strength of the political will in Ohio to reach for a world class education system.

Is there a group you would like to have take part in the discussion? Contact me at: Jane.Sonenshein@ode.state.oh.us .