

Expecting More.

*Higher Achievement for
Ohio's Students and Schools*



GOVERNOR'S
COMMISSION
for **Student
Success**

This is the initial version of the
Commission's report as presented to the
Governor on December 14, 2000. A final
printed version will be prepared shortly.

The Commission's Work: What We Did

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Governor Bob Taft called for the Governor's Commission for Student Success to recommend solutions that will improve Ohio's schools significantly. He particularly asked us to look at making sure that what we expect of students is clear; there are sensible ways to measure their progress; and there is a practical accountability system that holds students, adults and schools responsible for results.

The Governor appointed 33 Ohioans—more than half of whom are or have been professionally involved in education—to serve on the Commission. We are parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, legislators, and business and community leaders.

Under the chairmanship of William F. Patient, with co-chairs William E. Kirwan and Martha W. Wise, the Commission began work on April 19, 2000. The Commission organized the work into three committees that met monthly: Academic Expectations and Public Engagement, Student Assessments and Intervention Strategies, and Accountability Systems.

The committees spent the last seven months researching and studying the issues; listening to local and national experts; hearing testimony from concerned parents, educators, students, administrators, and business and community members; discussing and debating the issues; and ultimately coming to a consensus about what should be done to improve student achievement.

In addition to the work of the committees, the full Commission met five times. These meetings provided additional opportunities for Commission members to hear from experts and to discuss, debate and form

consensus around the Commission's recommendations. All Commission meetings were open to the public, and many Ohioans took the opportunity to listen to and share in the Commission's work.

We also reached out to virtually all of Ohio's leading education organizations and professional associations. The Commission's work benefited from their insights and guidance. Our final report is more informed because of their participation.

Early on, the Commission created a Web site to support its communications efforts. The Web site contains information on the Commission and its charge, meeting notices, meeting minutes, research findings, and an e-mail address to contact the Commission directly.

From the initial charge, the Governor encouraged the Commission to listen, and this became a guiding principle for our ongoing work. Along with the research and presentations we heard at our meetings, the Commission also undertook a series of 16 focus groups, public opinion polling of 1,000 Ohioans and 28 constituent group meetings to better understand Ohioans' thoughts and concerns about standards-based education. In addition, the Commission received a great deal of written input—through both e-mails and other written correspondence. Nearly 2,000 Ohioans were a part of these efforts, and their input and advice were instrumental in helping shape and define the Commission's recommendations.

December 14, 2000

We Heard You

The recommendations contained in this final report of the Governor's Commission for Student Success are a response to:

Students, who want to know what they are expected to learn and that their education will prepare them for success in college, the workplace and life. **Parents**, who want higher academic standards for their children, more information about whether their children are meeting those expectations and quality teachers who can help their children succeed. **Teachers**, who want clarity about what they are expected to teach the children in their classrooms and a credible, useful student assessment system that is aligned with the state's academic standards. **School administrators and local boards of education**, which want the flexibility to pick the best ways to help their students learn and a better understanding of what their schools will be held accountable for. **Colleges and universities**, which want students who are more ready to learn and who require less remedial help. **The business community**, which needs knowledgeable and skilled employees who can solve problems and think and communicate clearly. **Public officials**, who want assurances that their attention to creating better schools actually is making a difference in producing the results the public wants. **Taxpayers**, who want assurances that their tax dollars are being used effectively.



Across Ohio there is a deeply held desire for schools to do a better job—for more students to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills to make good choices about their futures. Parents, teachers and taxpayers want Ohio students to have the education they need and deserve to be successful.

So do we.

For most of this year, the Governor's Commission for Student Success looked at education in Ohio and across the country. We looked at what is working, and what is not.

We heard from a lot of people—teachers, administrators, parents, students, and business and community leaders. And we listened through polling, focus groups and constituent group meetings.

The one thing we did not hear was that Ohio schools are good enough. They are not.

Raising Expectations

There are many wonderful public schools in our state, where competent and caring teachers are helping their students achieve high standards. But there are also schools where students are falling through the cracks or graduating without the knowledge and skills they need. There is an achievement gap where minority and poor children are experiencing far less success than their peers who are white or whose families have more money. That is unacceptable—Ohio is committed to the success of all of its children.

Today's world increasingly is based on knowledge. Workers no longer are hired for their ability to do physical labor but rather for their ability to make mental choices—to compute, analyze and communicate. For Ohio to succeed as a state, we need to provide a high-quality education to every child.

Other states are improving their schools dramatically, and some are doing a better job than we are of taking all students to higher levels of academic achievement. If we want to remain competitive, and we do, then we have to do better. We have to create a system of schools that leaves no student behind. Where we can, we need to prevent failure before it occurs and intervene swiftly with remedial measures when students are not succeeding.

The Commission's vision for Ohio schools is fairly simple, one we believe that the Ohio public supports and can be embraced by policymakers. We believe it is driven by a common commitment to what is best for students. We believe it reflects a sense of partnership and collaboration. We believe it can endure across



elections and not change every year or two. And we believe it involves clarifying expectations for student achievement, agreeing on how student progress will be measured, teaching young people how to apply what they have learned, providing adequate resources and needed interventions for students, and establishing a shared responsibility for student success.

A System Based on Clear Standards

By looking at what seems to be working elsewhere, and what makes common sense, the Commission has reached a consensus on what Ohio needs to do to improve student achievement. It will take time and resources. It will require flexible thinking, creative problem-solving, solid execution and a practical focus on results. There are no silver bullets, no quick fixes. But there are sensible solutions.

First, Ohio needs to start with clear, rigorous and reasonable **academic standards**—what we expect Ohio students to know and be able to do in key subjects. Today, Ohio does not have standards that meet this criterion.

and Achievement

There is little clarity and consistency across the state for what each student must know at any particular grade or before graduating. The process of creating clear standards has begun but must be accelerated, and the standards must be explained well to the public and modified where the public has significant concerns.

Second, we need to create a system of **assessments** to measure how students are performing against these standards. Ohio's current system of proficiency tests, which is based on learner outcomes approved by the State Board of Education, are not grounded in clear and rigorous standards, so they have become the *de facto* standards with far too little public participation. The new tests and other measures must be seen as reasonable ways to evaluate student progress, and they can't be seen as punitive, which is how many Ohio teachers and parents view the current tests. The assessments that the Commission recommends will allow students to demonstrate what they know rather than merely determine what they do not. They will be created with substantial input from Ohio's practicing classroom teachers and parents. And they will be designed to help educators and parents identify students' strengths and weaknesses so they can intervene to help students meet the standards.

Third, we need to develop **intervention strategies** that will produce real and lasting improvements in student learning. Our attention must be focused on improving daily classroom instruction and building the knowledge and skills of educators. We must create a more personal environment for learning and extending time on task to



give all students more opportunities to achieve. And we must provide schools and school districts with curriculum guidelines and research-based “best practices” that make it easier for them to help students meet the standards. Educators and schools will know *what* knowledge and skills students will need to succeed, yet they will continue to have the freedom to decide *how* to get them there.

Fourth, we need to reward success and not allow failure. We recommend an **accountability system** that is fair but that also has teeth. Today’s system provides penalties for students who do not pass the state tests but has little effect on the educators who work with them. The state annually will publish clear data about how each school, not just a school district, is doing. Schools that demonstrate progress for all students will be recognized and rewarded. Schools that are having problems will get extra help. And corrective action will be taken in low-performing schools that persistently show no improvement.

Building a Transition

It will take several years to fully implement the Commission’s recommendations—to put a new system entirely in place. In some areas, it may take as much as a decade. We would be pleased if it can be done in less time, but we want to make sure it is done right, even if that means taking an extra year or two.

What must be accomplished cannot be done by a few people, and it must have the understanding and support of the broad public, particularly educators and parents. Ohio’s practicing classroom teachers and other stakeholders must be involved in writing the standards, and the public must have the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the draft standards.

The creation of standards is well under way. The State Board of Education and Ohio Board of Regents already are working with Ohio’s classroom teachers and other education stakeholders to build academic content standards by adapting successful work done elsewhere to fit Ohio’s unique needs. This work must be completed for the benefit of all Ohio schoolchildren.

The Commission believes that work can begin on new student assessments as the draft standards are being completed. We also think that curriculum guidelines and professional development for educators can be developed concurrently. During this “construction period,” the existing system of proficiency tests should remain in place with significant modifications.

We believe the recommendations in this report make sense. We also know that for these recommendations to make a difference in the lives of children, they will require adequate resources, some of which can be reallocated from existing programs and some of which must be new.

As we present these recommendations to the Governor, the State Board of Education and members of the Ohio General Assembly, it is crucial to discuss these proposed actions with the people of Ohio—particularly with educators and parents. We have no doubt that Ohio students can meet high standards. We know that they can do as well as any students anywhere. But we need to be clear about what we expect of them and of the schools they attend.

This report will spell out how Ohio’s academic standards will be created, and how curriculum, assessments and interventions are aligned to help students achieve success. It will make clear how schools, teachers and administrators are accountable for student learning. It also will describe how we can go from where we are to where we want to be.

We submit this report with respect and commitment.

William F. Patient
Chair

William E. Kirwan
Co-Chair

Martha W. Wise
Co-Chair



Vision

The Commission's vision is an education system that makes sense—one that:

- Challenges all students to meet rigorous and reasonable academic standards that are widely understood and supported.
- Focuses on the needs of students, emphasizing results, not process.
- Implements credible assessment systems that give educators, parents and students information about student performance and notices early on when students are not doing well enough.
- Ensures students receive interventions as needed to achieve academic success.
- Supports teachers and relies on their skills, just as it rewards good teaching and solid achievement.
- Puts into practice effective, nonpunitive accountability measures that hold students, educators and schools responsible for achievement by attaching real consequences—in the form of rewards, sanctions and interventions—to performance.
- Refuses to tolerate persistently low performance in schools and provides assistance to schools that are struggling to improve.
- Possesses and makes effective use of the resources that are needed for success.
- Makes sure that all these elements align in an effective education system that prepares students to succeed.
- Never gives up on students no matter where they are in their education and believes that all children can learn at higher levels.

Why Bother?

It should come as no surprise that improving public schools is the top public priority in Ohio and throughout the nation. First, people have come to understand the value of a good education in a society that rewards knowledge; the evidence surrounds them. Second, they are frustrated by a system of public schools that seemingly does not produce graduates who have the skills they need to be successful in college or the workplace.

Consider:

- A recent study found that U.S. eighth graders lag significantly behind their peers in other countries in learning math and science, and it questions whether they will be able to compete in an increasingly technological world. The study concluded that students in foreign countries are learning at a faster rate. (*SOURCE: Third International Mathematics and Science Study, December 2000*)
- Of the freshmen who enter Ohio's public colleges and universities, one-fourth require remedial classes in English or mathematics before they are ready to do college-level work. (*SOURCE: Ohio Board of Regents*)
- Only one in 14 Ohio students is leaving high school prepared to participate in the state's emerging knowledge-based economy, according to a study of 15,000 seniors. (*SOURCE: Knowledge and Knowhow: Meeting Ohio's Skill Gap Challenge, June 1998*)
- Far too many Ohio students—25 percent—drop out before graduating from high school. (*SOURCE: Ohio Department of Education*)

Over the years, there has been no shortage of programs aimed at helping students and improving schools. Just ask any veteran teacher how many highly touted programs he or she has seen. Yet, states where schools are doing better have found that the solution is not a collection of programs, but a systemic approach. Set rigorous, reasonable standards. Measure student progress with good tests and other assessments. Establish clear consequences for success or low performance. Create a system that meets the needs of students.

That's why the Governor's Commission for Student Success is recommending a systemic approach for Ohio that is based on both good standards and common sense.

The Governor's Charge

Eight Questions for the Commission to Address

- 1 What is the appropriate state role in setting expectations for students' academic performance?
- 2 Are Ohio's current academic standards sufficiently clear, rigorous and explicit?
Do our existing proficiency tests measure the standards we care about? Should they be redesigned to bring them into closer alignment with our academic expectations? And how can we better assess students' progress in meeting these expectations?
- 3 How can we ensure that children in kindergarten through fourth grade learn the basics in reading and other academic subjects?
- 4 What can we do to make sure that our high school graduates have the knowledge and skills they'll need to succeed in college and the workplace?
- 5 What should the state do to ensure that a larger percentage of our students meet the established standards?
- 6 What should we do about those children who do not meet academic expectations, and especially those who are not reading at grade level by the end of the fourth grade?
- 7 How should we hold students and adults accountable for meeting standards and expectations, and how should we reward strong performance and deal with the persistent failure of schools to improve?

An overwhelming number of Ohioans agree that Ohio must establish clear academic standards if it is to significantly improve the quality of its schools and the performance of its students. Ohio's lack of clear, easily understood, concise standards was the key ingredient that Achieve, Inc., identified as missing in Ohio when it examined the state's education reform program in 1999. (*Achieve, Inc., is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization created by the nation's governors and business leaders to help them follow up on the commitments made at the 1996 National Education Summit.*)

That must change. We have learned that other states that are demonstrating considerable school improvement have set academic standards that are clear to everyone and become the expectation for everyone. If we want Ohio students to learn at least as much as, if not more than, students in states that have improved their schools, then we must set clear, rigorous academic expectations—standards—that are consistent across the state.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Clarifying Expectations

This recommendation is the bedrock on which all the Commission's other recommendations rest:

1 **RECOMMENDATION:** *Ohio should create clear, rigorous academic standards in key subjects and grades that are as good as or better than those produced by states that have created standards successfully. The standards should be high and realistic and should focus on the core knowledge and abilities that all students need to have before leaving high school.*

The standards we recommend will provide all Ohio students with a common floor of knowledge and skills that they must stand on to graduate. And, for many of them, these expectations will be far higher than what their schools now expect of them.

Once these standards are in place:

- **Teachers** will know with far more precision what they should teach and what they will be held accountable for their students knowing.
- **Students** will know with certainty what they are expected to learn and do.
- **Parents** will have a clear idea of what is expected of their children in every grade and what they can do to help their children succeed.
- **Communities** will know exactly what to expect of schools and graduates.

The Commission sees the new academic standards as a starting point and encourages schools and districts to raise expectations even higher.



Clarifying Expectations

As the Commission listened to Ohio citizens and educators, we found overwhelming support for statewide academic standards—particularly from school superintendents. But we also found some confusion over what is meant by standards. Some people, for example, saw raising standards as no more than requiring students to obtain higher grades. Others saw it as requiring teachers to teach the same way. The Commission defines academic standards as the knowledge and skills that students must have before graduating so they will have more opportunities for success.

Good News

Ohio does not have to start from scratch. Other states have set standards quite successfully in the past few years. National organizations, such as Achieve, Inc., have helped states benchmark academic standards against the best in the country and the world. Other organizations, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, offer different resources to help states develop rigorous, reasonable academic standards.

Ohio, too, is making considerable progress in creating academic standards. The Joint Council, which is made up of members of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, has created draft standards in mathematics and English language arts. Produced by teams of Ohio classroom teachers and school administrators, college and university faculty, parents and members of the business community, these draft standards are now the subject of considerable conversation across the state. Samples of the standards have been mailed to all teachers and the entire set is available on the Internet and has been widely viewed. In addition, the Joint Council has been holding meetings on the draft standards around the state to gather feedback from key groups.



The writing teams that created these standards set them at key levels of a student's career—defining the standards as expectations to be met by the end of primary (third grade), intermediate (fifth grade), middle (eighth grade) and high school (12th grade).

These draft standards have received initial praise for clarity, rigor and appropriateness for students. The Commission did not feel it had the expertise to evaluate the quality of these standards. But it does endorse the inclusive standards-writing process being used by the Joint Council, and it supports the Joint Council's "clustering" of standards at key grade levels. Therefore:

2 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the Joint Council continue drafting developmentally appropriate academic standards—as quickly as possible—by building on the best of what has been done in Ohio and elsewhere. Its immediate focus should be on creating draft standards in science, social studies (geography, history and civics) and technology, followed by foreign languages and the arts. And it should ensure that the standards-writing process continues to be inclusive, with the active involvement of Ohio's practicing classroom teachers, school administrators, parents and representatives of the business community.*

The purpose of this work is not just to create standards on paper, but also to make them reality for all Ohio students. Therefore:

3 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that, once adopted by the State Board of Education, these academic standards become the expectations for Ohio students.*

With its recommendation that all students be expected to meet the state's academic standards, the Commission is not calling for changes in how we deal with special education students or those for whom English is a second language. To the contrary, we believe that the state of Ohio must be in full compliance with federal rules and requirements in this area. More critically, we support alternative programs that commit additional time and effort to the education of these students—that offer the kind of intensive instruction and remediation that helps students meet the standards.

Once the standards are adopted, there needs to be still more clarity to make them most useful—on a grade-by-grade basis—to teachers, students and parents. Guidelines are needed to establish this continuum of knowledge and skills and to break the standards down into what should be taught when.

4 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state create guidelines that define grade-by-grade standards and develop curriculum models to assist teachers in getting students to reach the state's academic standards. Practicing classroom teachers should be involved in the development of these guidelines, which would be provided to all schools. But schools would not be required to use the "model" curriculum. The state also should provide these guidelines to parents to help them understand what their children should be learning in each grade and how parents can play an active and supportive role in their children's education.*

The Commission believes that the adoption of good academic standards and curriculum guidelines is

essential to better schools. But standards alone are not enough.

The standards must be widely understood and supported. People, particularly teachers and parents, need an opportunity to see them and to talk about the standards and what they mean. For example, Ohio citizens need to look at the fact that the mathematics standards require all students to learn elements of algebra and geometry before graduating. They need to talk through the implications of standards like this for their children and their schools.

As the standards are created and put in place, teachers will want and need considerable training in how to help all their students meet the standards. They also will need time to work with their fellow teachers to align their curricula and develop strategies for ensuring that all grades work together. Many teachers, particularly those who now teach mathematics and science, may need additional education to make sure they understand the depth of content they will be required to teach.

The Commission believes that the state needs to provide as much guidance as possible. The state academic standards will provide clarity about *what* is to be taught, but the Commission feels that districts, schools and teachers should have considerable latitude in determining *how* their students should be taught to reach those standards. Ohio has a long history of local control, and the Commission believes that tradition must be honored.





Clear Academic Standards: On the Way

Every day, 1.8 million students attend Ohio's public schools. They are required by law to go to school for 12 years, and the law tells them how much time they must spend in school. The law also requires certain things of teachers, and it sets standards for school buildings and buses.

But today, Ohio has not defined and communicated clearly *what* our students must learn or be able to do by the time they graduate or at various points during their schooling.

That is changing as the Joint Council of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents develops draft standards—clear, rigorous and reasonable statements of what students should know and be able to do in key grades.

Right now, draft academic standards have been created in English language arts and mathematics. Written in Ohio by Ohioans, these draft standards specify clearly what students should know and be able to do by the end of primary, intermediate, middle and high school.

Team members relied on their knowledge of Ohio's schools, students and people to draft the standards. They also incorporated "the best of the best" from world-class standards from other states and countries. They drew from the expertise of such groups as the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, New Standards, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Achieve, Inc. The draft standards reflect Ohio's needs, and they are comparable to the best in the nation.

Early in 2001, the Joint Council and its writing teams plan to work on draft standards in science, social studies (geography, history and civics) and technology. Later, they will create standards in foreign languages and the arts.

The draft standards in English language arts and mathematics can be viewed at: www.regents.state.oh.us/jointcouncil/academic_content.html

What Do Standards Look Like?

Academic standards define the knowledge and skills students must learn.

For example, there are nine components in the draft mathematics standards produced by the Joint Council. One of those components is “number, number sense and operations,” which is the ability to understand and use numbers. But there is far more clarity and specificity within this broad area at each grade level. For example:

- By the end of third grade, students must know and be able to add and subtract two- and three-digit numbers and show mastery of multiplication and division facts through 10.
- By the end of fifth grade, students must know and be able to use models and pictures to relate concepts of ratio, proportion and percent.
- By the end of eighth grade, students must know and be able to estimate, compute and solve problems involving rational numbers (including ratio, proportion and percent) and explain their solutions.
- By the end of 12th grade, students must know and be able to use rational and irrational numbers to solve problems.

Similarly, there are nine components in the draft English language arts standards. These components help teachers and parents by clearly defining what students should know and be able to do at key grades.



Ohioans Support Academic Standards and Statewide Testing

The Governor's Commission for Student Success worked hard to listen to Ohioans and respond to their thoughts and concerns. We surveyed the public and gathered additional insights through professionally moderated focus groups of students, parents, teachers and citizens. We held constituent group meetings all over the state to gather feedback as our recommendations started to form.

Among the things we learned:

- Education—better schools—is the top priority of Ohio citizens, surpassing issues such as crime, taxes, the economy and the environment.
- Parents and residents believe the Commission's direction of standards, state testing and accountability is a move in the right direction. For example, more than eight in 10 say establishing statewide standards in core subjects, such as mathematics and English, is a good idea.
- Ohioans support statewide testing—and the consequences that go with testing. For example, seven in 10 people in the state support the requirement that students pass a statewide test to graduate.
- While Ohioans support testing, they also put at least as much faith in measures such as grades and teacher evaluations for determining whether students should be promoted or should graduate.
- Significant numbers of parents, particularly mothers, believe there is too much statewide testing of elementary students.

- Ohioans particularly support proposals that encourage higher levels of skills in classroom teachers. Quality teaching is the public's top issue within education.

In the 16 focus groups and 28 constituent group meetings, we heard from many educators who want to make sure that the academic standards are put in place before other changes are made. Through the years, they have heard many promises that “things will be done right,” but they believe that many of those promises have not been kept. Many of them reminded us that resources and appropriate professional development are necessary for these initiatives to be successful.

We also heard from teachers and parents who are enthusiastic about the Commission's emphasis on diagnostic assessments in core academic subjects and early intervention for students. We heard strong support for prevention, intervention and remediation throughout the primary grades for students who are performing below expectations. But many people also told us that the results of diagnostic assessments must be reported promptly if they are to be useful to help students. Others cautioned against “layering.” When new regulations are put in place, they said, old ones must be eliminated.

The 64-page survey report, *Ohioans Consider Efforts to Improve Their Schools*, can be accessed on the Commission's Web site at www.osn.state.oh.us/gcss

Ohio must have the capacity to measure the progress of our students toward meeting the academic standards that are so critical.

The Governor's Commission for Student Success recommends an assessment system designed to tell teachers, students, parents and the community how students are doing and what they need to do to meet the standards. Indeed, the system is oriented toward helping all students and schools succeed, rather than merely identifying those that are not succeeding. It is an assessment system based on both tests *and* the evaluation of students by teachers and principals.

S T U D E N T A S S E S S M E N T S

Assessing Student Achievement

The purposes of the assessment system the Commission recommends are clear. The system would provide:

- Timely, useful feedback to students, parents and teachers on academic progress to enhance instruction and determine what additional help is needed.
- Multiple indicators to help teachers determine whether students are ready to graduate or be promoted to the next grade.
- Data that can help schools and school districts improve their performance and hold them accountable for that performance.
- Data to develop targeted professional development that improves the quality of teaching to help students reach the standards.

The existing system of Ohio proficiency tests has become controversial. Any conversation about schooling in Ohio quickly turns to an airing of complaints about the proficiency tests. The complaints are wide ranging. Some people complain that the tests dominate instruction and drive other subjects, such as art, music or physical education, out of the curriculum. Others complain that there are too many tests. And still others complain that these tests put too much pressure on young children.

The Commission has a more fundamental issue with the proficiency tests: While they are based on legally defensible learner outcomes approved by the State Board of Education, the tests are not grounded in academic standards that are clear, concise or widely understood. Indeed, the proficiency tests have become the *de facto* standards in Ohio.



Despite the criticism, many educators and parents argue that the proficiency tests have been beneficial in getting schools focused on results—more learning for students. As a consequence, some specific recommendations emerged from the Commission's deliberations.

5 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state phase out the existing proficiency tests and build a new set of achievement tests based on Ohio's academic standards. The existing tests should be replaced as the new ones are put in place.*

6 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the Ohio Department of Education review all of the state's current testing requirements and identify those tests that should be eliminated as a new student assessment system is implemented.*

7 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that achievement tests, based on academic standards, be developed in key subjects at key elementary grades. Students would be expected to demonstrate their ability to:*

- *Read well by the end of third grade*
- *Write well and do basic computation (math) by the end of fourth grade*
- *Understand basic science and social studies by the end of fifth grade*

8 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends a flexible achievement testing system that recognizes that not all students, particularly young students, learn at the same pace.*

9 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that Ohio's practicing classroom teachers, as well as administrators, college and university faculty, parents, and representatives of the business community, be integrally involved in the design and preparation of these achievement tests and all other tests included in the Commission's proposed assessment system.*

These standards-based achievement tests would cover the key subjects now included in the existing fourth-grade proficiency tests. But instead of the current five-tests-in-five-days fourth-grade proficiency tests, the new achievement tests would be spread over three years, starting with reading in third grade.

Ohioans agree all students need to read well, and they need to do it as early as they can. Students need to learn to read so they can read to learn. The Commission listened closely to educators who gave advice on when it was most developmentally appropriate to take these tests and to parents who were concerned that the existing system of five consecutive days of testing puts too much stress on fourth graders.

In addition, the Commission has suggested that the system be flexible enough to allow a student to take the tests early, while acknowledging that some students may need more time before they pass. For example, a student could take and pass the third-grade reading achievement test while he or she is still in second grade and not have to take the test again in third grade. And some students may require extra help and multiple opportunities to take the test in fourth grade before becoming proficient readers. The point is to worry less about exactly when elementary students pass these tests. Rather, we should work to get all students to become good readers.



We envision that students will achieve at one of four levels on these tests: below basic, basic, proficient or advanced, which are the same levels used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Two of these achievement levels—proficient and advanced—would be designations for students who have met the state standards. Students who are below basic or basic must receive the targeted instructional interventions they need to improve and meet the standards—and ultimately to pass the achievement tests. (See “*Helping Students Learn*” on page 20.)

The Commission believes that teachers will need detailed reports that help them tailor instructions for students. Also, parents need reports that are designed with them in mind—straightforward language in clear formats that they can use to help their children succeed.

The Commission would expect that teachers, students and their parents would receive plenty of advance indication of students’ progress toward the Ohio standards—long before the child takes one of these five achievement tests in third through fifth grades. But to make sure there are few surprises, the Commission recommends an early detection system of diagnostic assessments.

10 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that all school districts be required to administer standardized diagnostic assessments provided by the state to students in key subjects annually from kindergarten through eighth grade. These assessments should be designed to quickly provide teachers, students and their parents with an understanding of students’ strengths and weaknesses relative to their progress toward the state standards—and what they need to do to meet the standards. It is crucial that teachers and parents get training in how to read and use the results from these assessments. The Commission*

The Right Test for the Right Purpose

Testing has always been a feature of American education; teachers use tests daily to measure students’ progress and identify areas where more instruction is needed. But the last several years have seen a dramatic push for more tests to measure student performance against the rigorous academic standards that states have put in place. This new emphasis on testing has spawned controversies and led critics to argue that testing is forcing educators to narrow the curriculum, creating unwarranted stress for children, and causing teachers and principals to leave the profession, just as it encourages educators and students to do whatever it takes to raise their scores.

Members of the Governor’s Commission for Student Success share a different view. We see standards-based exams as important tools for identifying what students know and are able to do—and for deciding where educators and policymakers should direct their resources and energies. Yet, we recognize that different kinds of tests or assessments are required to serve the purposes outlined in the discussion of our student assessment recommendations. Consequently, we recommend that two kinds of tests or assessments be used to measure the achievement of the state’s students and schools:

- **Diagnostic assessments**, which are designed to give teachers and parents detailed information on the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. The results of these assessments will allow teachers to develop and deliver better instruction to help students reach standards.
- **Achievement tests**, which are designed to measure what students know and are able to do in key grades, set the bar for students, and hold schools accountable. Based on Ohio’s academic standards, these tests will replace the state’s current proficiency tests. For example, they will measure whether students are reading well by the end of third grade, computing and writing well by the end of fourth grade, or ready for high school work by the end of eighth grade.

also recommends that the highest-performing schools be permitted to use other diagnostic assessments than what the state provides.

11 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the Ohio Department of Education produce high-quality, developmentally appropriate assessments that school districts can use to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses in key subject areas. Practicing classroom teachers should be integrally involved in the development of these assessments. And while school districts would be required to administer only one set of diagnostic assessments each year, the state's assessments should allow schools, if they choose, to test students in the fall and again in the spring to measure the "value added" of the instruction the student received during the school year.*

Current Ohio law requires schools to assess students annually—from first through 12th grades—in key subjects. But the state currently does not pay for these "competency-based assessments," and the reality is that districts use a wide variety of assessments, many of which are not based on clear, concise and widely understood state standards. Under the Commission's proposal, the state would pay for these diagnostic assessments for reading, writing and math in kindergarten through second grade and in these three subjects plus science and social studies in third through eighth grades. The Commission recommends eliminating the requirement for competency-based assessments and replacing them with the diagnostic assessments.

The diagnostic assessments would be designed specifically to give rapid and useful feedback to teachers, students and parents. The assessments would provide a road map that would allow teachers to alter or intensify their instruction to help students, and that would give parents clear indications of their child's academic strengths and weaknesses.

Unlike the achievement tests, the diagnostic assessments are less formal, and local schools will decide precisely when to administer them. With the exception of scores for kindergarten students, schools would not have to report the results to the state. However, it is essential that the assessment results follow the student as he or she moves from grade to grade, school to school and district to district. The Commission heard considerable concern about what happens when students move among schools and communities. This is one of the reasons why we support a common diagnostic assessment.

The state's highest-performing schools—those that are determined as exceeding the state's performance standards and in which all subgroups of students, defined by race, gender, ethnicity and economic status, are exceeding these performance standards—would be permitted to use diagnostic assessments other than what the state provides.

Again, the purpose of these diagnostic assessments is to provide an early warning and a road map for instructional action and to help teachers and principals understand what additional professional development they need to be successful with their students.

12 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that all students be required to take middle school achievement tests in key subject areas—reading, writing and mathematics in seventh grade and science and social studies in eighth grade.*

In middle school, in addition to these diagnostic assessments, students would take achievement tests designed to measure how they are doing against the state standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies.



The purpose of these middle school achievement tests is to determine whether students are ready to do high school work. Again, students would achieve at one of four levels—below basic, basic, proficient or advanced. Schools would be required to provide additional instructional help to those at the basic or below-basic level—particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers and principals would use these test scores, as well as other measures, to determine whether students are ready to move on to high school.

13 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends the state develop, with the active involvement of classroom teachers and parents, a series of end-of-course exams that high school students could take after completing key courses. A prescribed number of end-of-course exams would need to be offered at all Ohio high schools, and students would have to take and pass a certain number, including particular courses, before graduating.*

Today, Ohio's high school students must pass a ninth-grade test based on eighth-grade knowledge and skills to graduate. The Commission believes that this standard is too low for awarding a high school diploma. Instead, we believe that students should demonstrate that they have met the state's new academic standards. That means all students will have to show that they have mastered the basics and more—mathematics that includes elements of algebra and geometry; clear writing; and probably science courses such as biology, chemistry and physics—before graduating. The Commission believes that there could be at least two ways that students can demonstrate that they have met the standards—either by passing a cumulative high school achievement test or by passing several end-of-course exams after they complete particular courses.

14 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that students could pass a standards-based, cumulative high school examination that covers multiple subject areas as an alternative to the end-of-course exams. The Commission recommends that the state ensure that its new 10th-grade test—the Ohio Graduation Exam—is aligned with Ohio's new academic standards before passing this test becomes a requirement for receiving a high school diploma.*

15 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends eliminating the current 12th-grade proficiency test.*

The introduction of end-of-course exams is a new approach for Ohio. It makes considerable sense for a number of reasons. It is also an approach that received widespread approval in the Commission's constituent group meetings, focus groups and polling.

For the first time, there would be clarity and consistency of instruction across the state regarding what must be taught in key courses, such as algebra, geometry, algebra II, chemistry, physics, biology, U.S. history, American government, American literature and composition. An algebra course in Cleveland or Springfield would need to cover the same material in the same depth and breadth as one in Westerville or Athens. This is not a statewide curriculum. Teachers and districts would be able to determine how to deliver the prescribed content, and whether and how they want to go beyond prescribed content. But it would provide consistency of expectations, and schools or districts that want to exceed the state standards would be encouraged to do so.

The high school assessment system would provide flexibility to students. Not every student would have to take every mathematics or science course, but each student would have to take more than most do now.



Too Many Tests?

The Commission's recommendations actually will decrease—by approximately one-third—the number of state-mandated tests and assessments for Ohio students.

There was considerable sentiment within the Commission, however, that all students should be tested every year, at least in reading and mathematics, and that those data should be reported to the state. Other states that are doing annual testing, such as Texas, have the capacity to produce a rich array of data about students and schools. And the data in many places have produced powerful changes.

But the Commission also heard two significant concerns in Ohio. First, there is widespread belief that there already is too much testing, particularly in elementary school. And, second, many educators believe that annual testing would be used merely to identify failure, rather than to help students improve.

Both concerns are deep seated and legitimate. The Commission listened to the views of educators and decided not to require schools to report the results of the annual diagnostic assessments to the state. The point is to use the information to provide more successful instruction for students, not to rank or label schools or school districts.

In addition, if a student chooses, for example, to take Advanced Placement courses and passes the Advanced Placement test, he or she could substitute that for one of the state's end-of-course exams.

High school teachers often complain that it is impossible to identify the value added that they provide to students, particularly when months or even years may pass between when students receive instruction and when they take a proficiency test. Under the new system, most students would take a class and then be assessed; instruction and assessment would be connected and the feedback would be much faster.

Teachers, like students and parents, are looking for clarity in the system, and end-of-course exams would provide that. End-of-course exams also would provide stronger alignment to university entrance requirements and reduce the need for remedial course work at the college level.

For students who either choose not to take end-of-course exams or are in danger of not passing enough end-of-course exams, the Commission's recommendations would provide flexibility and allow them to take the cumulative exam. This exam also would be an appropriate alternative for students from other states who transfer into Ohio schools in the last year or two of high school. The Ohio Graduation Exam would be based on the new academic standards. This exam would be set at the 10th-grade level and would be significantly more challenging than the existing ninth-grade proficiency test, which covers eighth-grade knowledge and skills. Students would have multiple opportunities to pass it, and they could take it in portions—for example, they could take mathematics or English language arts late in the fall and then science at the end of the spring term.

We believe it is crucial that the Ohio Graduation Exam be aligned with the state's new academic standards before passing it becomes a graduation requirement.

Therefore, the Commission thinks that while the test should be implemented on schedule, the class of 2005 should be required to pass only the reading, writing and math sections to graduate because only these sections will be aligned to the state's academic standards. The graduation requirement should be extended to science and social studies as soon as possible once they are aligned with the standards.

Again, the Commission's goal is to create a system to ensure that students achieve standards, not to put unnecessary hurdles in their way. At the same time, the Commission insists that no student be granted a high school diploma without having demonstrated that he or she has mastered essential high school work.

16 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that all school districts be required to publicly disclose what they test, when they test, who they test, why they test and who developed the test. This recommendation relates only to districtwide and schoolwide tests, not the assessments that teachers use every day in their classrooms.*

The point of the proposed Ohio achievement tests is to measure whether students are meeting the academic standards and to indicate to those who aren't how far they have to go. But it makes no sense to simply layer new tests and assessments on top of those that already are being given.

All state testing requirements need to be reviewed, and those that do not serve the purposes outlined above should be eliminated. Further, parents and communities have a right to know what tests their children are taking—and how the tests are being used.

	Current State Testing Requirements (including locally administered tests and assessments)	The Commission’s Testing Recommendations (including locally administered tests and assessments)
Primary and Intermediate Grades (K-5)	<p>Local Competency-Based Assessments Grades 1-5 ... locally selected assessments in reading, composition, math, science and citizenship</p> <p>Early Entrance Grades K-1 ... state-required “educationally accepted standardized test”</p> <p>Reading Guarantee Grades 1-3 ... state-required reading assessments</p> <p>Gifted Students Grades K-5 ... locally administered tests selected from a state-approved list</p> <hr/> <p>State Proficiency Tests Grades 4 ... five-tests-in-five-days proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science and citizenship</p>	<p>Diagnostic Assessments Grades K-2 ... common diagnostic assessments in reading, writing and math <i>(with questions to identify gifted students embedded in the assessments)</i></p> <p>Grades 3-5 ... common diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, math, science and social studies <i>(with questions to identify gifted students embedded in the assessments)</i></p> <hr/> <p>State Achievement Tests Grade 3 ... state reading achievement test Grade 4 ... state math and writing achievement tests Grade 5 ... state science and social studies tests</p>
Middle Grades (6-8)	<p>Local Competency-Based Assessments Grades 6-8 ... locally selected assessments in reading, composition, math, science and citizenship</p> <p>Gifted Students Grades 6-8 ... locally administered tests selected from a state-approved list</p> <hr/> <p>State Proficiency Tests Grade 6 ... five-tests-in-five-days proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science and citizenship</p>	<p>Diagnostic Assessments Grades 6-8 ... common diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, math, science and social studies <i>(with questions to identify gifted students embedded in the assessments)</i></p> <hr/> <p>State Achievement Tests Grade 7 ... state achievement tests in reading, writing and math Grade 8 ... state achievement tests in science and social studies</p>
High School (9-12)	<p>Local Competency-Based Assessments Grades 9-12 ... locally selected assessments in reading, composition, math, science and citizenship</p> <p>Gifted Students Grades 9-12 ... locally administered tests selected from a state-approved list</p> <hr/> <p>State Proficiency Tests Grade 9 ... proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science and citizenship <i>(to be phased out and replaced by the 10th-grade test to be administered in 2003)</i> Grade 10 ... proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science and citizenship <i>(not implemented until 2003)</i> Grade 12 ... state proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science and citizenship</p>	<p>Gifted Students Grades 9-12 ... locally administered tests selected from a state-approved list</p> <hr/> <p>State Achievement Tests Grade 10 ... Ohio Graduation Exam in reading, writing, math, science and social studies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Grade 9-12 ... end-of-course exams in selected subject areas</p>

NOTE: Since the Commission focused its attention on tests and assessments that are required for all or most students, it did not address the issue of the Work Keys/OCAPS tests. Therefore, these tests, which are required for 12th-grade students in districts that receive vocational-enhancement funds, are not included in this analysis.

What is important is not pulling the carrot out of the ground every so often and measuring its growth. What is important is making sure the carrot grows.

The Governor's Commission for Student Success' desire to create new standards-based assessments is not merely to measure progress. The most important goal is to make a difference for students—to help them learn more and succeed.

The Commission believes the critical purpose of the assessment system, both the achievement tests and the diagnostic assessments, is to assist teachers in identifying the instructional needs of students. And the Commission believes that the essential purpose of the system of interventions is to make sure those instructional needs are met.

S T U D E N T I N T E R V E N T I O N S

Helping Students Learn

In this context, the Commission uses the term “interventions” to refer to the wide range of practices that can be used to help students raise their levels of academic achievement. Most of these interventions involve more “time on task,” as educators put it. The point is not to lower expectations for some children, but to make sure they have enough quality time and help to meet Ohio's academic standards.

We heard from educators, experts and parents that we should not wait to provide additional help. In most cases, preventing problems early will be more effective than trying to fix them later. If we want students to be reading well by the end of the third grade, then we have to make sure they do not arrive at kindergarten never having been read to or not ever having held a book. We believe, for example, that schools that have significant numbers of students entering school not ready to read should put all-day, every-day kindergarten in place.

Parents are the first and earliest educators of their children. As Ohioans, we must do more to support families in this role — especially families living in poor urban neighborhoods and poor rural areas. Ohio is already working to support families by strengthening the education services provided through Head Start and similar programs. The Commission believes the state should continue building a comprehensive early childhood education system in collaboration with schools, school districts, childcare, healthcare and children services agencies, as well as statewide initiatives such as Family and Children First and Help Me Grow.

The early experience of *OhioReads* confirms the value of and need for expanded mentoring and tutoring programs in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics—particularly in urban and rural communities where the achievement gap dividing racial, ethnic and economic groups is most serious.



Such programs should be strengthened through training initiatives for parents, mentors and tutors.

The active involvement of parents is absolutely critical to a child's success in school. Because teachers cannot do it alone, preschool programs' capacity to offer parent training and information should be expanded. Ohio's common preschool assessment should be aligned to the state's academic standards and should be continued for all Head Start and public preschool programs. This assessment should be made available on a voluntary basis to all other preschool programs, and the state should ensure that all preschool programs have access to quality academic resources and materials.

While the Commission believes that the state has a clear and important role in establishing statewide academic standards, we also respect and support local flexibility in the design and implementation of instructional programs and other services to help children learn. It is appropriate for the state to say *what* should be learned in key subjects; it is much less appropriate for the state to determine *how* local schools should teach students to meet these standards.

The Commission subscribes to a philosophy that keeps the state's interest as narrow as possible and gives flexibility to local school boards, administrators and teachers. But, while flexible, the Commission's recommendations are oriented toward action: Where students are in danger of falling behind or not meeting key state academic standards, the Commission expects local schools to act aggressively. In some cases, we actually require action. The state will provide help—additional resources, technical assistance, training and examples of strategies that work—but local educators must be the ones who provide the necessary instruction to make sure students reach the standards.

17 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that schools be expected to provide intensive instruction and intervention services to students who diagnostic assessments show are unlikely to reach the academic standards. The nature of these services should be determined locally but could include summer school, extended time in school, tutoring assistance or smaller class size.*

18 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state provide the necessary legislative authority to local school districts to allow them to make mandatory such extended-time programs as summer school, Saturday school, or before- and after-school programs.*

The Commission's primary interest in recommending that the state develop and pay for common diagnostic assessments is to help teachers identify the strengths and weaknesses of students. However, that investment will be worthwhile only if teachers actually use the results to improve student learning.

The Commission heard a common theme from the schools that are succeeding around the state and the country—they provide more "time on task," giving students who are in danger of failing increased instructional time, either during the school day or outside of it. Most of them rely on summer school, before- and after-school programs, Saturday school, one-on-one tutoring, smaller class sizes, and longer school days or even longer school years. Many of these schools rely on some combination of interventions.

19 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the Ohio Department of Education regularly identify and disseminate research-based practices that provide additional instructional time and identify examples of where it is working to increase student achievement.*





The Commission heard that the state has done an excellent job identifying and disseminating instructional practices that work in teaching reading. We believe it can do the same thing with the best use of instructional time.

20 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends a more intensive reading guarantee placed at the third-grade level, as part of the state's new system of achievement tests. Schools would be required to provide intensive interventions to students who do not pass the new third-grade reading achievement test. Schools could choose from a range of interventions, but they must intervene to bring students to the point where they can pass the reading achievement test. In consultation with the parents of these students, schools would be required to prepare a simple, one-page, written academic intervention services plan that outlines what the school will do to ensure that those students learn to read well.*

21 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that in spring 2002, the decision on whether to retain fourth graders who have not passed the reading portion of the current proficiency test become an option for schools and school districts, but schools are expected to provide intensive intervention for children who are struggling to read beginning in kindergarten through grade 2.*

The Commission spent much of its time focused on strategies for improving the reading ability of Ohio's students, particularly its youngest students. We agree with the original intent of Senate Bill 55—to ensure that all students would be reading at grade level by the fourth grade. But we think the fourth-grade reading guarantee, as it is about to be implemented, is unworkable. There is a widespread perception that it requires fourth-grade students who do not pass the reading portion of the proficiency test to be retained. Most Ohioans do not realize that teachers and principals can still move students on if they believe the students are prepared for fifth-grade work.

The Commission sees test scores as an important trigger for action to help students, but we also believe in the judgment of teachers and principals based on other measures, such as portfolios or grades or other evaluations. The state should work in partnership with local schools to help identify the most appropriate measures for schools to use.

The Commission believes much more must be done to make sure students can read. We believe that in some cases local schools should decide that retaining a student is the appropriate intervention, but we do not believe that retention should be required by state law.

Instead of what has been seen as automatic retention, the Commission would require schools to choose from a menu of interventions. Those third-grade students who reach the proficient or advanced categories on the third-grade reading achievement test clearly would be expected to move on to fourth grade—and to more challenging work.

But for those students who score in the basic or below-basic categories, schools and school districts would have to create a simple, one-page, written plan, in consultation with a child's parents, that indicates what the school will do to help these students reach the proficient level in reading. For these third-grade students, that plan could include:

- Summer school
- Saturday school
- Before- and after-school instruction
- Individual reading instruction
- Additional reading classes
- Instruction in smaller classes
- Retention in third grade

Students who move into fourth grade would continue to get additional reading instruction. They would have at least two more opportunities before the end of the fourth grade to take the third-grade reading achievement test. Most of these students, the Commission believes, will pass

the test as proficient readers. But, for those who do not pass, but who score at least at the *basic* level, the school must choose and carry out individual intervention strategies from a smaller menu that could include:

- Summer school
- Individual reading instruction
- Retention in fourth grade

For those students who, after taking the test three times, still score in the *below-basic* category, we believe the school must provide one of two options—either an alternative elementary program focused heavily on remedial reading instruction (which includes mandatory summer school or an effective alternative) or retention in fourth grade. These students would be required to retake the reading achievement test in the fifth grade.

These interventions should be developed by the Ohio Department of Education in consultation with Ohio's practicing classroom teachers and parents. We urge the department to examine whether these interventions should include automatic retention if the student does not participate in the services that are offered. We also believe the department should evaluate these interventions to see which ones are working best under which circumstances.

It is the Commission's view that it will do little good, particularly in poor communities, for the state to mandate such interventions if they are not accompanied by resources to pay for them.

The Commission believes that the state's interest in reading is warranted. If we want students to succeed in all of their subjects, we know they need to be able to read well. It is for this reason that the Commission recommends such extensive academic interventions in the primary and intermediate grades. But the Commission also expects that schools to provide

significant help to those students who are not doing well enough in mathematics, science or social studies.

At the middle school level, the Commission believes schools should be *required* to provide extensive intervention services to students who do not achieve at least a proficient level on the seventh-grade achievement tests in reading, writing and mathematics. Schools should be *expected* to provide intervention services to students who do not achieve proficiency on the eighth-grade science and social studies tests.

The Commission expects the state to work with classroom teachers and outside experts in middle school instruction to develop the appropriate menu of interventions with a variety of programs, including alternative classes with additional emphasis on mathematics and English. It is crucial for all students to have a solid ability to read, write and handle mathematics before they move into high school.

Similarly, the Commission expects Ohio high schools to examine the new academic standards and determine how to restructure their instructional programs or add new ones to make sure that students reach the new graduation requirements. The Commission heard repeatedly that many high schools already are doing this in preparation for the more rigorous high school graduation test that is being developed.

Most of the work described in this section on interventions must be done by professional educators, mostly teachers. But they cannot do it alone. They need meaningful support from the community, as well as the active assistance of parents and volunteers. The Commission heard far too many stories of schools that tried to provide additional instruction, such as summer school, and were rejected by parents.

For our students, all of them, to be successful, it will take a partnership of all of us.

Strengthening Ohio's Reading Guarantee

The Commission is recommending that the current law be adjusted so that in spring 2002, the state would not require schools to retain fourth graders who have not passed the reading proficiency test, although local schools would continue to have the option of doing so.

Following is a comparison of the "fourth-grade reading guarantee" now in place with the more intensive "third-grade reading guarantee" that the Commission has proposed.

Current – Senate Bill 55

Starting in spring 2002, fourth graders who have not passed the reading portion of the fourth-grade proficiency test would be retained in fourth grade unless their teachers and principals determine that they are academically prepared to move on to fifth grade.

Proposed (Commission recommendation)

Third graders who have not passed the state third-grade reading achievement test would receive mandatory special intervention that could include summer school, Saturday school or placement in smaller classes. These students would receive intensive instruction in reading in fourth grade, where they would have at least two opportunities to retake the third-grade reading achievement test.

If they still do not pass the test, the school would be required to choose and carry out individual intervention strategies from a smaller menu of options that could include summer school, individual reading instruction or retention in fourth grade.

If these students still do not move beyond the below-basic category in reading, the state would require that the school provide one of two options: either an alternative elementary program focused heavily on remedial reading instruction (which includes mandatory summer school or an effective alternative) or retention in fourth grade.

Retention vs. Social Promotion: A False Choice

It's an old debate in education: Should students who are not performing at grade level be retained until they achieve academic standards, or should they be promoted to the next grade with their peers?

Most education research tells us that retention contributes very little to students' academic achievement. Yet, critics of social promotion rightfully point out that most socially promoted students are never able to catch up; instead, they continue to fall further and further behind academically.

According to the American Federation of Teachers: "Social promotion is an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everybody—for kids, who are deluded into thinking they have learned the skills to be successful or get the message that achievement doesn't count; for teachers, who must face students who know that teachers wield no credible authority to demand hard work; for the business community and colleges that must spend millions of dollars on remediation; and for society that must deal with a growing proportion of uneducated citizens, unprepared to contribute productively to the economic and civic life of the nation."

The choice between retention and social promotion is a bad one. That's why the Governor's Commission for Student Success agrees with a recent study by the National Association of School Boards of Education, which confirms that this issue—as it usually is framed—forces a choice between two poor alternatives, both of which result in unacceptable consequences.

The Commission believes there is a third and better alternative—a way to get all students to reach higher levels of achievement. It is prevention and early intervention services that are driven by data and supported by research. It is strategies that make substantial and lasting improvements in students' levels of achievement by improving daily classroom instruction and building the capacity of educators to promote student academic success.

This third alternative makes effective use of instructional support teams, tutoring and summer school programs, smaller classes, and creative after-school programs that stretch students' learning opportunities. It requires new and innovative teaching strategies to meet the needs of individual students. It uses transitional programs to help students move from elementary to middle school or from middle to high school.

This is the course that the Commission recommends for Ohio's students and schools. It is a strategy that refuses to recycle students through more of the same, just as it sees social promotion as a sign of failure for our public schools and our students.



Results matter. That's why many states and school districts are developing new accountability systems with rewards, incentives and sanctions designed to spur change and improve student learning. Effective accountability systems make clear who is responsible for what and to whom. They are aligned tightly with rigorous, reasonable and widely understood academic standards, just as they are linked to assessments of what students know and are able to do.

Schools always have been accountable for many things—for complying with state regulations governing hours of instruction and days in the school year, maintaining prescribed pupil-teacher ratios, ensuring school building safety, and submitting reports. What there hasn't been enough of is accountability for what matters most—the knowledge and skills of students.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Improving School Performance

The Governor's Commission for Student Success believes that this new sense of accountability must be a key ingredient of Ohio's efforts to improve student and school performance. We support an accountability system that recognizes good schools, identifies those that are struggling to improve and helps them get better.

In Ohio today, several elements of an accountability system are in place. Student assessments are being given in targeted grades and academic subject areas. Local report cards that measure schools' and school districts' performance are being produced and distributed to parents and the public. Some financial incentives are being given to schools that achieve significant improvement in academic performance. Almost all school districts are required to write plans

to help them improve the performance of their students. And, the Ohio Department of Education is providing technical assistance to approximately 200 school districts that are performing below the state's expectations.

Yet, the Commission believes that a more comprehensive accountability system is needed—one that includes a combination of rewards, incentives and consequences for students, schools and districts. We also believe that substantial improvements are needed in the current system.

Several defining principles guide the Commission's recommendations in this area:

- The accountability system must be based on the academic standards, student assessments, model



curriculum and teacher standards. The state needs to make explicit what students, educators and schools are being held accountable for.

- There should be no consequences for students without also holding adults and schools accountable. Adults should be held accountable before students.
- Ohio's accountability system should support the public's right to information on student achievement in each school and school district. At the same time, individual student privacy rights must be protected.
- Local school districts and boards of education must share in the responsibility for holding schools accountable, just as they have an obligation to ensure that resources are distributed equitably and targeted to students and schools that need them the most.
- Rewards and consequences should be attached to performance. They should be defined clearly and widely understood.
- The state should assist low-performing schools that have the capacity to improve or are capable of improving with help. Assistance should come before corrective intervention. But state action should be an option; the state cannot allow low-performing schools to fail indefinitely.

22 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state begin holding individual schools—not just school districts—publicly responsible for student achievement. The performance of schools and school districts should be measured both by the portion of their students meeting the standards AND by the amount of progress they are producing.*

Today, Ohio's accountability system focuses primarily on school districts, not schools. School district report

cards have attracted most of the public's attention. The current school district ratings—academic emergency, academic watch, continuous improvement and effective—trigger the need for districts to write continuous improvement plans. These ratings also determine which districts receive technical assistance from the Ohio Department of Education.

This focus on district-level accountability has been based on the assumption that school districts have the power to promote improvement where it counts most, at individual schools. It has been driven by the belief that districts have the capacity to structure incentives and demand changes in individual schools.

The Commission believes that school districts continue to play a crucial role and that local boards of education must share in the responsibility for holding schools accountable. But the Commission also believes that schools *and* school districts should be identified as units of accountability. Holding only districts accountable can mask the performance of individual schools. Good schools may be labeled as underperforming because they are in a district that is rated as "poor-performing." Conversely, poor-performing schools in more highly rated districts may be overlooked and not get the assistance they need.

The Commission also believes that schools *and* school districts should be held accountable for both absolute levels of academic performance and the rates at which they improve. Both types of accountability measures should be reflected on school and school district report cards. State assistance and intervention strategies should be designed with both sets of expectations in mind. And while it is not the Commission's responsibility to determine how progress will be measured, we encourage the State Board of Education to establish progress indicators for schools and school districts that are both demanding



and reasonable. The state's expectations for improvement must stretch the system's capacity to perform at higher levels.

23 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state provide monetary and other rewards, including recognition for helping students succeed, to schools and school districts that are making significant annual progress.*

Through “listening” in Ohio and reviewing other states’ experiences, the Commission learned that the connection between performance awards and improved student achievement has not been documented fully. However, some research confirms that recognition and awards—monetary and otherwise—affect teachers’ motivation to change and improve teaching practice, just as they stimulate collaboration among educators.

The Commission agrees with Peter Drucker’s counsel that there is value in investing in those who are making the most progress and performing at the highest levels and that the state benefits by challenging the best to do even better. Therefore, the Commission believes the state’s current \$10 million-a-year award program for school improvement should be expanded significantly and the criteria for such awards should be reviewed and clarified. Commission members also agree that performance awards and public recognition should be provided to entire schools that succeed, not just isolated individuals at particular grades within schools. Awards must be used to further improve the achievement of students, teachers and schools.

The Commission believes that schools that receive such awards should be obligated to share their successful practices with other teachers and schools.

24 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state provide assistance to poor-performing schools and school districts and to those that are making insufficient progress. All schools should be expected to develop continuous improvement plans that concretely outline how they will increase student learning, and poor-performing schools should be required to submit their plans to the Ohio Department of Education for approval.*

25 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the Ohio Department of Education take the lead in realigning and strengthening Ohio’s regional service delivery system to provide assistance in specialized areas (e.g., professional development, technological services and curriculum development).*

Interventions in poor-performing schools and school districts typically come in two stages—first, assistance to help schools improve and, second, interventions for schools where performance does not improve quickly enough.

According to *Education Week*, approximately 20 states provide or require districts to provide direct assistance to poor-performing schools. Assistance comes in many forms, including sending external review teams to the schools to analyze poor performance and make recommendations, requiring schools to develop and implement improvement plans, and providing additional funding and professional development for school staff.

The Commission supports efforts to provide assistance before more serious interventions are needed. We recognize that many poor-performing schools need help defining key issues, changing what they do or even analyzing the data that demonstrate



Seven Steps to School Accountability

Academic Standards

Establish clear, rigorous and reasonable academic standards that all students are expected to meet. Ensure that students, their parents, educators and schools know what they are being held accountable for, including but not limited to test scores.

Student Assessment

Test students to see how well they meet academic standards, using assessment tools that are aligned fully with the state's academic standards.

Report Cards

Make available a public performance report on each school and school district. Support the public's right to know overall levels of student achievement, as well as the progress students are making in each school and school district.

Rate Schools

Assign a performance rating to each school and school district, or at least publicly identify low-performing schools.

Rewards

Attach rewards and recognition to performance. Provide incentives for schools to meet or exceed the state's expectations.

Assistance

Help schools meet or exceed the state's expectations. Make sure they have the capacity to improve.

Sanctions

Provide for strong interventions for schools that are not giving their students an adequate education and that are not improving over time.

their own performance. In some cases, they need assistance with curriculum design, professional development, instructional approaches and management strategies.

Commission members believe the Ohio Department of Education should continue to provide technical assistance to poor-performing schools and school districts. It should develop and promote research-based school improvement models and “best practices,” which schools and school districts can use to enhance student, teacher and building-level performance. It also should assist schools and districts in creating partnerships with colleges and universities, retired master teachers and administrators, and private service providers. We think the department’s capacity to provide this kind of assistance needs to be expanded.

But expanding the state’s capacity to provide technical assistance requires more than the investment of new resources. The Commission believes the system must make better use of the resources that are already in place. We believe the Ohio Department of Education should take the lead in redesigning and aligning the state’s regional service delivery system, which includes Educational Service Centers, Special Education Regional Resource Centers, Regional Professional Development Centers, SchoolNet regional staff and Data Acquisition Sites. Alignment is needed to ensure that all of these regional centers are effectively delivering services that are aimed at helping schools improve the performance of students to meet the state standards.

Some of this alignment already is occurring, and the Commission supports these efforts. For example, the Ohio SchoolNet Commission is working to align statewide and regional technological services and to

establish a state technology strategic plan. We are encouraged by the Ohio Department of Education’s work on a performance evaluation of nontechnological services and by its efforts to develop a collaborative process to produce uniform data.

We also believe the state’s education policy leaders should consider extending key elements of the state’s accountability system to these service centers, using report cards and other reporting instruments to fully inform the public about its contribution to all students’ academic success.

26 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state be given additional authority to intervene in persistently failing schools. Low-performing schools should not be allowed to fail indefinitely.*

Intervention of last resort—including the use of intervention teams, the replacement of teachers and administrators, or school closings—should be part of Ohio’s accountability system. More than half the states have enacted laws that allow state intervention in severely troubled schools and districts, although many of them have not yet used these sanctions.

The Commission believes that the first responsibility for improving poor-performing schools rests with the local board of education and the professionals who lead the school district. This is the purpose of developing and carrying out school improvement plans. It is why we think the initial steps driving school improvements should be designed and implemented locally.

We believe that schools should be given time, but not too much time, to improve their performance and that the state should intervene if the district fails to make improvements. We recognize that some may not have



the capacity to improve. We believe that if there is no realistic chance of intervention, business will continue as usual. And we understand that the state does not have the capacity to intervene in a large number of schools or districts. Therefore, we believe that:

- Schools that continue to decline after two years, despite implementation of a school improvement plan, should receive intensive intervention *at the district level*. This may involve reconstitution by the local school board, and assistance may be requested from the Ohio Department of Education or regional service centers.
- The Ohio Department of Education should have the authority to use “intervention teams” similar to those dispatched in North Carolina and Kentucky to assist low-performing schools. These teams of distinguished teachers and administrators help design and carry out improvement plans, and they help align curriculum and instruction with state standards. These teams would be empowered to evaluate school staff and make changes needed to improve performance.
- As a last resort, the state should have the authority—and the necessary resources—to implement a state-directed school improvement plan, which could include the closing of a school. The number of schools selected for this intensive intervention will depend upon the state’s capacity, and the schools selected will be among the state’s poorest-performing schools. Using a model similar to those in North Carolina and Kentucky, exemplary administrators and educators will be brought into the school for a period of no more than two years to implement these interventions and prepare local educators to run a high-performing school.



27 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that the state develop a new set of report cards to publicly identify how students are doing against state standards and other key measures for each school and school district. These reports should be readily available to parents and the public.*

28 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that state law be amended to allow the state to disaggregate student performance data and to use information based on race, ethnicity, gender and economic status on the school and school district report cards.*

29 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that a new system of performance designations be developed for Ohio schools and school districts and that this new rating reflect both the absolute levels of student performance and success in improving student achievement.*

The Commission believes that public reporting sparks action and leads to improvements in student and school achievement. The prospect of receiving recognition for a job well done, as well as the fear of adverse publicity—being labeled a “school in crisis” or in “academic emergency”—seems to encourage teachers, administrators and parents to focus more attention on improved performance.

We applaud the work that already has been done in this area, but we think there is room for improvement. Without trying to redesign the report cards themselves, the Commission offers several suggestions:

- Schools should be the focal points of Ohio’s school report cards. District-level reports should be produced and widely distributed, but individual schools should be the primary unit of analysis.

- School and school district report cards should focus attention on progress (i.e., rates of improvement), in addition to reporting absolute levels of academic performance.
- Ohio's school and school district report cards should be made simpler and more easily understood through changes in design, layout and content.
- New performance designations should be adopted for schools and districts. These new designations should be simple and easily understood by educators, parents and the general public. We urge the State Board of Education to consider:

Achievement Designations	Improvement Designations
Excellent	High
Good	Medium
Fair	Low
Poor	

A broader range of performance indicators should be used, with less reliance on proficiency test scores. Currently, 25 of the state's 27 minimum performance standards are based on the proficiency tests. We believe that the report cards' primary focus should be on both absolute levels of and progress in academic performance but that other "capacity" indicators also should be included. Some of these indicators would be included for informational, not accountability, purposes.

The Commission did not try to redesign the report cards or identify specific performance indicators that ought to be included. That decision needs to be made by others, with significant input from Ohio's practicing classroom teachers, administrators and parents. But the Commission does want to provide guidance on the kinds of indicators we believe will enhance the public's knowledge about the

The Importance of Teachers

The research is quite clear: The single most important thing a school provides to ensure the success of a student is skilled and knowledgeable teachers.

Students who have skilled teachers learn more than those who don't. The research confirms common sense.

Ohio has not yet faced the statewide shortage of teachers that other states are experiencing. But in pockets around the state—in large cities and in some of Ohio's most rural school districts—recruiting and retaining teachers is becoming more difficult.

More importantly, today's and tomorrow's teachers will need a higher level of teaching skills and a deeper knowledge of academic content than their predecessors. The Commission is recommending rigorous statewide academic standards. Those standards will demand more, for example, of elementary school teachers because they include the expectation that students will read well by the end of third grade. The standards will demand more high-level mathematics—algebra and geometry, for example—than many Ohio math teachers have experience teaching.

But if we want Ohio's students to be competitive with those in other states and other countries, we must make sure that our teachers have the knowledge and teaching skills they need to help their students meet the state's academic standards.

As the Commission was finishing its work, the results of an international study of math and science achievement were released, showing that U.S. students lost ground to their international peers as they moved from elementary school through middle school into high school. At fourth grade, U.S. students were near the top. In middle school, they were average; and in high school, they were close to the bottom. Essentially, they got worse.

Within the report was a telling statistic. U.S. eighth graders were far less likely than their counterparts in other countries to have a math teacher who had a degree in mathematics or whose main field of study was math. Just 41 percent of the U.S. students' math teachers had those qualifications; internationally, 71 percent did.

As a number of Ohioans told the Commission, "Teachers matter hugely."

Indeed, they do. When we surveyed the Ohio public during our deliberations, Ohio parents and taxpayers had a clear answer to creating better schools—strengthen the quality of teaching in the state.

Improving School Performance

progress students are making. So here are some of the new indicators we would like Ohio's education policy leaders to consider:

- The percentage of high school graduates who continue on to a college or university who need remediation.
 - The percentage of high school graduates who are accepted into college honors programs.
 - Improvement of test scores on the state achievement tests for all quartiles of performance, not just minimum standards.
 - The proportion of teachers who are certified in the subject areas they are teaching or those who have earned National Board certification.
 - The percentage of students who score at the "advanced" level on state achievement tests at the elementary, middle or high school levels.
 - Scores on the third-grade reading achievement test for those students who retake the test in the fourth or fifth grades after initially failing the test in the third grade.
 - Student performance on the common diagnostic assessments in reading, writing and math, at the kindergarten level only (for informational, not accountability, purposes).
 - Measures of the performance gap on achievement tests (at the elementary, middle and high school levels) between groups of students defined in terms of race and socio-economic status.
- The percentage of students who are allowed to accelerate beyond their classmates, particularly in the elementary grades.
 - The breadth of coursework—for example, the number of Advanced Placement courses offered or participation in the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Program or high-level distance learning courses.
 - Parent participation in meetings with teachers and students' academic programs.



At the beginning of this report, we talked about the need for a comprehensive approach to education in Ohio. There have been a wide variety of incremental approaches over the years—all of them well intentioned and some of them quite effective. But the result has been a layering of program on top of program, and law on top of law. Too often, these incremental actions left us with a wealth of rules and regulations, but with answers to questions that were not widely known or understood.

The Governor's Commission for Student Success is suggesting that what Ohio needs is less regulation and more clarity of direction, fewer "reform" programs, and more flexibility for schools to be successful.

A L I G N M E N T

Ensuring Student and School Success

We know that schools are not businesses, but there are valuable lessons to be learned from the business community in Ohio and elsewhere. One of the central lessons from the corporate world in the past decade has been to set clear goals, provide solid measures of progress, provide authority and flexibility to employees, and hold people accountable for results. The systemic changes we recommend for Ohio's education system reflect this approach.

We are recommending clear standards of what should be taught and learned. We are recommending assessments designed to measure progress and provide helpful diagnostic information. We are recommending rewards and sanctions that will hold everyone—students and adults—accountable for results. Importantly, these elements come together as a system aligned around the standards and what it takes to help students to succeed.

We also are suggesting that Ohio's education policy leaders, as well as the constituent groups that define the state's education community, intensify their efforts to take the mystery out of standards, assessments and accountability. All of us must do a better of communicating. We must give students, parents and educators a clearer picture of what we are expecting of them, and of what we are prepared to do to help them succeed.

There are four issues—all of which are linked to the issue of alignment—we believe are critical to that success.

Investing in Teacher Quality

While it is essential that we have an education system that is sensibly aligned around clear standards, the achievement results we seek will only happen because of the work of individual teachers and school



administrators. Caring, competent and qualified teachers and skilled administrators are critical. The research is clear: The single most important thing that a school can provide is a skilled and knowledgeable educator.

Ohio is fortunate to have thousands of dedicated teachers. The state, for example, has more “master” teachers who have been certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards than most states.

But as we demand more of teachers—asking them to get their students to meet high academic standards—we have to make sure we recruit, prepare and retain the best teachers possible. We need to treat them as professionals and pay them accordingly, while holding them accountable for results. We need to provide them with the quality professional development—training across their careers as educators—they need to do their job. They need resources; they should not have to take dollars out of their own pockets to meet the needs of their students.

We know there is great disparity across the state with respect to teachers’ level of preparation, the amount and quality of professional development they receive, the availability of resources and tools that contribute to their success and the salaries they earn.

30 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends that a commission on the teaching profession be established to assist in developing policies, strategies and incentives to attract, prepare and retain quality teachers to improve student achievement.*

We did not study the issue of teacher quality; it was not part of our charge. But we think it should be studied with at least as much intensity as this Commission has examined academic standards, assessments and accountability.

We think that a commission on the teaching profession should be established as soon as possible. With leadership provided by the State Superintendent and Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, and with the active involvement of Ohio’s practicing classroom teachers, colleges and universities, parents and business leaders, this Commission should examine state policies and local practices regarding teachers. It should recommend policies, strategies and financial incentives for recruiting, preparing and training the quality teachers who will play an important role in defining Ohio’s future.

Ohio needs to assure the quality of its educator preparation programs. It needs to support teacher and administrator retention and skill improvement during their critical early years of employment.

Ohio needs to provide long-term assurance of the quality and retention of experienced teachers through ongoing, research-based professional development, including job embedded learning opportunities that are built into the school day.

Ohio needs to make sure it has the best teaching force possible if we expect our students to reach the high academic standards being set for them.

Getting Better Information

The Commission believes that Ohio needs to significantly upgrade its ability to collect, analyze and distribute information about the academic performance of students, educators and schools.

31 **RECOMMENDATION:** *The Commission recommends continuation of the current effort to redesign the EMIS (Education Management Information) system. We also encourage the state’s education policy leaders to clarify the rules for collecting and using data to ensure that this*

system, which was originally created as an accounting system, has the capacity to meet the needs of an effective accountability system.

As this work continues, the Commission believes that emphasis should be given to several objectives:

- Privacy protections for student performance data must be guaranteed.
- Student and school data must be disaggregated, as we recommended in our discussion of school accountability.
- The capacity to follow students' academic careers as they move from school to school, from district to district, and into institutions of higher education should be a priority. EMIS and other K-16 systems should be linked to Ohio's higher education information system.
- All Data Acquisition Sites should use a standardized data model with common data elements to ensure that district and school data are accurate and fairly reported.
- All performance data must be widely available and it should be accessible in ways that are user friendly. Public and private organizations should be encouraged to analyze and disseminate information about student and school performance.
- Teachers and administrators should be trained to use data to inform decision making, and to guide instructional strategies, lesson plans and professional development. Similar training should be available to parents, the media and other community organizations.

The Commission heard repeatedly about programs being incrementally added and none taken away. To put it bluntly, we believe there should be a very hard look at all of the education laws, regulations and rules on the books in Ohio, with an eye toward pruning back to only the ones that are necessary to ensure the success of teachers and students.

We are demanding results from schools and teachers. We should provide them the flexibility to do their jobs. They are

professionals; we should give them the freedom and respect that should go with their positions.

Rebuilding Trust

As we listened across Ohio, we consistently heard a lack of trust for what happens in Columbus and throughout the state concerning education. It came through in the public opinion research, in our focus groups, and in our many meetings with educators, parents and business leaders.

Educators particularly feel vulnerable to accountability measures that they see as punitive. They are frustrated by the unwillingness of many parents to get involved with the education of their children. They perceive themselves often to be held publicly responsible for things they see as beyond their control.

Many teachers and administrators are skeptical of new state initiatives, even those they favor such as academic standards. They do not see the value of producing continuous improvement plans and sending them to Columbus for review. Some are angry over the state's reliance in recent years on the scores that students get on proficiency tests. And they do not respond well to talk about the state intervening in poor-performing schools and school districts.

Similarly, many of the parents, business leaders and taxpayers with whom we have talked are unhappy. Some question the value of the proficiency tests. Others question the ability of teachers and schools to help students learn—to prepare them for success beyond the classroom. And, again, there is widespread concern about the lack of involvement of too many parents in the education of their children.

Through all of these voices, we have heard a common message: when it comes to education, there is a lack of trust in Ohio today. We understand that this trust cannot be rebuilt quickly, but we believe that it is necessary if Ohio is going to have the system of schools its children deserve.



Our concern from the beginning has been that all of this fit together in a comprehensive system that makes sense to the policy makers who must consider it, the educators who must carry it out, and the students and their parents who will benefit from it.



We have proposed a considerable number of changes in the way schooling works in Ohio—rigorous academic standards, new assessments and a revised accountability system. Our concern from the beginning has been that all of this fit together in a comprehensive system that makes sense to the policy makers who must consider it, the educators who must carry it out, and the students and their parents who will benefit from it.

None of this is easy. All of it will take time. While the Governor's Commission for Student Success would be pleased if the system could be in place quickly, the imperative is to do it right, to do it well.

The standards need to be clear and practical, which means they need to be thoroughly discussed across the state.

Getting Started

The assessments need to reflect those standards. They also need to be legally defensible, which means that tests must be based on curriculum models based on the standards, and that students must have reasonable opportunities to learn the standards before they are faced with tests that have significant consequences such as determining graduation.

The accountability system is based on the standards and assessments, which have not yet been developed.

And all of this must fit together in a seamless system.

With all of those caveats, the Commission proposes a timeline that includes the transition from the current system of proficiency tests to the new standards-based system of assessments.

Standards & Curriculum Guides

As described earlier, the Commission endorses the Joint Council's inclusive process to build Ohio's academic standards benchmarked to the best standards for students that exist in other states or countries. Ohio is now discussing solid academic standards in mathematics and English language arts.

The Commission hopes these draft standards will be adopted by the State Board of Education in 2001, and initially introduced into Ohio classrooms during the 2001-02 school year. We believe the mathematics and English language arts standards should become the expectations for all students beginning in the 2002-03 school year.

The Joint Council plans to create standards in science, social studies and technology in 2001, followed by extensive public review and engagement. Those standards could be the expectation for all students as early as the 2003-04 school year, although it is possible some may be completed earlier than others. Most states, for example, have had difficulty reaching public agreement on social studies standards.

Following these, the Joint Council expects to develop standards in foreign languages and the arts.

The current process calls for standards to be created at key points in a student's career—the end of primary (third grade), intermediate (fifth grade), middle (eighth grade) and high school (12th grade). But the Joint Council will also turn these into grade-by-grade standards along with curriculum guides for teachers and information guides for parents. The Commission hopes these could be completed for each subject within a year of that subject's standards being adopted by the Board of Education.

Achievement Tests

The Commission is aware that it often takes at least two to three years once standards are created until a test based on those standards can be developed, field tested and administered.

Based on this schedule, the Commission hopes that new standards-based achievement tests in reading, writing and mathematics could be in place during the 2003-04 school year.

Achievement tests in science and social studies would similarly follow development of standards in those subjects.

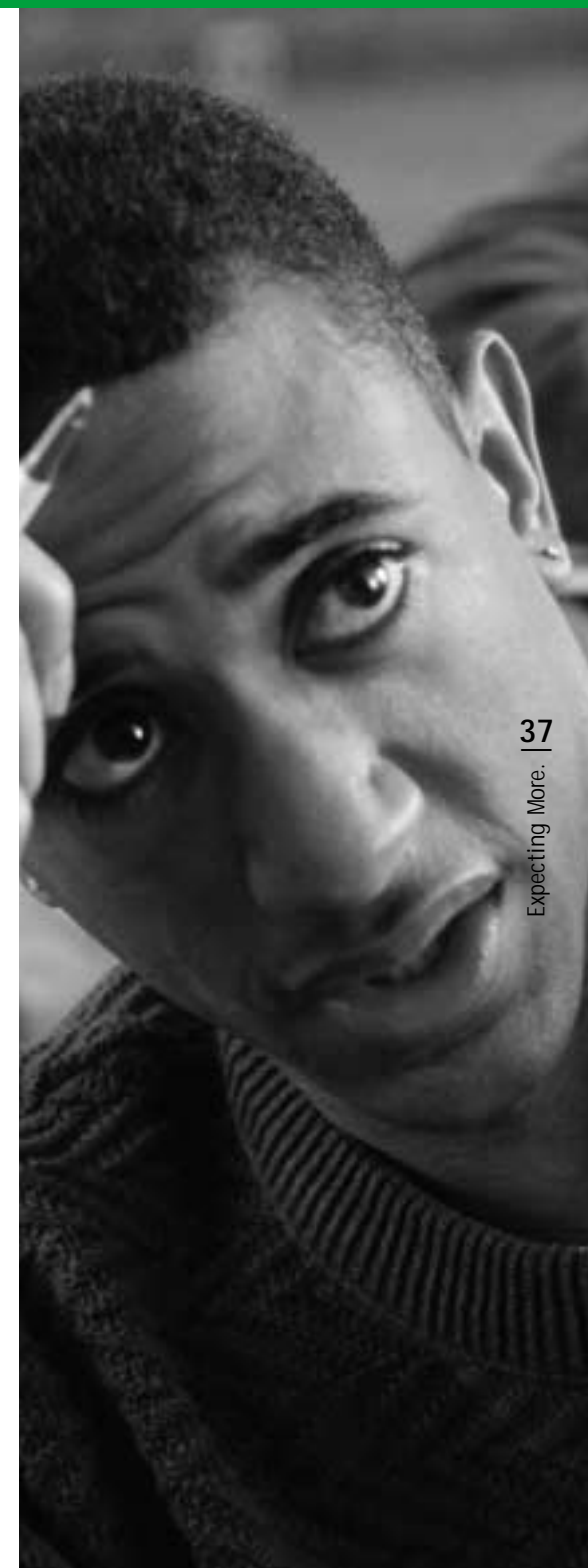
The existing proficiency tests would be phased out as the new achievement tests are developed. The 12th-grade proficiency test would be eliminated after it is administered in the spring of 2001.

The Department has long been planning to replace the 9th grade proficiency test with a more rigorous 10th grade test. The Commission understands that the mathematics and English language arts portions of this test are consistent with the draft academic standards in these subjects, although it is likely to need to add some questions to more fully cover the standards. The Commission believes this test—the Ohio Graduation Test—will be ready for administration to high school students in the spring of 2003 and required for graduation for the class of the spring of 2005.

The end-of-course exams (*see page 17*) will take longer to develop. The Board of Education will need to determine which courses will get such exams as well as how many of them a student will need to pass to graduate. And all of them must be built on standards and curriculum guidelines and professional development for teachers. The Commission hopes the first of these end-of-course exams will be to students in the 2004-05 school year and as a graduation alternative by the spring of 2008.

A New Third-Grade Reading Guarantee

The Commission has recommended a more intensive reading guarantee placed at the third-grade level (*see page 23*). In the spring of 2002, the decision whether to retain 4th graders who have not passed the reading portion of the proficiency test will be an option for schools but not required by the state.





Diagnostic Assessments

The Commission hopes that the state will immediately begin developing a common diagnostic assessment in reading, particularly one that can be used in the earliest grades.

The state may determine that there are existing commercial diagnostic exams that may be useful as an interim assessment while Ohio develops its own in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. (see page 15)

The Commission understands that the development of these diagnostic assessments should not take as long as the achievement tests, but still expects the state to need at least two years after the point that particular academic standards are adopted.

High School Graduation

To graduate from high school in Ohio currently, students must pass the ninth-grade proficiency test, which is based on eighth grade material. That is expected to continue to be the requirement through the class that graduates in the spring of 2004.

As described earlier (page 17) the Commission has recommended that Ohio students would eventually be required to demonstrate their readiness to graduate by either passing a cumulative high school exam or a series of end-of-course exams.

The Department has long been planning to replace the ninth-grade proficiency test with a more rigorous 10th-grade test. The Commission understands that the mathematics and English language arts portions of this test are consistent with the draft academic standards in these subjects, although it is likely to need to add some questions to more fully cover the standards. The Commission believes this test—the Ohio Graduation Exam—will be ready for administration to high school students in the spring of 2003 and required for graduation for the class of the spring of 2005.

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Glossary of Terms

The Commission has tried to avoid unnecessary jargon. But there are some words and phrases that warrant explanation. This glossary is intended to help make the meaning clear to readers of our report.

Academic Intervention Services Plan

A simple, one-page written plan produced by teachers and principals for students who are falling considerably short of meeting the state academic standards. The plan tells students and their parents what the students need to do to meet the standards and what the school will do to make sure they there.

Accountability System

A system that helps educators identify, understand and verify the educational approaches they use, and that holds students, educators and schools responsible for achievement by attaching real consequences—in the form of rewards, sanctions and interventions—to publicly understood performance. The Commission has proposed an accountability system in Ohio that is based on continuous progress and helping students, educators and schools succeed rather than merely pointing out failure.

Achievement Tests

New tests created by the state that measure what students know and are able to do in key subjects in key grades. These tests will be based on the academic standards that are being created for Ohio through the Joint Council. These tests, which will replace the state's *proficiency tests*, would test, for example, whether students are reading well by the end of third grade, computing and writing well by the end of fourth grade, or ready for high school work by the end of eighth grade.

Assessment

How student learning is measured. Often, assessment is used almost as a synonym for tests, but teachers can assess students in a wide range of other ways – from asking a

student a few questions orally to looking at samples of written work that has been done over several weeks or months.

Benchmarking

A popular business term that generally means systematically determining procedures that are most effective. The Commission uses it in a similar manner—to make sure that the state's standards are at least as good as those set elsewhere and to make sure that instructional procedures are the most effective available anywhere.

Content Standards

What we expect students to know and be able to do in key subjects at key grade levels. For example, students should be reading well at the end of third grade or adding, subtracting and multiplying to get the right answer in fourth grade. Content standards refer to the content of what must be learned. *Performance standards* refer to how well they need to know that content—essentially how well they need to perform when they are tested or otherwise asked to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Curriculum Guidelines

More detailed directions, primarily for teachers, of what should be taught grade by grade to help students learn the content standards. The Commission has said the Ohio Department of Education, in consultation with classroom teachers and other education stakeholders, should produce these guidelines at every grade level to make sure teachers have the guidance they need. These state guidelines would be available to, but not a requirement for, local schools, which could produce their own curriculum decisions.

Diagnostic Assessments

Assessments designed to provide detailed information on the strengths and weaknesses of individual students for the students, their parents and teachers. The results of

these assessments allow teachers to develop and deliver better instruction to help students reach standards.

End-of-Course Exams

New high school tests similar to final exams, except the end-of-course exams would be uniform across the state. For example, if a student took algebra or a U.S. history course anywhere in Ohio, the state exam would be the same. The state would produce curriculum guidelines for about a dozen courses. It also would provide training for teachers, and both the curriculum guidelines and professional development would be aligned with the state's academic content standards.

Ohio Graduation Exam

Today, students in Ohio must pass the ninth-grade proficiency test to graduate from high school. The state has been planning for some time to upgrade that to a test based on 10th-grade skills. The Commission recommends that this new exam be based on the state's academic content standards.

Interventions

A term that refers to a wide range of additional activities teachers or schools might do to help students learn essential content. For example, students could get extra tutoring or be sent to summer school, or they could be placed in a special program with smaller class sizes to accelerate their learning. At the state level, intervention also refers to action the state might take to deal with schools that consistently do not make progress. For example, the state might send a team of accomplished teachers or principals to a poor-performing school.

Joint Council

Composed of members of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, the Joint Council is working to create Ohio's academic content standards. The Joint Council has put together writing teams of teachers, college officials, business and

community members and parents to determine what Ohio students should know and be able to do at key grades. Team members relied on their knowledge of Ohio's schools, students and people to write the standards. They incorporated "the best of the best" from world-class standards from other states and leading organizations. They also drew from the expertise of such groups as the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Achieve, Inc.

Professional Development

The term the education community uses to refer to the wide variety of training that teachers and other educators receive, from college courses to workshops. The Commission believes that one of the keys to helping students reach higher standards will be making sure that educators have sufficient professional development to give them the skills and content to help their students meet the standards.

Proficiency Tests

The term that refers to Ohio's current system of state tests in fourth, sixth and ninth grades. These tests were designed to measure whether students were "proficient" in certain subjects but were not based on widely known and commonly accepted academic standards. The Commission recommends that these proficiency tests be replaced by state achievement tests based on the state's academic standards.

Time on Task

The term that educators often use when thinking about how much time a student actually is successfully engaged on a particular subject or skill, such as reading. One key intervention that many experts believe is crucial is to increase the amount of "time on task" for students to allow them to master critical skills, such as reading, writing and computation.

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the staff at the Ohio Board of Regents.

Richard A. Stoff, President of the Ohio Business Roundtable.

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William F. Patient, Chair



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