

Shaping Ohio's ESSA Plan



PHILANTHROPY OHIO'S ROLE

Philanthropy Ohio and our foundation members have prioritized state-level education policy since 2005 and have no plans to abandon it. Today, Ohio foundations invest over \$300 million annually in education to ensure that all Ohioans have access to high-quality education opportunities. Although our philanthropic community is a critical piece of the state's education policy landscape, it represents just a fraction of the investment when compared to the state's \$11 billion investment in P-20 education. And, in addition to providing financial support, funders are leaders and conveners in their communities around critical education topics.

Through several comprehensive reports and briefing papers, Philanthropy Ohio has continued its commitment to play an active role in helping improve public education in Ohio. Through research and by listening, funders have learned a great deal about Ohio's education assets and challenges. While much has been accomplished in the state, critical challenges and opportunities must be addressed to improve outcomes for our children.

OVERVIEW

This white paper shares what Philanthropy Ohio and its members heard during a "listening tour" of 10 regional meetings held across Ohio from August 31 to October 6, 2016. The meetings engaged nearly 1,500 Ohioans—including educators, funders, parents, students, community members and policymakers—in conversations about the newly-enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a federal law that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act. The findings from these conversations are sure to have important implications for Ohio students, families, educators and communities.

This listening tour connected State Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria and other education policymakers with community members across the state. A number of State Board of Education members, Ohio General Assembly members and staff, along with representatives from many statewide education groups, attended the meetings to hear from community members.

The series of 10 meetings kicked off with an evening session in Columbus on August 31, 2016 and concluded five weeks later with a meeting

near Portsmouth. At each meeting, State Superintendent DeMaria and a Philanthropy Ohio representative welcomed participants and provided brief remarks and local co-hosts, often local superintendents, also welcomed community members. Philanthropy Ohio Education Initiative Project Director Lisa Gray delivered a brief overview of the new federal law before moving to the next agenda item, small group discussions.

Prior to the meetings, registrants received advance-reading materials, including pre-identified discussion questions aimed at maximizing feedback for policymakers, a high-level overview of the Every Student Succeeds Act and a link to supplemental ESSA materials. Meeting agendas were structured to receive participant feedback based on the discussion questions. Philanthropy Ohio and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) considered feedback from the participants at the Columbus meeting and made adjustments to the questions.



“Though my table may have had different viewpoints on items, we did agree we are trying to do what is best for kids. We all agreed there should be testing and accountability, just not what we currently have. For example, seeing that almost all districts had a significant drop on their report cards and we have had two different tests in two years, it doesn’t seem productive and only raises frustrations.”

– Akron meeting participant

RICH & TARGETED DISCUSSION

Scribes recorded small-group table discussions, where participants addressed the following questions:

Introductory Question

- What is the most important issue facing our students and schools today?

Standards and Assessments

- Are you familiar with Ohio’s student academic standards? What types of revisions, if any, would you recommend?
- How are the results of state assessments used in your school or district?
- What changes, if any, would make state assessment results more useful at the local level?
- Should Ohio consider the use of nationally-recognized high school assessments (ACT/SAT) in place of the current high school state assessments?

Accountability

- How could Ohio improve the existing school/ district report card?
- ESSA requires inclusion of a non-academic measure (i.e. student engagement, school culture, etc.) in our accountability system. What do you recommend Ohio use?
- What factors should Ohio consider when establishing minimum group sizes for reporting and accountability purposes?
- How might Ohio measure improvement in reducing achievement gaps?
- What would you recommend for measuring the progress of English learners?

Educator Effectiveness

- What do you think are the qualities of an effective teacher? How can Ohio and local districts ensure all students have effective teachers?

- What state level professional development priorities would you recommend for further developing effective teachers?
- Although not required in the ESSA state plan, how can our state improve the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)?

School Improvement and Student Supports

- What types of information and support do school districts need to better address the needs of students?
 - How can Ohio best assist schools and districts to improve outcomes for students and develop improvement plans?
 - What role should student support services (dental, mental health, etc.) play in school improvement?
 - What strategies do you think are the most effective for engaging parents and families?
 - What types of strategies would help reduce bullying and harassment and suspensions and expulsions?

“I am hoping that we can make some serious changes on how we educate our children. I am also hoping that all voices at the table are heard.”

– Columbus meeting participant

Participants shared their views and learned more about what is happening in their region based on the five key areas addressed by ESSA. The discussions enabled all participants to gain a better understanding of how state, regional and local improvement agendas could be advanced, expanded and/or reshaped to benefit all students.

Each meeting surfaced a large number of ideas and suggestions for Philanthropy Ohio members and ODE to consider. Some were consistent from region to region while others were unique to particular regions, reflecting either local conditions or reform efforts already underway.

WHAT WE HEARD

Synthesizing the feedback gleaned from the 10 meetings resulted in the prioritized findings below, reflecting the diverse positions and robust debate about public education.

When asked to identify “the most important issue facing our students and schools today,” poverty and homelessness were the top issues participants identified. After that, participants identified the issues of school funding and resources, family engagement and home life, equitable access to resources, assessments (in general and the concern for too much testing) and the challenge of preparing all students for college and careers. More focused discussion on specific education issues and components needing to be addressed in the state plan followed this over-arching discussion of challenges.

There was broad, strong and virtually unanimous support for increasing quality early childhood opportunities for Ohio’s children, especially those with the greatest needs.

Participants noted the importance of intervening as early as possible to close critical achievement gaps and ensure students start kindergarten ready to learn. There was little specificity shared on where services should be provided, but participants noted the need to ensure that any state-funded early childhood investments focus on high-quality early learning experiences, not simply child care. They also noted the need to begin interventions for students as soon as challenges are identified so that students have as much time as possible to maximize their learning and overcome challenges before they begin kindergarten.



There was a similar level of intensity of support for the coordination of supports and resources for wraparound services.

It is important to note the depth, breadth and passion of the conversations around life challenges that students face, including our youngest students. Of particular note were the needs for school and mental health counselors, nurses, librarians, drug and alcohol counseling, social workers and after-school and summer bridge programs. Participants acknowledged that schools will likely never have enough resources or time to serve all the needs of students but with strategic, coordinated and well-aligned partnerships with other community organizations and service providers, a great deal more can and must be done to meet the holistic needs of students and families. It was also noted that these partnerships should not be mandated by the state and that it is important to have innovative and locally-developed partnerships. In places where some of these partnerships already exist, it is critical to better communicate to parents and families what is currently available. Where they do not exist, it is imperative to find ways to facilitate these partnerships and provide educators, parents and families with the supports they need to ensure all students have a better opportunity for educational success.

“Loved learning from both big and small school districts. It was a great evening and worth doing again. THANK YOU!”

– Cleveland meeting participant



“I did appreciate that Paolo and others were moving around and listening to the conversation. I would like to think that we do have a voice and that local educators can begin to actually shape the way education is being done.”

– Cincinnati meeting participant



“Both sectors, non-public and public, were present at this table. It was a great collaboration of minds with regard to shared challenges and concerns for our accountability system and assessment methods.”

– Toledo meeting participant

In general, those who are familiar with Ohio’s Learning Standards are widely supportive. That said, some expressed concerns about the developmental appropriateness of some of the standards, the levels of expectations and the number of standards. Educators are supportive of the standards review process and believe that, once adjustments are made based on the input received from parents and educators, the standards need to remain stable for a reasonable period of time, as stability is seen as a critical issue. Mentioned along with the standards was the need for better aligned curriculum materials, instructional resources and professional development opportunities to help teachers successfully prepare students at higher levels. Educators are hungry for quality, aligned materials and resources that can help them better prepare their students and actively engage them in their learning. These materials and resources were requested as guides and models, not requirements or mandates from the state.

Ohio’s assessment system received the most significant pushback of any of the issues that were discussed. While many acknowledged the importance of having a statewide assessment system, they identified significant concerns about many of the assessments’ components that inhibit its usefulness and limit its utility. These concerns include the constant change to assessments, a belief that there are too many assessments that require too much time, and most noted, the delay in receiving results that makes the assessment results of little use to educators. All sectors of the community—parents, families, teachers, administrators and community members—raised concerns about the assessments. Proposed solutions include: maintaining stability of the assessment system; finding ways to ensure assessment results are returned to educators in a much more-timely manner so that they can maximize the use of the results; exploring new assessment

innovations that will improve assessment utility; allowing for a faster turnaround of results; and for assessments to be developed locally and provide families and educators with more actionable data and information.

Unique concerns relate to the high school assessment system, especially about Ohio’s end-of-course exams. Many educators flagged concern about whether the end-of-course exams are set at levels that are too high since high school students have not had the advantage of enough years of instruction with the newer, aligned and more challenging standards. In addition, there is strong support for allowing high school students assessment options. The majority of participants indicated they are interested in high school assessments being replaced with ACT or SAT. However, numerous participants expressed reservations about this

decision largely based on two concerns: first, that these assessments have not been validated as aligned to Ohio’s Learning Standards; and second, that ACT and SAT measure college-readiness and not all students are college-bound. Many participants believe that even if ACT and SAT do not replace EOC examinations, they should be options available to students.

Concerns about Ohio’s report cards are closely tied to the concerns about Ohio’s assessment system. Many Ohioans question the validity and reliability of the overall report cards and some individual measures because of the numerous changes to Ohio’s

assessment system over the last few years. Overall, it was noted by a majority that the report cards, as currently developed, are too complicated, include too much data and should be simplified so that parents and the public can better understand the data and reports. In addition, a significant number of participants expressed a general dislike of letter grades. It was frequently mentioned that report cards are seen as “more punitive in nature, rather than diagnostic, especially as newspapers use them to rank schools.” A significant number of people called for report

“It is good that the state has opened itself up to these direct feedback sessions, but they only have impact if there is a lot of participation. Although there was a diverse set of people present, the overall crowd ought to have been larger if it was to be truly representative of the population.”

– Lorain County meeting participant

“Some of the details of the law seem to be undefined at this point. It could be useful to convene again perhaps a year after those fine points will have been implemented perhaps to share best practices.”

– Lorain County meeting participant



cards to be eliminated, indicating they are an unfair and inaccurate depiction of results while a fewer number noted that there is an important public role for report cards, but that Ohio has not yet struck the right balance. When asked about non-academic indicators that should be included in the report card attendees indicated a desire for measures and indicators that reflect the whole school—student achievement and growth in multiple subjects and broken down by student groups, poverty, school culture, school climate, extra-curricular activities, attendance, achievement gaps, etc. The need to better educate and communicate to parents and the public about what the report cards mean was also mentioned consistently across the state. Almost all attendees felt that additional communication from the state and local districts is critical if the report cards are going to be recognized and utilized as a tool to improve student achievement and overall school and district performance.

Lastly, minimum group sizes for reporting and measuring the progress of English Language Learners was also discussed. When asked about N-sizes, the majority of participants suggested a percent of the total population be used, however, this was followed closely with “keep the N- size the same.”

“I loved the open dialogue at the table. I really appreciated having a representative from ODE who was there to listen to our concerns.”

– Cambridge meeting participant

Regarding English Language Learners, many indicated that we must ensure that our English Learners have sufficient time to learn English.

Ohioans widely support their local educators and understand the critical roles they play in helping our students learn. Furthermore, they understand that having an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective school leader in every building are important goals if we are to prepare all our students for success. However, Ohioans are not in agreement on how we should evaluate the effectiveness of our educators.

Educators, in particular, do not believe that the evaluation system currently in place is working as it should. For example, there was broad support for changes to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation (OTES) and Ohio Principal Evaluation Systems (OPES). Educators almost universally saw the evaluation systems as too time consuming, complicated and cumbersome and there was great interest in simplifying the evaluation process. Some aspects of the system were supported: many, but not all, thought the rubric is helpful and most believe that the feedback from principals and other evaluators is necessary and useful. There is great angst and mistrust about including student growth measures and student learning objectives as a large percentage of the



“This opportunity allowed me to participate in conversations about the topics that are most relevant and concerning in relation to ESSA with a variety of stakeholders. The conversation was rich as the different perspectives were expressed, which allows for open and transparent conversation.”

– Cincinnati meeting participant



“I really appreciated getting the opportunity to talk with politicians, school officials, teachers, and ODE personnel. Very holistic and informative. There were lots of factors I hadn’t considered until that evening.”

– Dayton meeting participant

evaluation. When raised, educators indicated that: it is not a “fair” measure of an educator’s performance or effectiveness; that too often educators have little control over the results because of other challenges in students’ lives; and that “student test results are used against teachers.” In addition, there was broad support for expanding mentorships for new and struggling teachers. Many noted that teachers can improve with the right guidance from effective mentors but that too often these mentorships are not provided. In addition to concerns about OTEs and OPES, a number of educators raised concerns about the Resident Educator Summative Assessment and believe that changes also need to be made to this evaluation.

In addition to comments specific to teacher evaluations, participants also had passionate conversations on professional development opportunities to further develop effective teachers. The majority of participants expressed interest in local level professional development decisions, asked that more funding and resources be devoted to professional development and mentioned a need for cultural awareness professional development.

Improving our lowest performing schools and successfully intervening with our at-risk students is a goal everyone has for our education system but who does it and how is up for much debate. It is clear from the feedback

that Ohioans understand that this is hard work and that schools and educators cannot do this alone. In almost every conversation about improving schools and helping students achieve at higher levels—especially our most disadvantaged students—the need for additional supports and assistance was mentioned and a significant number of participants noted that our efforts towards reducing achievement gaps should heavily focus on growth rather than achievement. These critical supports included more funding; building-based wraparound and support

services; aligned and coordinated community partnerships and engagement; stronger, deeper and more consistent involvement of parents, families and guardians; cultural competence and awareness; and interventions and trainings for anti-bullying and harassment, drug and alcohol addiction, truancy and suspensions.

Participants also noted that this assistance and support must be identified at the local level, and whenever possible, provided at the student, classroom and building levels. They acknowledged that each community has different assets and challenges and that one-size, top-down solutions from the state are not the answer. That said, there is a desire for the state to provide resources to support locally- identified needs, share best practices and help encourage the coordination of services and resources between and among state- funded agencies and service providers. It was also mentioned that the

Educational Service Centers (ESCs) can and should continue to play an important support role for teachers, schools and districts as they pursue improvement efforts. ESCs were mentioned numerous times as critical partners in this important work.

In addition to the information above, there are other key takeaways from the meeting that are worth noting. Numerous participants—including parents, educators, school administrators and funders—expressed deep

appreciation for the opportunity to attend the meetings and were especially pleased that Ohio’s new State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria not only attended all meetings but presented and listened to what the public had to say during individual table conversations. Another topic that was mentioned at every meeting across the state revolved around charter schools. Many participants expressed concerns about the quality of Ohio’s charter schools, especially the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow.

“I think it is important for teachers, administrators, non-education people to talk and understand the limitations and opportunities that there are in education.”

– Cambridge meeting participant

“This type of setting helps us share thoughts with each other and with ODE. Communication is essential in helping us proceed with the changes that need to take place.”

– *Portsmouth meeting participant*



Regional ESSA Stakeholder Meetings Sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education, Philanthropy Ohio and its Members

August 31, 2016: Columbus

Co-sponsored by Thomas B. Fordham Institute

September 7, 2016: Akron

Co-sponsored by GAR Foundation, Summit Education Initiative, Summit Educational Service Center

September 8, 2016: Dayton

Co-sponsored by The Dayton Foundation, The Frank M. Tait Foundation, Vectren, Montgomery County Educational Service Center, Learn to Earn Dayton

September 14, 2016: Bucyrus

Co-sponsored by the Community Foundation for Crawford County

September 15, 2016: Toledo

Co-sponsored by Stranahan Foundation, Toledo Community Foundation

September 19, 2016: Cleveland

Co-sponsored by Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, United Way of Greater Cleveland, Educational Service Center of Cuyahoga County

September 28, 2016: Elyria

Co-sponsored by The Nord Family Foundation, Nordson Corporation Foundation, The Stocker Foundation

September 29, 2016: Cincinnati

Co-sponsored by The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, KnowledgeWorks, United Way of Greater Cincinnati

October 5, 2016: Cambridge

Co-sponsored by Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, Muskingum County Community Foundation

October 6, 2016: Portsmouth (New Boston)

Co-sponsored by the Scioto Foundation, South Central Ohio Educational Service Center

“I think that the conversations are important as we consider the implications for the students we serve in the state of Ohio. The unintended consequences for them are catastrophic for their future. We need to move from the punitive model of deficit and adopt a true reform mindset that promotes teaching and learning.”

– *Cambridge meeting participant*



ABOUT PHILANTHROPY OHIO

Philanthropy Ohio is an association of foundations, corporate giving programs, individuals and organizations actively involved in philanthropy in Ohio. Its mission is to provide leadership for philanthropy in Ohio and to enhance the ability of members to fulfill their charitable goals. It provides the network, tools and knowledge to help people engaged in philanthropy become more effective, powerful change agents in their communities. Together, its more than 220 members hold over \$50 billion in assets and provide over \$4 billion in grants to nonprofit organizations that work to improve the lives of community residents.



“Thank you for this opportunity. Teachers and parents aren’t given many chances to voice their concerns before the rules are put into place.”

– Bucyrus meeting participant

PHILANTHROPY OHIO EDUCATION INITIATIVE MEMBERS

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The Athens Foundation	The Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation
The Business of Good Foundation	The Nord Family Foundation
The Greater Cincinnati Foundation	Nordson Corporation Foundation
The Cleveland Foundation	Scioto Foundation
Cleveland Browns Foundation	Stark Education Partnership, Inc.
The Dayton Foundation	The Stocker Foundation
Dominion	The Frank M. Tait Foundation
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation	Third Federal Foundation
GAR Foundation	United Way of Central Ohio
The George Gund Foundation	United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Martha Holden Jennings Foundation	United Way of Greater Cleveland
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