Philanthropy Ohio

Ohio’s foundations have prioritized state-level education policy since 2005, and we have no plans to abandon it. Today, our foundations invest over $300 million annually in education to ensure that all Ohioans have access to high-quality education opportunities. We are committed stakeholders: not only because it’s an economic imperative, but because it is the right thing to do.

Since Ohio began to nosedive on the well-respected Quality Counts national rankings in 2011, we have become increasingly concerned about the condition of our P-20 education continuum based on student success measures.

To make Ohio soar again, we will reinvigorate partnerships with the governor, the legislature, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Higher Education Chancellor, local school superintendents, college presidents and others to relentlessly enhance student learning opportunities and equity for each and every student across P-20, honoring individuality and local flexibility along the way. We will also share the successes of our collective portfolio of investments in P-20 education so the state can help spread and scale those successes for greater reach and impact.

**WHY A P-20 STRATEGIC PLAN?**

Philanthropy Ohio has been a steadfast partner in ensuring that all Ohioans have access to high-quality education opportunities, beginning with the state’s youngest, most vulnerable learners to those earning a workforce credential or college degree. To more effectively serve each and every student, we believe the state of Ohio must develop a strategic vision for P-20 education and address the artificial gaps that fragment early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary education opportunities for many of our students. The gaps largely exist because of disconnected bureaucratic structures that are funded separately and were not originally designed to remove barriers and enable student success.

To remedy this issue, we urge Ohio’s early childhood, K-12 and higher education leaders to join hands and engage stakeholders in a process to develop a statewide comprehensive P-20 plan for education. This plan should recognize the state’s full education ecosystem and acknowledge the cause-and-effect relationships that link early childhood, K-12 and higher education. In other words, long-term K-12 goals cannot be attained without simultaneously addressing issues in early childhood. Similarly, it is impossible to achieve positive change in higher education without tending to issues in early childhood and K-12. Figure 1 demonstrates the interconnected nature of Ohio’s education ecosystem.

Figure 1 – Ohio’s Interlocked Education Ecosystem

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**P-20 SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES**

- **Innovation and Technology**
  - Early Childhood
    - Access, Readiness & Expansion
  - K-12
    - Standards, Instruction, Assessment & Accountability
    - Charter Schools
    - School Funding
  - Post-Secondary
    - Access, Affordability & Completion

**Educator Human Capital**
This Open Letter is singularly focused on something Ohio has lacked over the last several years: a clear, unified vision and strategic plan for P-20 education, or a North Star. This letter is designed to help elected officials, policymakers and education leaders engage key stakeholders in a process to identify a North Star and a strategic plan that will guide the state’s education system into the future.

**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.

**IT’S TIME TO ACT: THE STAKES ARE HIGH**

Ohio has been rapidly losing ground in key P-20 education indicators. Consider the following:

- In 2013, more than 60 percent of kindergarteners required either targeted or intense instruction upon entering kindergarten.¹
- In 2009, Ohio ranked 6th in the nation on state-level efforts to improve public education.² In 2016, Ohio plummeted to 23rd – mediocre at best.³
- Ohio’s student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has remained stagnant over the past six years:
  - In 2015, only 45 percent of Ohio’s fourth graders were proficient or above in mathematics. Only 38 percent were proficient or above in reading; and
  - That same year, at the eighth grade level, performance was worse. Only 35 percent were proficient or better in math and 36 percent in reading.⁴
- In 2016, 43 percent of current working-age Ohioans hold a post-secondary certificate or above. By 2025, that figure will need to be 64 percent. Ohio is an under-producer of intellectual capital, which threatens the state’s economic vitality.⁵

Ohio cannot settle for mediocrity. It flies in the face of our 200+ year history of innovation and invention. And our students, families and communities deserve better.

**A PIVOTAL TIME FOR EDUCATION IN OHIO**

2016 represents an inflection point for education in Ohio. We must capitalize on key converging factors:

- **The passion and energy of the newly-appointed K-12 state education leader.** Ohio’s newly-appointed State Superintendent of Public Instruction should be encouraged and supported to work with stakeholders, including leaders in early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary, to identify an academic North Star for student success and co-develop a broader, driving strategic plan that will lead P-20 education into the future.
- **The landmark passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),** which calls for state plans that include a vision for significantly improving student achievement through a commitment to effective implementation of challenging standards, aligned assessments, data and measurement, school intervention and other key education elements critical to student success.
- **The upcoming 2018-19 biennial budget,** which should operationalize and support the vision established by our P-20 education leaders, elected officials and other critical stakeholders.
OPPORTUNITY BEGINS WITH A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

To start the conversation, Philanthropy Ohio believes the following guiding principles, at a minimum, should inform the vision to be determined by stakeholder engagement.

• **Be Student-Success Oriented.** Students must be the focal point of the state’s vision and strategic plan. Every student must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to succeed in life. With the right supports, including a focus on personalized learning, every child can achieve, meet or exceed established expectations and begin a path of lifelong learning.

• **Remain Data Driven.** Every clear vision must be informed by data that honestly illuminate today’s student, school and system performance realities. The data should also help educators determine which educational interventions are needed for students and work most effectively.

• **Recognize the Importance of Equity.** Equity, by definition, is not the same as “equality,” nor is it the same as “diversity.” Equity recognizes the unequal platform from which some students start and provides them the tools, resources and supports to achieve success.

• **Balance State Responsibility with Local Decisions.** While clear and tight expectations must be articulated at the state level, local education leaders must have flexibility to accommodate unique needs based on size, student populations, resources and community priorities. State leaders should consider efforts of local school districts and communities that are leading the way.

• **Commit to High-Quality Implementation and Follow Through.** Our students, educators and families cannot afford to be whipsawed by constant political and policy shifts at the state level. State policy leaders must agree on a unified vision and exercise care and long-term commitment to turn that vision into reality. This means following through on the implementation of high-quality standards for what students should know and be able to do and relevant professional development and instructional strategies that support the standards. This work won’t happen overnight.

• **Be Future Oriented.** Teaching and learning has changed dramatically over the last decade with the promise of technology. State leaders must continue to maximize the use of technology as a tool for education delivery and personalized learning.

Ohio’s P-20 vision must have a clearly-defined purpose, with measurable goals and benchmarks, for public education in each of the three areas: early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary. It should also articulate where Ohio wants to be in the next 10 years. The vision should be supported by a set of clear goals that are enabled by strategies and tied to clear measures that can be easily reported on an accessible, public dashboard.

For illustrative purposes, Philanthropy Ohio offers the following broad vision as a starting point. We encourage P-20 policymakers to consider this example as they push further to advance specific goals, strategies and measures.

P-20 VISION

Each and every Ohio student enjoys learning, has access to high-quality education opportunities in early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary education and is prepared to enter the workforce and succeed in life.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR PHILANTHROPY OHIO?

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving education and following this Open Letter, Philanthropy Ohio will launch a series of targeted education briefing papers aimed at helping the state’s early childhood, K-12 and higher education leaders, elected officials and other key stakeholders plot a clear direction for the future of education. It is our hope that the briefing papers will help drive continuous improvement, scale innovative solutions that we know to work based on our portfolio of investments, remove barriers and accelerate learning for each and every student.

Philanthropy Ohio has developed the following K-12-focused briefing papers:

- **Policy Brief #1**
  Ensuring a Cycle of Effective Teaching

- **Policy Brief #2**
  Standards and Assessments

- **Policy Brief #3**
  K-12 Measures and Accountability

- **Policy Brief #4**
  School Improvement and Turnaround

The policy briefing papers are designed to dive deeper into specific strategies that should be considered to advance K-12 education goals.
Policy Brief #1 examines effective teachers and leaders. Aside from parents and families, teachers are the most valuable asset to the education of our children. And, school leaders have a significant impact on teacher effectiveness and student success. This brief explores the elements that comprise a cycle of effective teaching, including teacher preparation programs and alternative pathways; teacher recruitment and retention; teacher compensation; teacher leadership and professional learning; and evaluation. The brief proposes specific recommendations within each element and identifies opportunities for Ohio through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Policy Brief #2 focuses on challenging standards and assessments. Ohio has developed and is implementing challenging standards in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, science, fine arts and foreign language. The state has also identified a set of aligned assessments. This brief explores Ohio’s 30-year history of academic standards and assessments, explains Ohio’s current approach for updating its standards, describes how ESSA will affect state assessments and identifies specific recommendations Ohio can take to follow through on implementing and enhancing its challenging standards and aligned assessments.

Policy Brief #3 addresses K-12 measures and accountability. Ohio has changed the way it measures and reports school and district performance. This brief outlines those changes, describes additional requirements brought forward by ESSA and identifies recommendations Ohio can take to resist the urge to retreat in accountability. The goal of measuring student progress and holding schools accountable for teaching all students is to eliminate inequity.

Policy Brief #4 explores strategies for turning around low performing schools. Turning around low-performing, high-poverty schools has been a major focus since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002. This brief examines Ohio’s current school improvement approach, unpacks investments made to support turnaround efforts, identifies turnaround and school improvement strategies that are moving the needle, pinpoints upcoming opportunities thanks to ESSA and proposes a set of targeted recommendations leaders can take to help the more than 370,000 Ohio students who are affected by inadequate learning environments.

A future set of white papers—to be issued later this year—will address other areas of the state’s education ecosystem, including early childhood and postsecondary education.

LET’S GET TO WORK

Philanthropy Ohio and its members look forward to partnering with Ohio’s education policy leaders and stakeholders to identify a compelling statewide vision and strategic plan for education that promotes clear goals, strategies and metrics—and drives toward a cohesive, student-success-oriented P-20 education ecosystem. We will leverage the successes from our portfolio of investments to help the state spread and scale solutions that work. We will remain vested partners in education. We owe our children nothing less.

ENDNOTES