

# BEYOND RESTRUCTURING

OHIO RETOOLS STATE SUPPORT FOR HIGH-NEED  
DISTRICTS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY



September 2009

CENTER ON  
EDUCATION  
POLICY **CEP**

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### Introduction

Since 2007, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) has been observing Ohio's implementation of restructuring, the final stage of school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While the number of schools entering restructuring is increasing rapidly, very few schools are exiting. After 2008 testing, the number of Title I schools<sup>1</sup> in the planning and implementation phases of restructuring increased by more than 50%, from 97 to 148. (Schools in the planning phase of restructuring, or year 4 of school improvement, have missed state targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five years; schools in the implementation phase, or year 5 of improvement, have missed targets for six or more years.) No Ohio schools exited restructuring as a result of 2008 testing. Since NCLB was enacted, only nine Ohio schools have ever successfully exited restructuring.

Although state officials charged with school improvement emphasize that they have fully and consistently complied with NCLB requirements, they express deep philosophical disagreement with what they view as key premises of NCLB school restructuring: that school improvement and district improvement can be addressed separately; that a series of increasingly punitive consequences for schools will promote academic success for their students; and that replacing principals and teachers will quickly produce gains in student achievement within schools that have longstanding histories of academic failure. State officials also readily acknowledge they lack the capacity to assist all the districts and schools in the state in need of improvement, as expressed in interviews with CEP.

Recognizing the need for new approaches to help its most challenged schools, Ohio successfully applied to become one of the first six states involved in the U.S. Department of Education's differentiated accountabil-

ity pilot, which permits states to vary the interventions they use with struggling schools and focus their resources on those with the greatest needs. (An additional 3 states joined the pilot in January 2009.) During school year 2008-09, the first year of the pilot in Ohio, the state began to focus higher levels of funding and technical support on certain high-need districts; these districts are expected develop data-driven improvement plans to be implemented in fall 2009.

In 2008-09, Ohio also began to implement a second new approach relevant to NCLB improvement—a growth model for determining whether schools have made AYP. Under the growth model, which Ohio adopted with the permission of the U. S. Department of Education, students who fall short of the state's AYP targets may be counted as having met the targets if they make significant gains, as explained later in this report. Using the growth model has substantially reduced the number of schools that would otherwise have been identified for NCLB improvement, thus reducing the number of schools requiring technical assistance from the state, as mandated by NCLB. Together the differentiated accountability pilot and the growth model have narrowed the state's focus on a smaller group of districts and schools.

This report, a follow-up to CEP's 2008 report on school restructuring in Ohio, examines the implementation and effects of differentiated accountability and related policies in Ohio. We looked at a range of questions. How is the differentiated accountability pilot affecting districts with large numbers of schools in restructuring? How successfully is the new system differentiating support and interventions for schools and districts in which only a few subgroups of students missed AYP targets from those in which students across the board missed the targets? What local approaches are districts taking to improve restructuring schools?

<sup>1</sup> Title I schools are those that receive federal funding for low-achieving students in low-income areas under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLB.

To collect data for this report, we conducted interviews in the fall and winter of 2008-09 with two officials in the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). We also interviewed more than 20 local administrators, teachers, and other district and school staff in four school districts—Cincinnati Public Schools, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Mansfield City Schools, and Mount Vernon City Schools—and in eight schools within these districts. In addition, we reviewed restructuring-related documents and analyzed test data at the state and local levels.

## Key Findings

Several key findings emerged from our study of differentiated accountability and restructuring schools in Ohio:

- The state accountability system, known as the Ohio Improvement Process, is the primary driver of school improvement in Ohio. No Child Left Behind's accountability system, including restructuring, is secondary.*** Ohio's differentiated accountability pilot was designed to bring federal accountability into closer alignment with the state's accountability and school improvement processes.
- With the exception of school personnel in Cincinnati, the people we interviewed in case study schools in year 4 of improvement seemed unaware of federal requirements to develop plans for restructuring.*** However, school personnel clearly had a strong working knowledge of the state accountability system, within which federal restructuring options are embedded, most likely because the state system's consequences are more readily apparent. As explained in detail below, schools in the lowest categories of the state's accountability system face the prospect of competing with charter schools or losing students through the state's tuition voucher program. Both these options have been exercised in the state's largest school districts, Cleveland and Columbus. By contrast, direct experience with NCLB restructuring consequences, such as the restaffing of Taft Elementary in Cincinnati, occurs far less frequently.
- The number of schools entering restructuring in Ohio has increased, but very few schools have exited.*** Through its differentiated accountability plan, the Ohio Department of Education hopes to change this situation by fine-tuning its support for districts with schools where only one or two subgroups missed AYP targets and providing more focused support for districts with schools where students across the board missed targets.
- Ohio's differentiated accountability plan attempts to settle the question of how often a school that has not exited restructuring after multiple years would have to try a new strategy.*** The plan requires districts where large numbers of students are not meeting AYP targets to select one optional improvement measure in addition to a required measure at the time it enters the support category, then select another optional measure if it has not made "significant progress" after three years.
- An increase in Title I funds, combined with differentiated accountability, means some schools long in restructuring are once again receiving state school improvement grants for which they had previously exhausted their eligibility.*** The state uses school improvement funds available from both subsections 1003(a) and 1003(g) of Title I for these grants. While subsection (g) funds have a three-year limit, subsection (a) funds do not. The state is targeting subsection (a) funds to districts slated for high levels of support under the differentiated accountability pilot.
- As of December 2008, districts were just beginning to learn about differentiated accountability.*** However, at least one case study district, Mount Vernon City Schools, has already seen state support diminish because its targeted school improved. District officials from the large urban districts in our case studies, Cincinnati and Cleveland, gave mixed initial reviews of the new system.
- Individual districts are pursuing small-scale but radical restructuring efforts that show initial promise.*** In summer 2008, the Cincinnati Public Schools completely restaffed Taft Elementary. Thanks to a state grant for schools focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and a partnership with the University of Cincinnati, Taft also underwent building renovations last summer and now has significant, continuing support for staff development. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District has created new schools, also partially funded by state STEM grants, as a restructuring strategy. The

new schools are intended to provide higher-quality school options for students who would otherwise have attended low-performing high schools, including high schools in restructuring. Data on the entering classes in Cleveland's two new STEM schools indicate they have succeeded in attracting students who might otherwise have attended high schools in restructuring.

## Ohio Context for Restructuring

Over the past two years, CEP's interviews and site visits in Ohio have shown that a school's performance rating in the state accountability system carries much greater weight with district and local school officials than NCLB school improvement categories do. The Ohio Department of Education provides formal guidance to local districts and schools that explains the federal accountability system under NCLB and the consequences at each stage of school improvement. This guidance is publicly available on the ODE Web site. For the last two years, however, case study district and school personnel have consistently asked questions about restructuring in ways that show a lack of awareness of the federal accountability system. For example, when we conducted research in the fall and winter of 2008-09, none of the people interviewed in our case study schools that were in year 4 of school improvement, other than staff in Cincinnati, was aware that NCLB requires them to develop a restructuring plan. Some schools in year 5 were unaware of their restructuring options under NCLB.

At the same time, our interviews with district officials, particularly in Cleveland, as well as a survey of local superintendents conducted for ODE in spring 2008 by Ohio University, highlighted the challenges involved in coordinating state and district efforts at school improvement. The Ohio Department of Education has been making a concerted effort over the last five years to improve its overall level of service delivery to districts, but the superintendents surveyed by ODE indicated more work remains to be done. Through the survey, which had a response rate of 73%, superintendents expressed frustration at what they viewed as a lack of two-way communication between districts and ODE staff, and perceived ODE as "out of touch with the field" (Ruhill, Yandell, & Lewis, 2008).

The federal and Ohio state accountability systems have different consequences for schools that fail to meet each system's standards. NCLB provides a succession of consequences for schools that have failed to make AYP for multiple years and have spent more years in school improvement. Ohio has no parallel system, but places schools in one of six categories based on an internal rating system, which takes into account both state indicators and AYP, as well as other factors. From highest to lowest, the ratings are excellent with distinction, excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch, and academic emergency. State law permits charter schools to open in districts designated as academic watch or academic emergency. Also, Ohio's voucher program is targeted to students who attend schools that have been placed in these two lowest categories for two of the previous three years. Thus, district and school personnel are keenly aware they could lose per-pupil revenue if their schools stay in those categories.

This combination of factors makes NCLB restructuring a low priority in the minds of local district and school personnel. Meanwhile, at the state level, the need to target resources narrowly and the philosophy of working with districts rather than schools as the unit of change has prompted the state to seek a differentiated form of accountability, one that state officials believe brings the federal and state accountability systems into closer alignment.

## Ohio's Differentiated Accountability Plan

The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), as differentiated accountability is known within the state, differs from No Child Left Behind's accountability system in some important respects. Significantly, the focus for state assistance in improvement is the district, not the school. "Buildings are not good or bad by themselves," observed Associate Superintendent Stephen Barr, who directs Ohio's Center for School Improvement, in explaining the rationale behind Ohio's plan. "Let's assume the impact of building to building and district to building is a reality and build a system around it."

Given this foundational principle, districts and their schools are generally expected to move through the OIP as a unit. Ohio districts in district improvement are categorized in one of three ways: low-, medium-, or high-support, based on the aggregate percentage of

students not meeting AYP targets across the district. Low-support districts are those that have failed to meet less than 20% of the state’s AYP targets; medium-support districts have failed to meet between 20% and 29% of the targets; and high-support districts have failed to meet 30% or more. Generally, the OIP categories do not take into account the number of years a district and its schools spend in the improvement process. However, to ensure schools in restructuring receive adequate support, the OIP mandates that any district with at least one school in NCLB restructuring must be categorized at least as medium-support. These new labels replace the school improvement categories under NCLB but do not change the state’s school performance ratings, which are the ones to which district and school personnel pay the greatest attention.

According to unpublished data provided by the Ohio Department of Education, just under half (291) of Ohio’s 613 districts have been categorized at one of the three levels of support in the Ohio Improvement Process. Of these, 23 are considered high-support, requiring intensive state assistance in improvement. Three of our four case study districts—Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Mansfield—are among these high-support districts. Our fourth case study district, Mount Vernon, is considered a low-support district.

**Table 1** shows the complete list of high-support districts for the 2008-09 school year and the number of schools in each district.

While maintaining the interventions required by NCLB in the early stages of improvement for all districts in the Ohio Improvement Process, Ohio has also developed new interventions to be used with districts at different levels of need. Districts labeled medium- or high-support, which include all districts with schools in restructuring, are required to establish district and building leadership teams charged with analyzing school and student performance data and using that data to build, implement, and evaluate improvement plans. As they begin gathering data, state-selected high-support districts are required to work with a state diagnostic team of part-time state employees. The diagnostic team conducts a comprehensive audit of district and school curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development practices. These data help inform the district and schools as their district and building leadership teams work through the decision

**Table 1. Restructuring Schools in Ohio’s High-Support Districts**

District Name	Number of Schools	Number of Schools in Restructuring Planning or Implementation
Akron City	58	4
Canton City	22	4
Cincinnati City	63	13
Cleveland Metropolitan	106	27
Columbus City	128	24
Dayton City	34	15
East Cleveland City	7	4
Euclid City	10	5
Franklin Local	6	0
Lakewood Local	5	0
Lima City	12	3
Lorain City	17	1
Mansfield City	11	4
Maple Heights City	6	0
Marion City	9	1
Middletown City	11	2
Springfield City	16	3
Switzerland of Ohio Local	9	0
Toledo City	62	18
Toronto City	3	0
Warren City	5	0
Warrensville Heights City	6	0
Youngstown City	16	5

Table reads: The Akron City school district has 58 schools, of which 4 are in NCLB restructuring.

Source: Unpublished data provided by the Ohio Department of Education, 2008.

framework, a state-developed tool that helps districts analyze data and identify priorities for improvement.

In the OIP, the restructuring options under NCLB have been retained as part of a larger menu of options from which a school, district, or the state could select as needed to use with medium- or high-support districts. Because districts and schools move through the OIP as a unit, they share responsibility for making the choices, but the final word generally lies with the district. The menu also includes other options that are not among NCLB's restructuring choices, such as extending the school day or year. When a district is initially identified as medium- or high-support, it selects one option from this menu. If a district or school remains in the medium- or high-support category for three years without showing "significant progress" in raising student achievement, it must implement another option from the menu. To determine whether a school has made significant progress, the state takes a three-year average of changes in scaled scores on state tests rather than changes in proficiency of students taking the state tests. This method looks "under the hood" to better determine if progress toward the goal of proficiency is being made. If the change in average scaled scores represents a rate of increase that, if sustained, would bring all students and subgroups to proficiency by 2014, the school is considered to have made significant progress. Districts and schools that remain in the same support category and have not made significant progress would be required to add an additional intervention once every three years. The state would not impose additional interventions on schools in any category that are demonstrating significant progress.

**Table 2** shows the interventions that can be used in the Ohio Improvement Process and specifies which are required and which are optional at each level of support.

In addition, the state could select one or more options from a set of other consequences for high-support districts that fail to demonstrate improvement or fail to provide consistent oversight of improvement efforts. These include the following:

- Defer programmatic funds or reduce administrative funds
- Replace district personnel who are related to the failure to make AYP

- Remove particular schools from district jurisdiction and establish alternative governance procedures
- Appoint a receiver or trustee for the district
- Initiate the Academic Distress Commission if the district has missed AYP targets for four consecutive years and is labeled in academic emergency using state accountability measures

In the minds of some Ohio state and district officials, the Ohio Improvement Process places a much greater emphasis on working with existing staff in restructuring schools than does No Child Left Behind. Because replacing staff is one of just five federal restructuring options under NCLB, these officials feel restructuring forces schools and districts to consider replacing staff whether or not that is an effective option in practice. The difficulty of replacing teachers and the likelihood the same staff will simply reappear as new hires in another school in the same district are major reasons for their skepticism of this option.

"You have an ineffective teacher at School A, and you restructure so you shift that ineffective teacher from School A to School B, and now School B's also infected. So that wasn't working. Shifting people around isn't going to work," observed Shannah Kosek, executive director of elementary education for the Mansfield City Schools. "So now we have this Ohio Improvement Process where you support the people who you have, and you don't just infect the entire district by moving people around. You put supports in place."

## State and Federal Accountability Systems in Ohio

Ohio's state accountability system differs in significant respects from federal accountability under No Child Left Behind, and it is the state's system that is foremost both in differentiated accountability and in the minds of Ohio's district and school leaders.

Although the federal accountability system under NCLB and Ohio's state accountability system share key features, they differ in both how they calculate performance and what consequences are imposed on districts and schools that fail to meet performance standards. While NCLB solely relies on AYP to deter-

mine whether schools are succeeding or failing, the Ohio accountability system takes more factors into account. Four components make up Ohio's accounta-

bility system: performance on state tests according to state indicators; attendance and graduation rates; a performance index score; a value-added measure

**Table 2. Interventions under Differentiated Accountability in Ohio**

Interventions	District Level of Support					
	Low		Medium		High	
	Required	Optional	Required	Optional	Required	Optional
Implement public school choice	X		X		X	
Implement supplemental educational services	X		X		X	
Notify parents of district status	X		X		X	
Use the state's decision framework to create district and building needs assessments	X		X		X	
Develop district & school improvement plans	X		X		X	
Direct 10% of Title I funds to professional development	X		X		X	
Apply annual measurable objectives for affected subgroups	X		X		X	
Establish district and school leadership teams		X	X		X	
Conduct on-site review and follow-up by state diagnostic team					X	
Conduct on-site review and follow-up by state-approved diagnostic team as selected by the state				X		X
Implement district and school plans with state oversight						X
Reopen the school as a public charter school				X		X
Replace all or most of the building staff				X		X
Institute and implement a new curriculum, including professional development				X		
Decrease management authority at the building level				X		
Appoint an outside expert to advise the building				X		
Extend the school day or school year for the building				X		
Restructure the internal organization of the building				X		
Contract with an outside entity to operate the school				X		X

Table reads: Districts categorized as low-support, medium-support, and high-support under the Ohio state accountability system are required to offer public school choice.

Note: "Optional" indicates additional items from which the district, school, or state would select one or more.

Source: Ohio Department of Education, *Ohio's Differentiated Accountability Model: Promoting Flexibility, Innovation for District-Wide Improvement of Instructional Practice and Student Performance*, [www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=590&ContentID=47348&Content=61263](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=590&ContentID=47348&Content=61263).

(which in 2008 replaced a measure of academic growth in the school's performance index); and AYP status.

Although Ohio's system pays attention to more than just AYP, federal AYP does weigh heavily and independently into the accountability designations awarded to districts and schools. AYP can raise or lower a school's state performance rating independently of the school's performance on other measures. If a school makes AYP, it automatically earns the state rating of "continuous improvement," the middle of the scale, regardless of its performance on state indicators. If a school fails to meet AYP targets for three consecutive years and falls short of these targets for more than one subgroup during the current year, it can be rated no higher than continuous improvement regardless of its performance on state indicators.

Until recently, all state accountability targets were more difficult to meet than was AYP. Since 2004, state test benchmarks have been set at 75% of students scoring at the proficient level on state tests of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Only reading and math are tested annually in grades 3-8; writing is tested in grades 4 and 6, while science and social studies are tested in grades 5 and 8. All subjects are included in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Ohio Graduation Test.

Ohio's AYP targets have only recently begun to catch up to, and in a few cases surpass, the 75% benchmark set by the state. In 2007, Ohio's AYP targets in reading were higher than the state benchmark for all grades except 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, but in math the state benchmark was higher than AYP targets at all grade levels. Although Ohio's AYP targets increased between 2007 and 2008 testing, no mathematics target has yet reached the 75% proficient benchmark. Ohio's AYP targets will not rise again until the 2010-11 school year.

To illustrate the gap between the two sets of targets, **table 3** shows the difference between the state indicator and AYP targets in elementary reading and math for grades 3 and 8 in the 2006, 2007, and 2008 school years.

Currently, Ohio districts and schools can make AYP through any of four ways:

1. **Current year results.** The current year's percentage proficient for the subject, weighted across all tested grades, meets or exceeds the AYP target. (The percentage of students tested in the relevant grade levels and subjects meets the AYP targets set by the state.)
2. **Two-year combined results.** The percentage proficient for the subject weighted across all tested

**Table 3. Ohio State Accountability Indicators and AYP Targets in Elementary Reading**

Indicator or Target	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
<b>Reading</b>			
State reading indicator (all grades)	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%
Grade 3 AYP target	71.2%	71.2%	77.0%
Grade 8 AYP target	73.8%	73.8%	79.0%
<b>Mathematics</b>			
State math indicator (all grades)	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%
Grade 3 AYP target	60.6%	60.6%	68.5%
Grade 8 AYP target	47.5%	47.5%	58.0%

Table reads: In 2005-06, Ohio's state accountability system required 75% of students in any tested grade to score at or above the proficient level on state tests for a school or district to meet the state indicator. The AYP proficiency target for federal accountability purposes for grade 3 reading was 71.2% of students scoring at or above the proficient level.

Source: Ohio Department of Education Web site, [www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1&ContentID=16209&Content=64318](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1&ContentID=16209&Content=64318).

grades meets or exceeds the AYP target when current and prior school year results are averaged.

3. **Safe harbor.** A subgroup that failed to meet AYP targets the previous year must reduce its percentage of non-proficient students by 10% or more from the previous year, and the subgroup must meet the AYP target in the secondary indicator (attendance and/or graduation rate).
4. **Growth model.** The “growth model,” described below, is a new way for schools to make AYP in Ohio. Growth models look at how much academic growth students have made rather than looking just at whether they have or have not met a fixed achievement target. Ohio’s growth model is available only to elementary and middle schools because growth projections are based on Ohio Achievement Test data for grades 3-8.

Ohio is one of 15 states approved by the U.S. Department of Education as of January 2009 to pilot a growth model to determine AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). CEP has also studied the growth model in Michigan, which was approved for participation in the pilot at the same time as Ohio (CEP, 2009). Using publicly available statistical methodology, Ohio has devised a formula that uses a student’s current scores on state tests to project future scores. Under the growth model, any non-proficient student projected to become proficient within two years is counted as proficient for the current year. Similar to Tennessee’s, the formula accounts for students with missing test scores and adjusts for projected future schooling effects based on the test results from the schools a student is mostly likely to attend in the future, given standard feeder patterns (Ohio Department of Education, 2007).

The addition of the growth model has had a large impact on the number of schools making AYP in 2008 testing. According to data provided by the Ohio Department of Education, 25% of the state’s 2,075 Title I schools, or 527 schools, were able to make AYP due to the growth model. These percentages were larger than the reported range of 0 to 14% of schools that benefited from the growth models in the six states

participating in the U.S. Department of Education’s growth model pilot in 2007 (Klein, 2007).

Given the limitations Ohio and other states face in their ability to support districts and schools in improvement, “the growth model may ultimately be viewed as helping to establish some healthier boundaries” around which schools should be targeted for state assistance in improvement, said Associate Superintendent Stephen Barr of the Center for School Improvement.

## Funding for Restructuring

States have two sources of federal funding to assist districts and schools identified for improvement under NCLB, including restructuring schools. The first is the 4% set-aside of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(a) of Title I.<sup>2</sup> The second source is a separate appropriation of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I. This year, Ohio received a total of \$20,386,439 in Title I school improvement funds from both sources combined, an increase of \$2,490,099 over the previous year. “More schools are benefiting from these additional funds,” said Barr. Ohio’s internal reckoning of school improvement funds received over the last three years, shown in the **table 4**, varies slightly from these totals due to the differences between state and federal fiscal years and other administrative issues.

Ohio’s process for allocating Title I school improvement funds to schools is already tightly aligned to its differentiated accountability plan. In 2006, the state received permission from the U.S. Department of Education to target school improvement funds to districts with the largest numbers and percentages of students not meeting AYP targets, essentially the same criteria used to identify high-support districts under the OIP. “Those funds are still staying pretty tight on top of our priority districts,” said Barr. “We’re adding more schools in those districts.” At the same time, he added, “we’re trying to keep a consistent amount of money going out to schools over three years” to avoid a “roller-coaster” effect as federal funds fluctuate over time.

<sup>2</sup> Although all states were required to set aside 4%, some were not able to reserve the full set-aside in certain years because of a hold-harmless provision in Title I, as amended by NCLB. This situation is explained in more detail in two CEP reports (2006; 2007) available at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

**Table 4. School Improvement Funds Received in Ohio, 2007-2009**

School Year	Section 1003(a)	Section 1003(g)
2006-07	\$16,113,373	0
2007-08	\$17,755,088	\$4,325,232*
2008-09	\$20,275,387	\$17,946,161

Table reads: In school year 2006-07, Ohio received \$16,113,373 in federal funds under section 1003(g) of Title I law and no funds from section 1003(a) of Title I to assist schools identified for improvement under NCLB.

\*Section 1003(g) funds were made available to states in February 2008

Source: Unpublished data from the Ohio Department of Education.

Schools in improvement are eligible to receive a state-administered grant, usually of \$60,000 per year for a maximum of three years. The state currently finances these grants with Title I school improvement funds from sections 1003(a) and (g). Because federal regulations set a three-year limit on the use of section 1003(g) grants to individual schools, Ohio has had an informal policy of limiting all school improvement grants to three years. However, this is changing as the state targets funds to high-support districts and as schools remain in improvement longer. There are no statutory or regulatory limitations on how many years a school can receive 1003(a) funds, and the state appears to be taking advantage of that flexibility.

The state makes initial allocations available to schools on July 1 of each year. In June, data from schools that were in improvement the previous school year are run through a formula to determine school improvement allocations while the state is calculating AYP results for that year's state testing. While most schools in improvement are able to receive funds on July 1, schools whose eligibility for the funds rests on their most recent AYP results must wait until August to have their data entered into formula calculations. These schools include both those at risk of entering improvement and schools that made AYP the previous year, known as schools "in delay." If they make AYP a second year in a row, they exit school improvement and become ineligible for the money. Schools formerly in delay that subsequently missed AYP targets are entered first, then, if funds remain, all other eligible schools are run through the formula to determine allocations.

Although schools in improvement the prior school year are first in line to be evaluated via the formula, the formula does not give weight to the number of years a school has been in improvement, so restructuring schools have no special advantage in receiving school improvement grants.

The state is using its 5% share of the Title I school improvement funds set-aside under 1003(a) to pay for the technology warehouse needed to support its decision framework, a system for analyzing data as part of school improvement planning. It is also using those funds to pay for its state diagnostic teams, the part-time state employees who help districts and schools conduct their initial data analysis. State support teams work with districts and schools to help them analyze data from the diagnostic review using the decision framework, and then develop their improvement plans.

### Common Themes from Districts and Schools

At the time of our research, differentiated accountability, approved on July 1, 2008, was just beginning to establish a foothold in districts and schools. Early in school year 2008-09, the state provided training for state support teams and for regional technical support centers for schools known as educational service centers. The state then sent out the teams and center personnel to facilitate data analysis and improvement planning sessions with districts and schools. In November and December 2008, districts were begin-

ning conversations with their state support teams or educational service centers about differentiated accountability. The state expected high-support districts, and eventually their schools, to use the decision framework to gather and analyze data and develop plans in 2008-09 that would be implemented in 2009-10. “It’s really just getting started, and the plans that we’re putting into place do not take effect until next year,” said Bill Myles, administrative officer of school improvement for the Cincinnati Public Schools.

Cincinnati and Cleveland, the two urban districts among our Ohio case study districts, both had prior systems in place to use data to inform their improvement planning. Reactions to the OIP process were mixed. In Cincinnati, the official interviewed said the OIP initially seemed to mesh well with the district’s existing process, but a Cleveland district official expressed initial concerns that the OIP process might result in duplication of effort within the district. A May 2009 report on the OIP by Policy Matters Ohio indicated that districts in the first cohort to receive state support for planning under the differentiated accountability pilot were more positive about the process than the state’s five largest urban districts, where many schools in restructuring are concentrated (van Lier, 2009). The Policy Matters Ohio report also noted that the state may need to develop flexibility in working with urban districts that already have data systems and decisionmaking processes in place.

It comes as no surprise to the state department of education that such concerns have surfaced early on. “Training 400 to 500 people in a new way of thinking is not a two-to-four day experience,” said Barr. By May 2009, a number of superintendents who initially expressed skepticism about the OIP presented positive early results at a mini-conference of the first cohort of districts to undertake OIP planning with state support. “It was great to hear superintendents [say] ‘this is helping us have the conversations we need to have’” to move forward in district and school improvement, Barr observed.

In our interviews, district and school officials expressed confusion about the requirements for the planning phase of NCLB restructuring. Our observation last year that no Ohio case study schools in year 4 of improvement had engaged in restructuring planning held true again (CEP, 2008). Officials in Cleveland’s case study schools said they had done no restructuring

planning in 2007-08, when they were in year 4 of improvement; in 2008-09, all were in year 5, the implementation phase of restructuring. Cleveland district officials said in fall 2008 they were just beginning to have discussions about the research base for school improvement strategies with high school principals across the district, regardless of their school improvement status. During the previous school year, the district’s attention had been heavily concentrated on elementary schools.

Although our case study districts (with the exception of Cincinnati) said they had not done formal restructuring planning, in some cases districts had exercised an NCLB restructuring option without knowing they were doing so. For example, Mansfield City Schools chose to replace the principal at Malabar Middle School in the summer of 2008, as the school moved from year 4 to year 5 of school improvement. “We’re starting there first to see if it’s more an administrative situation that’s preventing them from moving along,” said Shannah Kosek, Mansfield’s executive director of elementary education.

Cleveland was the only case study district observed to have tried a new restructuring strategy in the 2008-09 school year. By creating two new schools focused on science, technology, mathematics, and engineering, Cleveland drew enrollment away from high schools in restructuring. District officials said they intend to deploy new school creation as a deliberate strategy to redirect enrollment away from restructuring schools.

## Restructuring in Cincinnati

In a December 2008 interview, Bill Myles, a Cincinnati district official, seemed optimistic that the new differentiated accountability plan would mesh well with district school improvement strategies. “In our case, it fits in very well because we already had a district improvement plan,” said Myles. “We already were basing our decisions [on] the data, and that’s what the Ohio Improvement Process is. It’s looking at the data, making your decisions about where your root causes are, and moving from there.”

Meanwhile, the district’s own school improvement strategies were about to change. In early March 2009, interim superintendent Mary Ronan announced plans to revamp Cincinnati’s coaching for schools in the

2009-10 school year. Her plan would eliminate the five instructional support teams (ISTs) that now work with all schools, although they devote more time to the neediest schools, including those in restructuring.

The district's new plan would more intensely concentrate coaching in needy schools and would create three "turn-around teams" to work with its 16 lowest-performing schools. According to Dawn Grady of the district's public affairs office, not all of the 16 schools are in NCLB school restructuring. The turnaround teams would consist of a principal and two teachers, likely recruited from the existing pool of IST coaches. Additional, external coaches would support the work at these 16 schools and would also work part-time with another 18 struggling schools not requiring as extensive support.

As announced in January 2008, Cincinnati's Taft Elementary was completely restaffed by fall 2009. The district also started a partnership with the University of Cincinnati, as well as museums and corporate and industry partners, to develop and focus Taft's new curriculum in science, technology, mathematics and engineering. The partners won a state STEM grant to pursue the work. Taft's STEM curriculum is based on the framework of Universal Design for Learning, which provides supports and eliminates barriers to learning for students with disabilities and English language learners. "We had a month-long professional development with the teachers last summer that came from the STEM funding," said James Basham, an assistant professor of education at the University of Cincinnati. The university also planned and helped manage building renovations and technology upgrades, including interactive whiteboards in every classroom and two "digital commons" areas for project-based learning that integrate laptops, iPods, desktops, and videoconferencing equipment capability. A university representative has been on site four days weekly throughout the school year, and the university plans to hold a three-week professional development training in summer 2009. Basham said that most of the current student body attended Taft before it was restaffed but that the school has been drawing new students, including some leaving charter schools, since the beginning of the 2008-09 school year.

Cincinnati provides an example of the new flexibility with state improvement grants discussed earlier. Parker Elementary School received a state school improvement

grant this year, although it had previously received funds in fiscal years 2003, 2005, and 2006. Meanwhile, Reese E. Price Elementary, formerly Whittier Elementary, was formally recognized as a new school with a majority of new students (the Whittier building was closed and the Price building, in a different location, opened in 2007-08). As a new school, it received a new building identification number from the state and was no longer considered to be in school improvement.

## Restructuring in Cleveland

Restructuring in Cleveland must be viewed within the overall context of school improvement. In the first year of the tenure of current Chief Executive Officer Eugene T. W. Sanders, the system moved into the state's "continuous improvement" accountability category, the middle of the scale. That was the first time ever that Cleveland had ranked so highly. However, in Sanders' second year as superintendent, 2007-08, those gains in student achievement were not sustained. While AYP targets increased, test scores also declined, and the district fell back into "academic watch," the second-lowest category. District leaders have continued to develop plans to increase students' academic achievement.

In summer 2008 Cleveland developed a curricular scope and sequence for grades preK-10. Chief Academic Officer Eric Gordon met with principals to explain the scope and sequence and to outline the district's academic performance goals for every school. Every school is expected to move every student a minimum of "one-half band" higher on state tests. For example, Gordon said, a student who is at the bottom of the "limited" category (the lowest category of student achievement) is expected to move to the top of "limited," gaining more than one year's worth of academic progress for a year of instruction. If schools succeed in making these kinds of gains for all students, they could expect to see their own state accountability rating rise one level, such as from academic watch to continuous improvement. Although the "half-band" strategy has been implemented at all levels this year, the district is focusing on improvement in K-8 schools and will tackle high schools in a more systematic way starting in the 2009-10 school year.

Cleveland's district leaders have met with their assigned state support team regularly to discuss differ-

entiated accountability, said Gordon. According to Gordon, the state's decision framework is similar to a data tool Cleveland already uses to guide planning. Cleveland spent much of the first part of school year 2008-09 negotiating with the state support team to use the data analysis the district has already done without redoing it into the state's format. "We have really wrestled back and forth with the state support team to make sure that we are able to meaningfully comply [with the state's process] and yet not derail work we've already done," said Gordon.

The Cleveland district and its state support team jointly determined that state diagnostic reviews would be held in each of the district's seven regions, essentially treating each region as a separate district. Gordon said he expected this process would help each region understand its own data more deeply than it has so far through the district's process. "We also think, and the state agrees, that [the district] will be better able to implement the model if we treat it more like it was designed, for districts of 8,000 kids or less instead of 50,000 kids."

In mid-November, regional superintendents were assembling teams of representative principals, teachers, parents, and support staff to meet with the state support team and begin preparing a decision framework for their region. The state's diagnostic team was scheduled to visit 14 schools in December—10 schools chosen by the state alone and 4 chosen with the district's input. The district and state support team agreed to confine school visits to K-8 schools because of the aforementioned focus on K-8 school improvement this year.

Gordon expressed concern that the planning process, like the data gathering, may need to be tweaked to mesh with Cleveland's existing school improvement strategy. "The diagnostic [team] and the state support team do not communicate with each other, so there's not a clear understanding of how the two pieces reconcile," he noted.

The high school principals we interviewed in the case study districts remained unaware of federal requirements under NCLB regarding restructuring. However, they were very well aware of their district's goals for student achievement and for use of the new scope and sequence. All three principals interviewed noted the challenge of helping students with disabilities make the significant gains expected of all students.

Cleveland has adopted new school creation as a deliberate school restructuring strategy. In early 2008, the Cleveland district received a grant from the Ohio STEM Learning Network to develop a new high school devoted to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This led to the formation of the Metropolitan Cleveland Consortium for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (MC2STEM), a network of 55 organizations supporting the development of the new MC2STEM High School. In addition, MC2STEM has supported the creation of the Design Lab Early College High School, a new school focused on engineering and industrial design.

Students attending the new schools and their parents expressed satisfaction with the new schools in their inaugural year. "I knew teachers would care about our education. We would get 60 to 80 college credits," said a female freshman student, explaining her decision to attend Design Lab Early College High School.

A parent of a Design Lab student shared her daughter's excitement about the school. "She feels really strongly this is the best place any kid could be right now. I'm thrilled she got in on the ground floor when all the enthusiasm is still bubbling." Her daughter, a strong math student who previously didn't think of herself as artistic, is now interested in a career in industrial design and robotics. "This school has helped see her artistic abilities. Sometime in September, she came home and said, 'I can actually draw, Mom.'"

Many students also said they were seeking an alternative to the high school they would otherwise have attended. "I didn't want to go to my home school. I thought this would give me a better experience," said a male freshman at Design Lab who would have attended East Technical High School, currently in restructuring, had he not been accepted to Design Lab.

"I love it and he loves it," said the mother of a freshman at MC2STEM. Her son would have been assigned to Collinwood High School, another Cleveland high school in restructuring, had he not been accepted to MC2STEM. "He told me he would drop out before he would go" to Collinwood, she said.

The new schools were fully expected to divert enrollment away from poorly performing high schools, including those in restructuring. Though the two new

schools have enrolled fewer than 200 students total in their first year, they appear to have successfully recruited students who might otherwise have attended high schools in restructuring planning or implementation. Cleveland district data show that 88% of MC2STEM High School's current freshman class lives in an area assigned to a high school in year 4 or higher of school improvement, meaning these students would likely have attended a high school in restructuring planning or implementation had they not enrolled at MC2STEM. Similarly, 85% of Design Lab's freshmen live in an area assigned to a high school in year 4 or higher of school improvement. Some students we interviewed said that they and their parents had concerns about attending their assigned high school and had actively sought an alternative. The new schools conducted a lottery admissions process, and test scores indicate they did not simply cream off higher-achievers. MC2STEM students scored slightly higher than district averages in math and reading; Design Lab students scored higher in reading, but not in math.

Meanwhile, some high schools in restructuring are seeing declining enrollment. "Our enrollment is now just under 800," noted Principal Dale Laux of East Technical High School. "We get parents who keep their kids away," though he attributes their reluctance to enroll their students more to the school's location than to its performance. Campus administrator Carol Lockhart of East High School noted she lost six teachers in fall 2008 due to declining enrollment.

## Restructuring in Mansfield

In summer 2007, the entire Mansfield district was reorganized. To address a \$9 million budget shortfall, new superintendent Lloyd Martin closed four schools and replaced principals throughout the district, regardless of each school's improvement status. To restaff in the wake of the building closures, all teachers in the district bid for jobs on the basis of seniority, as specified in the local bargaining agreement. Currently, Mansfield district is in year 5 of improvement; two schools are in restructuring planning and one school, Malabar Middle, is in restructuring implementation. One additional school, Newman Elementary, is now in year 4 delay after making AYP in 2008 testing.

Shannah Kosek, the district's elementary education executive director, met with the district's assigned state support team in fall 2008 for an overview of the Ohio Improvement Process. At the same time, she said, she continued to work with the district's executive leadership and building principals to monitor the district's improvement plan. She met with principals and other district leadership bimonthly for half a day to update them on the Ohio Improvement Process and to work together on school improvement planning and implementation.

In response to the OIP's emphasis on using data to drive planning, Mansfield created a new position for its districtwide testing coordinator. Since September of 2008 this staff person has served as the district's research and evaluation specialist, overseeing the many forms of data available to schools and providing training to building-level leadership teams in how to analyze data and use it to inform their decisionmaking. The new position is paid for from district general funds. "It helped us develop goals for buildings" as required by the Ohio Improvement Process, Kosek said. "We're using data now more than ever, for every decision we have to make."

When we visited Mansfield, the transfer of knowledge about the OIP from district to building level was still in process. As of mid-November 2008, "we haven't actually rolled up our sleeves and dug into the real work yet," Kosek said. Teachers at Malabar Middle School had yet to hear anything about the state's differentiated accountability plan.

Meanwhile, the district's training relationship with its state support team has changed somewhat since the advent of differentiated accountability. Previously, the state support team would come to the district and hold trainings for staff. Now, the district sends representatives to regional trainings provided by the state support team, and those representatives train other relevant district personnel when they return, in a "train the trainer" model.

Three Mansfield elementary schools—Hedges, Newman, and Prospect—received Title I school improvement grants of \$60,000 for 2008-09, their first round of funding. In 2008-09, Hedges was in year 3 of school improvement and in the state's lowest accountability category, academic emergency. Prospect was year 4 of improvement (restructuring planning) and in the state's second-lowest category, academic watch. Meanwhile, because Newman

had made AYP, it was in year 4 delay of improvement and had risen to continuous improvement, the middle of the state accountability scale.

Newman was using its school improvement grant to pay for a math coach provided by Ohio State University. Kosek noted that other schools in her district appear to need coaching more than Newman does. “We have Springmill. That’s in academic watch, has not met AYP for the last few years, and has no funding. So it’s not real equitable,” she said.

Newman Principal Alicia Hinton pointed out, however, that her school still needs the help. “I understand that there are some buildings that slipped behind and did not make AYP, and that we actually improved a level [according to the state accountability system]. But I still need that support,” said Hinson.

Malabar Principal Daniel Wood said his school has worked with the regional state support team on implementing routines and other strategies to control student behavior, a significant problem at Malabar. The team has also helped teachers increase the use of nine instructional strategies identified by various researchers as most likely to increase student achievement across all subjects, such as cooperative learning, summarizing, and note taking. The school is also using federal vocational-technical education funds to pay for training the building leadership team in a program called Making Middle Grades Work. “It’s everything I would want to do already put together, so I don’t have to reinvent the wheel,” he noted.

In addition to these more formal restructuring efforts, Kosek is borrowing a lesson learned from her prior work in Cincinnati by implementing a home-grown version of the national Teacher Advancement Program, which Cincinnati has used exclusively with a subset of its restructuring elementary schools. Although Mansfield lacks the funds to pay stipends to master and mentor teachers or to provide incentives for student achievement gains, its elementary schools do have 90 minutes of professional development time weekly. Kosek has recruited one volunteer at each grade level in Mansfield’s elementary schools to open the classroom to colleagues, who can come and observe new instructional techniques.

## Restructuring in Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon Middle School made AYP in 2008 testing. In school year 2008-09, it was in school improvement year 4 delay and received a rating of effective, the second highest rating, in the state accountability system. Because student performance improved, the region’s state support team has shifted its focus—and its funds—elsewhere. “We don’t qualify. We showed improvement,” said Lynda Weston, director of teaching and learning for the district.

Although most Mount Vernon elementary schools receive Title I funds, its secondary schools do not. Mount Vernon Middle is not a Title I school; neither is Mount Vernon High School, which missed AYP for the fifth year in a row in 2007-08 testing. Thus, no Mount Vernon schools in restructuring received Title I school improvement grants from the state for 2008-09.

Although Mount Vernon Middle has changed some of its methods, its focus on inclusion—instructing students with disabilities in the regular classroom as much as possible—has remained constant from year to year. (In 2006-07, the performance of students with disabilities was one of several factors accounting for the school’s failure to make AYP.) Last year, state support team monies made it possible to release a classroom teacher working in both math and special education to serve as an inclusion coach. However, district staff and Bill White, principal of Mount Vernon Middle, agreed that the coaching model had not been as effective as they had hoped, and when the funding was lost the coach simply returned to the classroom as a teacher. “The inclusion model continues as it had last year,” White added. In 2008-09, the school deployed special education teachers across grades rather than keeping them with particular grade level teams. The new system made it possible to lower student-teacher ratios in the classroom. An approach called Response to Intervention, which involves efforts to identify and intervene with students who show signs of learning difficulties earlier than usually happens in traditional special education, was piloted in spring 2008 and continued in 2008-09.

At the time of our research, the Mount Vernon district appeared to be the furthest along of our case study districts in understanding and applying Ohio’s differentiated accountability plan. In fall 2008, Superintendent

Stephen Short and Weston met with representatives of the Knox County Educational Service Center, which has been assigned to train Mount Vernon on the new accountability system. The district formed a 22-member committee that met on December 3, 2008, to begin working through the decision framework. Their goal was to complete their decision framework by February 2009. “We have to use that as the framework for applying for [state competitive] grants, and those grants are usually applied for in February,” said Weston.

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## Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was written by Maureen Kelleher, CEP consultant, with assistance from Caitlin Scott, CEP consultant. Nancy Kober, CEP consultant, edited the report. Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs, provided advice and assistance.

We are grateful to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which supports this project, and to the George Gund Foundation and the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation, which provide general support to the Center. The statements made and the views expressed in this report are solely the responsibility of the Center on Education Policy.

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