

# Thomas B. Fordham Institute

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



THOMAS B.  
**FORDHAM**  
INSTITUTE  
ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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# Letter from the President



**MICHAEL J. PETRILLI**  
PRESIDENT

Lucy and the football. Groundhog Day. “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.” Use whatever metaphor you like, but the pattern over the last several years has been clear: Just when we dare to believe we’ve escaped the pandemic, it grabs us once again, wreaking havoc in our lives, our schools, and the lives of our children.

But 2022 was the year that we finally reached escape velocity. With the beginning of the new school year this past fall, things finally felt back to normal. Quarantines were mostly over, and masks were mostly gone, and classes and extracurricular activities were mostly back in full force.

This fall was also when the education bill came due on America’s decision to shutter most schools for months on end as a cornerstone of our Covid policy. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, in two separate reports, documented the massive learning loss experienced by American students, enough to wipe out two decades’ worth of gains, and to widen our tragic achievement gaps into even larger chasms.

These two developments—the end of the pandemic and the accounting of just how much damage it did—led to the same conclusion: Now it’s time to push the pedal to the metal on student learning. And that’s exactly what Fordham pressed for in 2022—nationally, in our home state of Ohio, and with the dozen charter schools we oversee.

The highlights of those efforts are displayed in the pages that follow. They feature initiatives directly related to pandemic recovery, including a book I published with two colleagues, [\*Follow the Science to School: Evidence-based Practices for Elementary Education\*](#), as well as broader efforts to reboot the education reform movement. On that score, you'll find details about Fordham's latest research in our years-long study of charter schools, what makes them so effective, and how their expansion is also helping traditional public schools to improve. And you'll read about our newer efforts to reimagine high schools, especially with an eye toward career readiness and upward mobility, and to ensure that advanced learners get what they need from their schools, too.

I'm proud also to note that 2022 also marked Fordham's 25th anniversary. We're not into hoopla and self-congratulation, so we didn't make a fuss, but Checker has been spending some time digging into the archives to plot our trajectory since 1997. One important discovery is that we've stayed true to our policy North Star, despite all of the changes of the past quarter-century. Our original "credo," inherited from the Educational Excellence Network, had six "essential elements" for education reform: "the need for dramatically higher academic standards; an

education system designed for and responsive to the needs of its users; verifiable outcomes and accountability; equality of opportunity; a solid core curriculum, taught by knowledgeable, expert instructors; [and] educational diversity, competition, and choice."

We might tweak a word or two today, but those elements remain just as important now as back when Google launched its search engine. And we will pursue them, yet again, in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Petrilli", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

**MICHAEL J. PETRILLI,**  
PRESIDENT

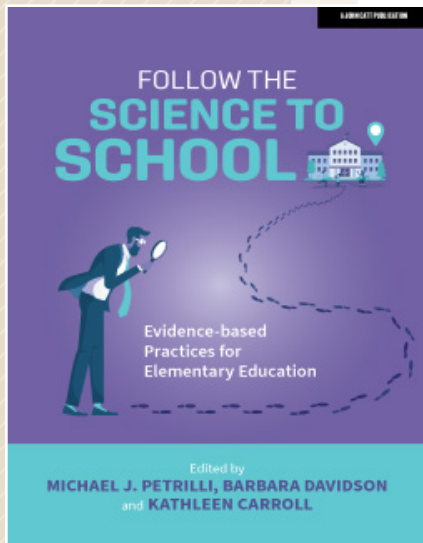
February 2023, Washington, D.C.

# Our Work This Year

## RECKONING WITH PANDEMIC-RELATED LEARNING LOSS—AND LAUNCHING AN AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE

In 2022—as the nation learned the true extent and severity of the pandemic’s toll on student achievement—we put our heads together, rolled up our sleeves, and got to work on helping students recover lost ground. At Fordham, not only do we identify and measure problems honestly, but we are also doers—as evidenced by our work on the ground in the Buckeye State. Through commentary, research, and efforts in our Ohio schools, we have tackled learning loss head-on.





## Follow the Science to School: Evidence-based practices for Elementary Education

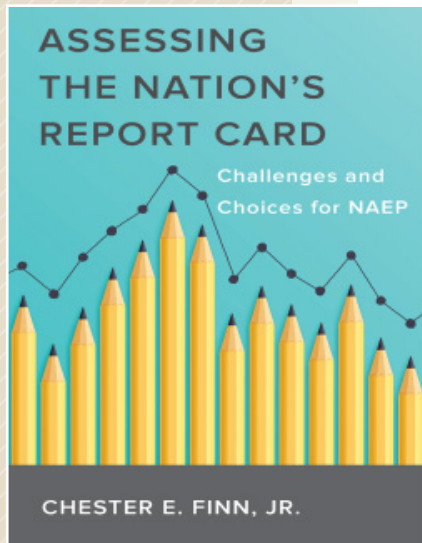
Edited by Mike Petrilli, Barbara Davidson, and Kathleen Carroll, *Follow the Science to School* evaluates the importance—but also the challenges—of “following the science” in elementary schools, especially in the wake of the pandemic. The editors offer evidence-based answers to questions such as the following:

- How does “reading comprehension” develop?
- Are there some ways to teach fractions that work better than others?
- What’s the appropriate role of homework?
- What’s the best way for teachers to establish a safe and supportive learning environment?

“The science is out there. The evidence can point the way. And there are good approaches to meeting the challenges that thousands of teachers and students encounter every day.”

– Excerpt from *Follow the Science to School*





### Assessing the Nation's Report Card: Challenges and Choices for NAEP

Authored by our Distinguished Senior Fellow and President Emeritus Chester E. Finn, Jr., *Assessing the Nation's Report Card* offered a unique perspective on the history, current state, challenges, and possibilities for the future of America's most reliable source of education data. Finn calls NAEP "the most important test you've probably never heard of."

With more than 150 attendees and over 300 online views, we held a lively webinar entitled, "What you may not know—but should—about the Nation's Report Card," to discuss this book's insights for policymakers. *Assessing the Nation's Report Card* has been covered in outlets such as [\*The Washington Post\*](#), [\*Forbes\*](#), and [\*Ed Week\*](#).

“If you want to know how ‘The Nation’s Report Card’ became the most reliable gauge of what and whether American children are learning, this book is a must read.”

– Former U.S. Senator, Governor, and Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander



## National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Commentary

This year brought three significant analyses from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): a decade of lackluster achievement trends before the pandemic; long-term trends from 2019–22; and national, state, and local results post-pandemic. Fordham provided insightful analysis throughout it all—on our widely read blog and popular podcast, as well as various op-eds. Some examples include the following:

- **[What national test scores tell us about American education before the pandemic](#)**

In this blog post, Mike analyzes part of NAGB's *Understanding Pre-Pandemic NAEP Trends* report. He offers various hypotheses for the diverging achievement growth between low and high achievers on NAEP over the last decade.

- **[Treating my NAEP hangover](#)**

In this blog post, Checker Finn gives a reality check to the political and often conflicting NAEP commentators of the October results. He also highlights the failure of schools to come up with a reasonable plan to attack learning loss.

- **[Education Gadfly Show #843: Halloween a week early with NAEP results in](#)**

On this *Education Gadfly* podcast episode, Checker Finn joined Mike Petrilli and David Griffith to discuss the October NAEP results.

- **[Charter schools complicate the narrative on Covid shutdowns and learning loss](#)**

In this *Flypaper* article, Mike looks at the declines in charter and other public school NAEP scores through the lens of pandemic shutdowns. He offers hypotheses as to why charters were more likely than other schools to stay closed during Covid.

- **[The Case for Kindergarten Tests](#)**

In this article, one of *Education Next*'s top twenty for 2022, Mike points out that most kids start their education at age three or four but are not tested until age nine. He argues for using NAEP-designed interactive games to assess kindergarteners so that we can finally have NAEP data for the most critical years of a child's education.





### Commentary on learning loss

Fordham has never shied away from stating the honest truth: Kids lost a bunch of learning during the pandemic, likely due to school closures and lengthy quarantines. Using our *Flypaper* blog, op-eds, and *Education Gadgetfly* podcast, we shed some much-needed light on this topic.

- [Teacher unions, which forced long lockdowns, now outrageously claim student learning loss is no big deal](#)

Published in the *New York Post*, this article by Mike Petrilli calls out unions for shuttering schools and then sugarcoating the resulting state of student achievement.

- [Education Gadgetfly Show #802: Erica Green on the pandemic's impact on high school students](#)

In our most-listened-to podcast episode of the year, Erica Green, a national education reporter for the *New York Times*, joined Mike Petrilli and David Griffith to discuss schools' struggle to address teens' mental health and increasing misbehavior.

- [Hold Montgomery officials accountable for school closures](#)

This op-ed by Mike Petrilli calls out Montgomery County (in Maryland) for keeping schools closed for too long during the pandemic.

- [Education Gadgetfly Show #823: How detrimental was remote learning?](#)

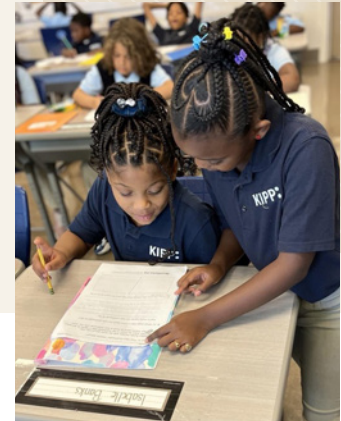
In another popular *Education Gadgetfly* podcast, Tom Kane, Harvard economist and director of its Center for Education Policy Research, explains the latest research on the disastrous—and inequitable—impact of remote learning on America's students.



## Our Ohio charter schools' efforts to attack learning loss

The dozen charter schools we oversee as a charter school authorizer in Ohio used several strategies to address their students' unfinished learning, including:

- Launching intensive summer intervention programs
- Adopting high-quality instructional materials and providing support and training to teachers
- Providing high-dosage tutoring before, during, and after school
- Implementing an extended day for struggling students
- Increasing communication with students and families about student academic progress
- Providing stipends to families to seek their own tutoring services



## Turning around troubled schools: How Ohio can create a stronger, clearer school improvement program

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), federal lawmakers have given states the ability to chart their own course when it comes to fixing underperforming schools. This report, authored by Aaron Churchill, analyzes ESSA's school improvement requirements and how they have been implemented in the Buckeye State over the years. It also offers eight research-backed recommendations to help strengthen Ohio's efforts going forward—which may be crucial to improving outcomes in the post-Covid era.



### Ohio policy briefs

Like the rest of the nation, Ohio students lost significant ground compared to pre-pandemic achievement levels. Our Columbus office responded with a series of action-based policy briefs aimed at strengthening K–12 education in the Buckeye State:

- ***Preparing all children to become strong readers: Ten ways to strengthen Ohio's grades K–3 early literacy initiatives***

This policy brief by Aaron Churchill recommends several ways that legislators can build on Ohio's early literacy initiative to ensure that every child acquires the reading skills they need to succeed.

- ***Strengthening Ohio's teacher workforce: Attracting and retaining talent through reforms to licensure and compensation***

This brief, authored by Jessica Poiner, addresses teacher-pipeline and teacher-retention issues that are critical to Ohio making teaching an attractive and financially rewarding career option.

- ***School funding imperatives for Ohio's next budget: Toward a more efficient, productive, and transparent system***

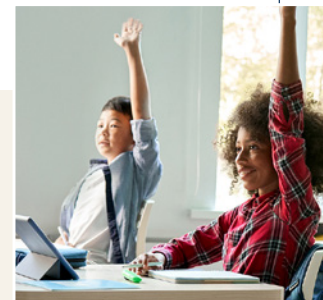
In the wake of record-high public education spending in Ohio, Aaron Churchill calls attention to the problems with the new spending formula and offers recommendations to move the state toward a more efficient school funding system.

## SUPPORTING ADVANCED LEARNERS

Low-performing students are not the only ones who lost ground due to the pandemic. The October NAEP release revealed that eighth-grade math scores for our highest-achieving students also plummeted, demonstrating the importance of focusing on all students across the performance spectrum. This year, we prioritized bringing high-achieving students to the forefront of the conversation.

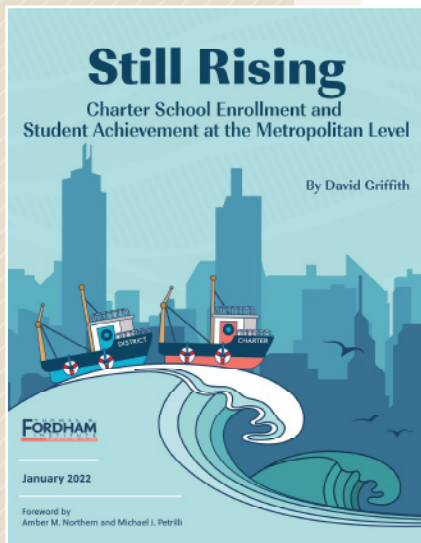
In addition to our commentary in the *Flypaper* and various opinion pieces, our editorial director Brandon Wright began a biweekly newsletter entitled “Advance,” which monitors and opines on the progress of gifted education in America—including legal and legislative developments, policy and leadership changes, emerging research, grassroots efforts, and more. We also launched the National Working Group on Advanced Education, which will publish recommendations in 2023.

- **[With affirmative action before the Supreme Court, here’s the state of diversity among high achievers](#)**  
In this *Flypaper* blog post, Mike uses 2022 NAEP data to determine whether the composition of America’s highest-achieving students became more racially diverse over the last two decades.
- **[High-achieving middle schoolers have suffered devastating math losses, finds NAEP](#)**  
In this “Advance” article, Brandon Wright breaks down the NAEP results through the context of high achievers.
- **[The case for gifted education](#)**  
Brandon Wright argues in this edition of “Advance” for the evidence-based methods to improve gifted learning: acceleration, ability grouping, and enrichment programs.



## PROMOTING CHARTERS AND CHOICE

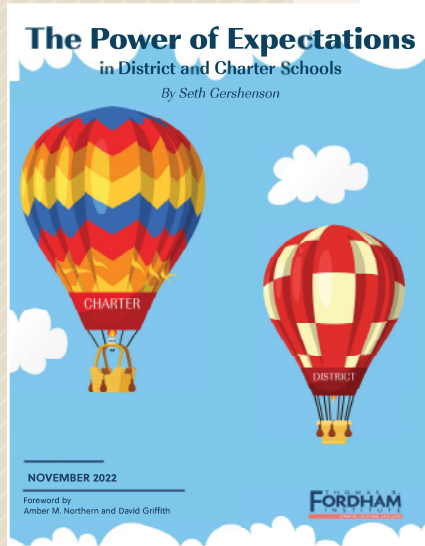
Continuing to promote high-quality education through school choice, we produced several pathbreaking studies on charter schools and private school choice programs, authorized new charters in Ohio, and pushed back on the Biden administration's hostile charter regulations.



### Still Rising: Charter School Enrollment and Student Achievement at the Metropolitan Level

In this sequel to [\*Rising Tide: Charter School Market Share and Student Achievement\*](#), Fordham's David Griffith revisits the implications of charter growth for metropolitan area students—including both charter students and those in traditional public schools. By analyzing a decade's worth of data on reading and math achievement at the metropolitan level, David found that, on average, an increase in total charter school enrollment share is associated with a significant *increase* in the average math achievement of poor, Black, and Hispanic students, especially in larger metro areas.

*Still Rising* was referenced in several articles from other organizations and in media outlets, including [\*New York Magazine\*](#).



## The Power of Expectations in District and Charter Schools

In this study, American University's Seth Gershenson uses nationally representative survey data to explore the relationship between high school teachers' expectations of their students, their students' perceptions of their expectations, and student long-term outcomes in traditional public, charter, and private sectors. He found that teacher expectations are higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools but highest in private schools.

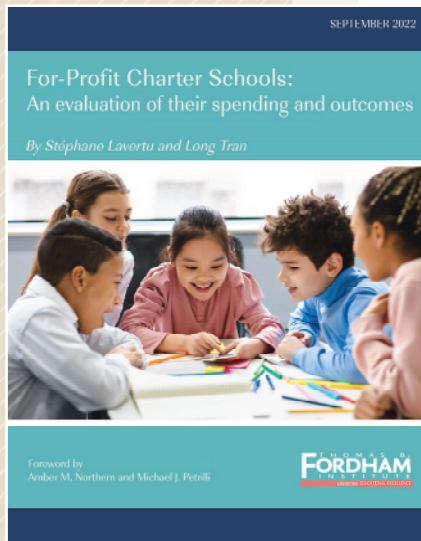
What's more, teacher expectations matter just as much, if not more, in charter schools as they do in traditional public schools. That said, high teacher expectations matter in every school sector, positively affecting long-run outcomes such as completing college, preventing teen childbearing, and reducing receipt of public assistance. The study was featured in [Education Week](#) and covered by *The Washington Post*'s Jay Mathews in his [weekly education column](#).

“Gershenson’s new study is eye-opening.”

– Jay Mathews,  
*The Washington Post*

“This new study seeks to understand better the role that high expectations should play in our nation’s academic recovery and gain a deeper understanding of whether and how they operate in the traditional public, charter, and private school sectors.”

– Amber Northern and David Griffith,  
authors of the report’s Foreword



### For-Profit Charter Schools: An evaluation of their spending and outcomes

“For-profit charters” were an easy target for the Biden administration’s burdensome new regulations for the federal Charter Schools Program, despite the fact that they are actually nonprofit organizations that contract out their services to for-profit organizations—as do most traditional public schools. In this study, Ohio State University scholars Stéphane Lavertu and Long Tran shed light on the nature of these schools. Overall, the analysis provided evidence that:

- In general, so called for-profit charter schools outperform traditional public schools but trail other charters
- For-profit charter schools in Ohio that outsource nearly all services perform worse than those that outsource fewer

For us, this means the following:

- Those who are automatically inclined to hate so-called for-profit charter schools should rethink their priors
- We shouldn’t view for-profit charter schools as a monolith
- We should avoid regulating charter schools based on the tax status of their management organizations

“Strictly speaking...almost nowhere in America is there such a thing as a 'for-profit charter school.'”

– Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli,  
authors of the report's Foreword



## The Ohio EdChoice Program's impact on school district enrollments, finances, and academics

Today, over 75,000 Ohio students participate in the Buckeye State's five voucher programs, notably the large EdChoice programs. In response to claims by critics that voucher programs harm traditional school districts, Dr. Stéphane Lavertu investigated the impacts of Ohio's EdChoice program on school district enrollments, finances, and educational outcomes.

Overall, the analysis provided solid evidence that the performance-based EdChoice program led to increases in racial integration, had no adverse effects on revenues per pupil, and increased student achievement in public school districts. It also reveals no credible evidence that the income-based EdChoice expansion harmed districts in terms of segregation, revenues, or student achievement.



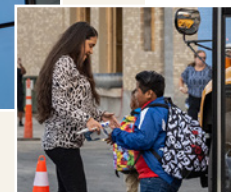
## Creating great school options for all Ohio students: Recommendations to strengthen educational choice in the Buckeye State

Ohio has a long history of empowering parents with educational options for their children. In this policy brief, Fordham's Aaron Churchill outlines specific ways that Ohio lawmakers should continue the push for more and better educational options. Recommendations focus on improving funding for charter schools, expanding eligibility for private school scholarships, and making inter-district open enrollment a reality throughout the state.



### Opening of two new IDEA schools in Cincinnati

The two newest charter schools in our authorizing portfolio, operated by the highly successful IDEA Public Schools charter management organization, opened in August. IDEA Price Hill serves grades K–2 and 6–7, and IDEA Valley View serves grades K–2 and 6. Approximately 500 students are enrolled across both campuses. Both locations plan to significantly increase the number of students served in the coming years.





## Commentary on school choice and the Biden administration's hostile charter regulations

On our lively blog, podcast, and various op-eds, Fordham staff pushed back on the proposed charter regulations in multiple locations and argued for the benefits of school choice:

- ***Education Gadfly Show #814: How Biden's proposed regulations would hurt charter schools***

Christy Wolfe, vice president for policy and planning at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, joined Mike to discuss how those regulations proposed could stunt the growth of charter schools across America.

- ***Biden administration fails to follow the science on charter schools***

In this blog post, Mike points out that charter schools are consistently shown to help, not hurt, students in traditional public schools, and explains why the Biden administration's aggressive new rules for charter schools are misguided.

- ***The feds' proposed changes to CSP will hurt Ohio charters***

In this *Ohio Gadfly* post, Jessica Poiner discusses how the Biden administration's charter regulations would affect Ohio charter schools.

- ***Lift the charter cap to serve NYC families***

In this *Daily News* op-ed, Mike and David make the argument for why New York City should allow the charter sector to grow.



*Chad Aldis presents Governor DeWine a Charter School Champions award on behalf of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.*



## REIMAGINING HIGH SCHOOLS

Many teenagers are sleepwalking through high school, and our high schools are sleepwalking through the twenty-first century. There's a lot of talk about reimagining high schools but very little transformative action, especially in the realm of career and technical education. This year we worked to change that through studies, commentary, and our annual Wonkathon.





## Commentary on CTE and rethinking high schools

Fordham has long pushed for alternative pathways through high school, not just “college for all.” This year, we revved up.

- ***We all agree that college isn’t for everyone. We should start acting like it.***  
 In this *Flypaper* blog post, Mike Petrilli lists several ways that we can create multiple pathways for students.
- ***First, Know Thyself. Then, Pick a Career Path***  
 In this *Education Next* article, Mike discusses a new generation of aptitude tests and urges parents to help their kids identify both what they’re good at and what they’re not good at in order to give all kids a fighting chance. This article made the “Top 20 *Education Next* Articles of 2022.”
- ***How Rethinking Industry-Recognized Credentials Can Help Boost Student Success***  
 Published in *The 74*, this article by Amber Northern makes the case for a hierarchy of IRCs for middle and high school students that would point the way to high-wage and in-demand occupations.
- ***Of Course There’s Tracking in High Schools. Get Over It.***  
 Mentioned in at least four other media outlets, this *Education Next* op-ed by Mike Petrilli lists the ways that high schools currently track students into different levels of classes.
- ***The Case for Career and Technical Education***  
 In this *Flypaper* post, Amber Northern and Jeanette Luna highlight the many positive outcomes of CTE for all students, especially those who are most vulnerable.
- ***The Upside of the Downward Trend in College Enrollment***  
 In this op-ed, Mike celebrates the fact that many students who are not academically inclined are choosing career paths that do not involve college.



AUGUST 2022

### How Attaining Industry-Recognized Credentials in High School Shapes Education and Employment Outcomes



By Matt Giani, Ph.D.

Foreword by Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli



## How Attaining Industry-Recognized Credentials in High School Shapes Education and Employment Outcomes

This pioneering study by Matt Giani assessed the impact of specific industry-recognized credentials (IRCs) earned during high school on various employment and postsecondary outcomes for students who do and do not attend college. The study found that high school IRCs are a net positive for students who earn them but are not transformative. Recommendations include stressing the key roles of high schools and middle schools in helping students figure out their career interests and aptitudes, embracing approaches that are much more ambitious than IRCs—such as serious youth apprenticeship programs—and encouraging stackable credentials.

## Imperfect Attendance: Toward a fairer measure of student absenteeism

Among the many areas for improvement for today's high schools is chronic absenteeism. Authored by Jing Liu of the University of Maryland, this study explores high schools' contributions to attendance after accounting for students' prior attendance records and other characteristics—or their “attendance value-added.” Liu finds that we can tell very little about a high school's impact on student attendance from conventional student-absenteeism measures, attendance value-added varies widely between schools, and attendance value-added is positively correlated with students' perceptions of school climate.

APRIL 2022

### Imperfect Attendance: Toward a fairer measure of student absenteeism

By Jing Liu, Ph.D.



Foreword by  
Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli





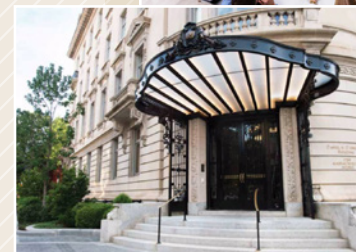
## Wonkathon

America's high schools are clearly in need of an overhaul. In this year's Wonkathon, we asked participants to brainstorm ways for states to remove policy barriers that are keeping educators from reinventing high schools.

In her submission, "[Teacher certification and uniform salary schedules hinder CTE staffing](#)," our winner Keri Ingraham—a fellow at the Discovery Institute and director of the institute's American Center for Transforming Education—wrote about the barriers of our teacher pay system to implementing effective CTE programs in schools. She points out the limitations of both the current salary structure and teacher certification process.

## Emerging Education Policy Scholars (EEPS)

Fordham and the American Enterprise Institute came together more than a decade ago to create this unique program, which brings young scholars to D.C. to meet with education policy experts and key stakeholders. EEPS alumni are producing impactful work, some of which has emerged in partnership with Fordham and/or other EEPS. In 2022, we collaborated with EEPS alumni—including Jing Liu and Seth Gershenson—on several of our national research reports, and twelve of our EEPS alumni made Rick Hess's most recent RHSU Edu-Scholar Public Influence list.





# About Fordham

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute and its affiliated Foundation promote educational excellence for every child in America via quality research, analysis, and commentary, as well as advocacy and exemplary charter school authorizing in Ohio.



**In order to improve student outcomes, boost upward mobility, and dramatically increase the number of young Americans prepared for college, career, and citizenship, we advance:**

- Ambitious standards in all academic subjects, strong assessments of student learning, aligned and well-implemented curricula, and common-sense accountability for schools and children across the achievement spectrum
- High-quality charter schools and other proven models of educational choice, particularly for the children and families that need them most

**We promote educational improvement by:**

- Producing relevant, rigorous research, analysis, and commentary for education practitioners and for policymakers at the national, state, and local levels
- Incubating new ideas, innovations, organizations, and visionary leaders to advance educational excellence
- Advancing sound policies in Ohio related to standards, assessments, results-driven accountability, equitable funding, school choice, and other important education reforms
- Serving as a model charter school authorizer and sharing our lessons throughout and beyond Ohio



# Staff & Board

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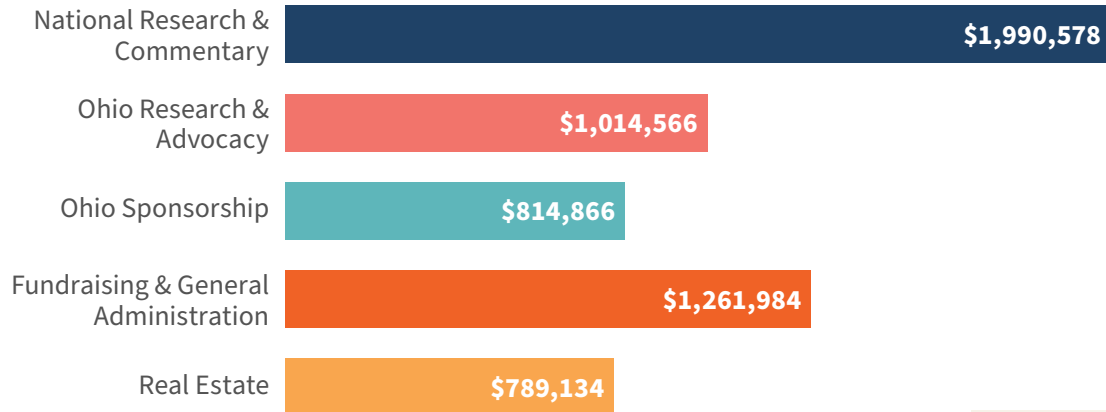


**CAPRICE YOUNG**

President,  
Education Growth Group

# Finances at a Glance

Fordham's spending was \$5.9 million in 2022 and is projected to be \$5.8 million in 2023. Of this total spending, 48% will be supported by our endowment, and the remainder will be raised from private donors. Our charter-sponsorship work is primarily funded by school fees.



# Funders

**A heartfelt thank you** to our funders and partners. We would not be able to achieve our mission without their critical support.

The Achelis & Bodman  
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## CONTACT

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### **NATIONAL OFFICE**

1015 18th St NW, Suite 902  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.223.5452

### **COLUMBUS OFFICE**

P.O. Box 82291  
Columbus, OH 43202  
614.223.1580

### **DAYTON OFFICE**

130 West Second Street, Suite 410  
Dayton, Ohio, 45402  
937.227.3368