

The Long Road to **RECOVERY**

THOMAS B.
FORDHAM
INSTITUTE
ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

President's letter

The cliché says that it's darkest before dawn; the late Senator John McCain preferred to quip that it's darkest before it turns pitch black. What's undeniable is that these are dark days for American education; the only question is whether we're finally hitting the dead of night and can start to look forward to brighter days ahead.

The latest results from the [NAEP](#), [TIMSS](#), and most [state assessment results](#) don't provide much reason for encouragement, with the bottom falling out for our lowest-performing students in particular. But test scores are lagging indicators, representing, as they do, not just what students learned this week or this year but their entire lives to date. And for today's children, the lengthy Covid shutdowns continue to cast a long, dark shadow.

But look hard enough and we can glimpse shimmers of hope, especially in the real world of schools and classrooms, where heroic educators are chipping away at low expectations, chronic absenteeism, and learning loss.

One such school is the [Dayton Leadership Academy](#) (DLA), a charter in our hometown that Fordham has authorized for almost twenty years now. Like Dayton itself, the school has struggled mightily at times. But thanks to strong and steady leadership from executive director Tess Mitchner-Asinjo (now in her ninth year in the driver's seat), an excellent board, significant family engagement, and a high-quality curriculum, the school is turning the corner.

In 2023–24, DLA achieved a three-star overall rating on [Ohio's school report card](#), a four-star rating for student progress, and four stars for “gap closing,” all notably up from previous years. Thanks to these gains, the school just qualified for Ohio's [Quality Community Schools Support Fund](#), which provides high-performing charter schools an additional \$2,000–3,000 per pupil every year. Fordham's [recent evaluation](#) of this state program, by senior fellow Stéphane Lavertu, found that these grants boost teacher salaries, reduce staff turnover, and drive student learning gains.

Dayton Leadership Academy has a long way to go until it has reached the level of excellence its educators know it's capable of. But it's moving briskly in the right direction. Now we need the rest of America's schools to do the same.

In 2024, our research and commentary work, nationally and in Ohio, also focused on helping schools and students make up critical lost ground, focusing on pressing issues including [enrollment declines](#), [achievement gaps](#), [grade inflation](#), and more.

Please read on for an overview of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's activities and impact in 2024, and join us in working toward a brighter education dawn in 2025.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Petrilli". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Michael J. Petrilli
PRESIDENT

Fordham's 2024 Priorities and Highlights

1

Expand high-quality charter schools

- **Charter school research**

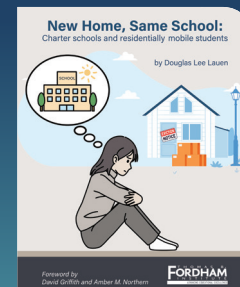
We released five studies on charter schools nationally or in Ohio, including one on the impact of extra funding for high-quality charters in the Buckeye State, and another on the benefit of charter enrollment for students whose families move.

- **Charter school authorizing**

Sixty percent of Fordham-authorized schools—enrolling 86 percent of students in our charter portfolio—have qualified for extra funding from the state of Ohio due to their high performance.

- **Getting the word out**

Fordham team members and scholars barnstormed the country, speaking about our charter school research and policy recommendations at annual meetings hosted by ExcelinEd, NACSA, AEFP, and the Colorado League of Charter Schools.



New Home, Same School was released in January 2024.



Starlee Coleman, President and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, joined the Education Gadfly Show in August to discuss how the charter sector can thrive under a new administration.



Student from Dayton Leadership Academies

2

Build a wider, more diverse pipeline of advanced students

- **National Working Group**

Mike Petrilli led a keynote panel of luminaries at the University of Connecticut’s annual Wallace Symposium, featuring the final report of the Fordham-sponsored National Working Group on Advanced Education.

- **The Broken Pipeline**

Fordham’s Adam Tyner and Meredith Coffey released a landmark study, *The Broken Pipeline: Advanced Education Policies at the Local Level*, which garnered over **11,000 views** and eight media hits and was featured (along with Adam) at the National Association for Gifted Children’s annual conference.

- **Advanced education policies**

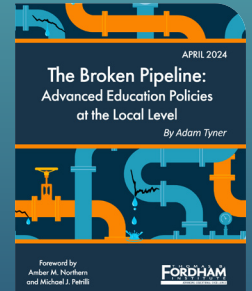
A Hoover Institution “Policy Ed” video of Checker Finn sharing ideas to promote advanced education attracted an incredible **420,000 views**. Checker also raised an alarm about the Advanced Placement program making some of its exams easier to pass.

- **Equitable advanced education**

Brandon Wright, Fordham’s Editorial Director and editor of Fordham’s “ADVANCE” newsletter on Substack, published a “Think Again” brief, *Are Education Programs for High Achievers Inherently Inequitable?* which has already racked up over **23,000 views**.



Mike Petrilli leading a keynote panel at the UConn annual Wallace Symposium.



The Broken Pipeline was released in April 2024.



Think Again: Are Education Programs for High Achievers Inherently Inequitable was released in October 2024.

3

Improve teaching and learning

- **Science of Reading**

Fordham’s Ohio team monitored the state’s science of reading reforms with multiple reports, analyses, and op-eds, while Senior Fellow Daniel Buck published a very popular “Think Again” white paper, *Should Elementary Schools Teach Reading Comprehension?*

- **Chronic absenteeism**

Our annual “Wonkathon” generated dozens of solutions to the chronic absenteeism crisis, earning plaudits from state superintendents among others.

- **Cell phone policies**

Blog posts by Amber Northern and Daniel Buck offered advice to educators on how to effectively ban cellphones during the school day and became top sources on the topic on Google.

- **Achievement gaps**

We published a groundbreaking study by Eric Hengyu Hu and Paul L. Morgan, *Explaining Achievement Gaps: The Role of Socioeconomic Factors*, which was cited by federal officials when announcing a new measure of student poverty for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.



Chad Aldis, Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, testifies before the Ohio House Higher Education Committee on the science of reading. Image Courtesy of The Ohio Channel.



Explaining Achievement Gaps: The Role of Socioeconomic Factors was released in August 2024.

4

Promote tough love for students, schools, and reformers

- **Grading standards**

We led the charge against no-zeros policies and other bar-lowering grading “reforms,” including with Adam Tyner’s and Meredith’s Coffey’s “Think Again” white paper, *Does “equitable” grading benefit students?*, along with a multi-part debate on the topic in *Education Week*.

- **School closures**

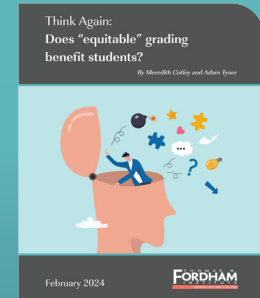
In the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, and via a new *Fordham study by the Brookings Institution’s Sofoklis Goulas*, we urged policymakers to consider closing schools that are chronically low-performing *and* under-enrolled.



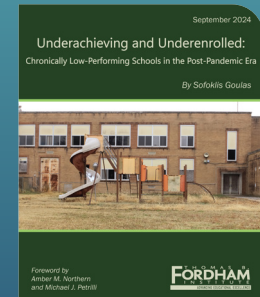
Francis Pearman, an assistant professor of education at Stanford University, joined the Education Gadfly Show in July to debate the impact that budgets, enrollment, and race play in closing schools.

- **Private school choice**

In opinion pieces and media appearances nationwide, we pushed back against universal school choice programs that provide unnecessary subsidies for wealthy families and neglect accountability for student results.



Think Again: Does “equitable” grading benefit students? was released in February 2024.



Underachieving and Underenrolled: Chronically Low-Performing Schools in the Post-Pandemic Era was released in September 2024.

Other Impacts



549 blog posts
published, with over
1.1 million readers



78 op-eds
placed in national
and local media



50 podcast episodes
produced with policymakers,
school leaders, and other guests



40 speaking engagements
at national policy events,
research conferences,
state legislative
committees, and more



**18 external radio,
podcast, and TV
interviews**

Op-eds published in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

 THE HECHINGER REPORT

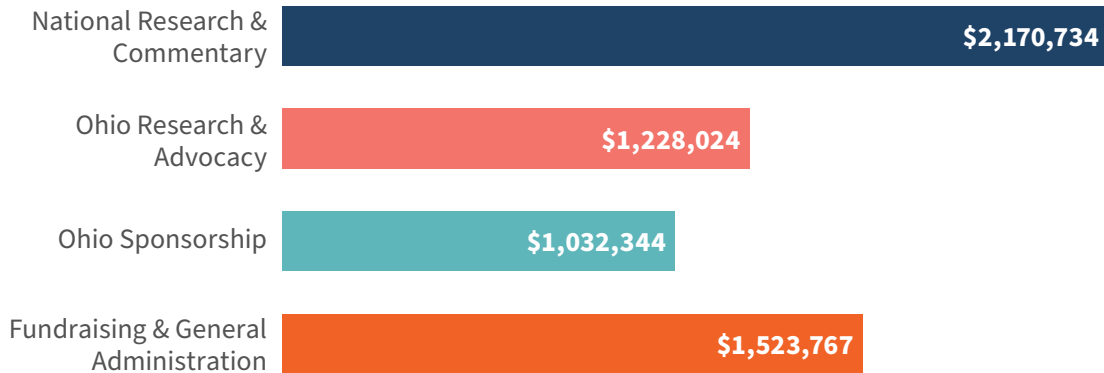
NATIONAL AFFAIRS

the LIBERAL PATRIOT

The74

Finances at a glance

Spending in 2024 was \$5.95 million, and projected spending for 2025 is \$6.69 million. Grant funding supported 32 percent of our spending in 2024. 20 percent was funded from sponsorship fee revenue, and the remainder was funded from portfolio earnings.



Funders

A heartfelt thank you to our funders and partners in 2024. We would not be able to achieve our mission without their critical support.

Achelis & Bodman Foundation

THE ANSCHUTZ FOUNDATION



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