



# 2014

THOMAS B. FORDHAM INSTITUTE  
ANNUAL REPORT





# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



## FORDHAM FRIENDS,

Closing the books on the year that just passed has special resonance this time around—both for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and for the education-reform movement at large. For us, 2014 marked the first leadership transition in our organization's history, with founding president Chester E. ("Checker") Finn, Jr. moving into his new role as senior distinguished senior fellow and president emeritus and with our board of trustees electing me to succeed him. Almost six months into this challenge, I remain honored by the faith they placed in me and appreciative of Checker's pitch-perfect management of the transition process.

For the education-reform movement, 2014 was more of a mixed bag. It was famously the year when America was supposed to, but did not, achieve "universal proficiency"—a goal set by the No Child Left Behind Act back in 2002. That nearly thirteen years have now passed without a much-needed ESEA reauthorization gives us one clue as to what went awry: gridlock in Congress and an administration incapable or unwilling to move lawmakers to act. It's hard to make improvements in policy when the policy-making machine grinds to a halt. Unilateral—and, arguably, unconstitutional—action by the executive branch is not a durable solution.

Yet that dysfunction also offers lessons worth heeding. If statutory updates are to materialize as often as the thirteen-year cicada, we should make sure that laws are written in a way that allows states and districts the room to make tweaks along the way. Likewise, we should be careful about locking in prescriptions or mandates, because we might have to live with them long after they've fulfilled their usefulness—or have been proven unworkable.

We also ought to reflect on the logic of turning aspirational goals (for instance, "universal proficiency" and "no child left behind") into rigid statutory language (such as "adequate yearly progress"). How much more sustainable and

popular might NCLB have been if its shapers had pushed for significant but achievable progress rather than making Pollyanna demands? How can we make sure that the country's current interest in moving lots more students toward "college and career readiness" doesn't morph into a similar utopian crusade? How can we give "career readiness" the serious attention it deserves? How can we ensure that careless legislative language we write today does not lock out promising new instructional and delivery models tomorrow?

These are the sorts of questions, about education policy in general and the education-reform movement in particular, that you have come to expect from Fordham. As you will read in these pages, 2014 brought myriad opportunities for us to play our role as Education Gadfly across a wide swath of issues, both nationally and in Ohio, that include Common Core, charter quality, voucher accountability, and "education for upward mobility." We appreciate your support, without which none of this would be possible, and your willingness to hear us out—especially when we challenge both established pieties and reformers' dogmas. Gird yourself, for there's more of that to come in 2015 and beyond.

Respectfully,

**MICHAEL J. PETRILLI**



**AUGUST 7, 2014**  
**@MichaelPetrilli**

#edreform advocates:  
Are the reforms you're promoting leading to coherence in the classroom?

## WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO



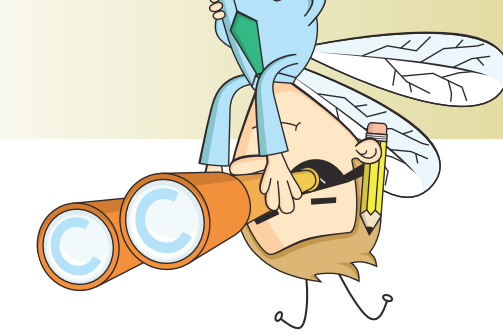
**AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF BRUISING POLITICAL AND RHETORICAL BATTLES,** education reform is well established across the land: Once a novelty, charter schools now educate kids in forty-two states, from Connecticut to California. Their popularity is growing among parents and politicians alike. Once a dream, the Common Core State Standards provide a clear, high bar for all students in states that take them seriously. They, too, are solidly entrenched, despite recent—and frequently politically motivated—criticism. Reform’s greatest triumph is accountability. Once a radical idea, schools everywhere are now judged by their results, not their intentions or inputs.

For the better part of two decades, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute has been a leader in this movement for a better education for all kids, setting the agenda for debate on the nation’s most pressing education issues. We’ve identified problems, offered solutions, and put those ideas into practice in our home state of Ohio. We’ve course-corrected when we were wrong. We’ve offered thoughtful criticism of friend and foe alike, begun the conversations on national standards and high-quality charter schools, and brought attention to thorny issues that many others would rather ignore, such as inefficient funding, special education, and gifted education.

We do it through high-quality research and incisive, analytic commentary. We do it by authorizing charter schools in Ohio and remaining an active force in the Buckeye State’s state-level debates. And, always, we do it with humility and humor.

Fordham has earned its reputation as a respected center of education-policy research, with the aim of providing the field with credible, rigorous, and accessible studies, having published eighteen papers and briefs in 2014 alone. We ensure that our ideas get into the field via both new and traditional media, plugged-in relationships with like-minded organizations, and deep engagement with state- and district-level policymakers and other key players in this space.

We’ve also become a leader at developing leaders. This past year, we reached more than sixty-five of ed reform’s most promising new thinkers and actors through two programs: EdPolicy 101 and the Emerging Education Policy Scholars. What’s more, we don’t just inhabit a Washington-based ivory tower: Our work in Ohio gives us a real-world perspective that is rare in national “think-tank” circles. This symbiotic relationship



SEPTEMBER 9, 2014

@MichaelPetrilli

@IQ2US Now let's go back to fixing America's schools, rather than fixing to fight one another

strengthens our efforts both nationally and in the Buckeye State.

Looking ahead to 2015, our ambitions are high but clear. Today’s challenge is no longer to make the case for reform or even to rally policymakers to action. Instead, we need to continue the progress of the last thirty years, get the policy details right, and ensure strong implementation of these reforms where they matter most—on the ground and in the classroom.

We dare not rest simply because the case for reform has been made and won. We need to continue to generate new ideas in this space, to test assumptions, and to tweak practices when necessary, so that the U.S. continues to make educational progress and Fordham sustains its value and credibility. Look for us to develop a new line of inquiry on pathways out of poverty and to take a hard look at the role education can play in helping kids avoid common traps, such as early pregnancy and incarceration, en route to adulthood and the middle class.

As one of the few organizations to bridge policy and practice, to intersect the national and state perspectives, Fordham is uniquely positioned to foster these discussions. We have the independence to frame issues forthrightly and the agility to weigh in as issues arise. We’re proud to have served as education’s gadfly since 1997 and pledge to continue in that mode in the years to come.



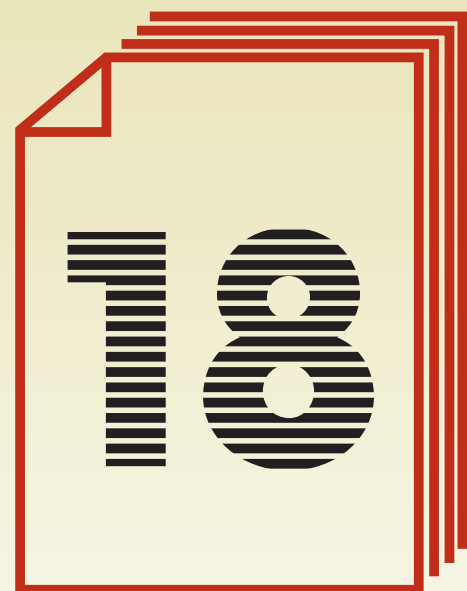
**WE DARE NOT REST SIMPLY BECAUSE  
THE CASE FOR REFORM HAS BEEN MADE  
AND WON.**



# OUR REACH IN 2014



**3,200 STUDENTS**  
in our Ohio charter schools



**REPORTS & BRIEFS**

  
**1,292,255  
PAGEVIEWS**



The day we had our one millionth pageview of 2014

**14**  
TV  
APPEARANCES



**51**  
PODCASTS



**211**  
RADIO  
APPEARANCES



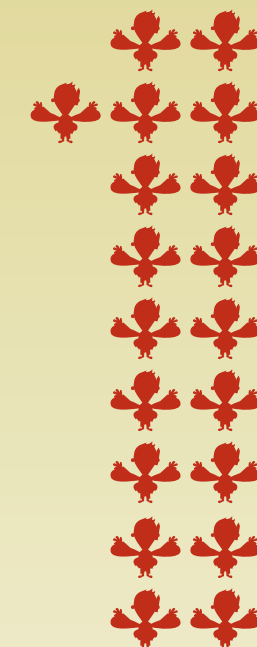
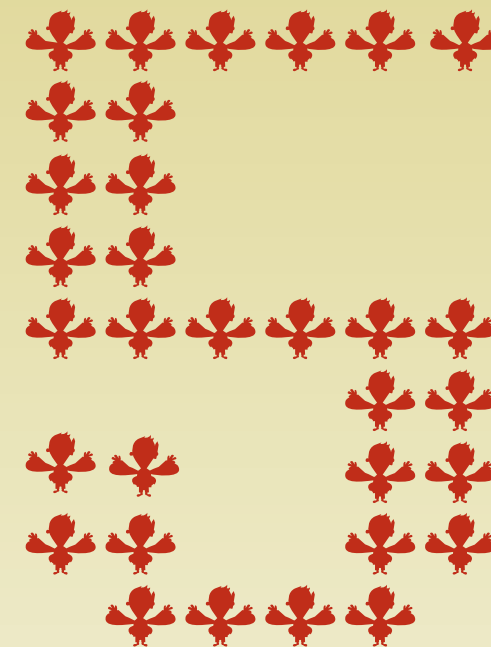
**34**  
VIDEOS



**82**  
SPEAKING  
INVITATIONS



**544**  
BLOG POSTS



**EDITIONS  
OF  
*EDUCATION  
GADFLY***



**EDITIONS OF THE  
OHIO GADFLY**

**FORDHAM IS AN  
ALL-HANDS-ON-DECK  
SHIP. PER STAFFER  
THIS TRANSLATES TO:**

- 22 blog posts 
- 8 radio interviews 
- 3 public speaking appearances 
- 5.6 cups of coffee weekly 

# OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR WE...

Were featured in:

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

THE ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

**SLATE TIME**

THE DAILY CALLER

THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER | THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**CNN** THE NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE  
THE DETROIT NEWS  
THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC | THE ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION

**THE WASHINGTON POST**

THE OKLAHOMAN | POLITICO | THE WICHITA EAGLE

**THE ECONOMIST**

THE ATLANTIC | FOX NEWS

Worked with legislators in:



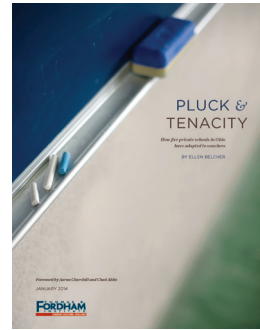
*Mike Petrilli is the new president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, one of the most energetic and influential education policy think tanks. He also is the father of a child in the Montgomery County school system. Education leaders are often put off by parents who know a lot about schools and won't shut up. Petrilli is definitely in that category."*

JAY MATHEWS  
IN THE WASHINGTON POST

Were cited in 234 research reports and articles, including in:

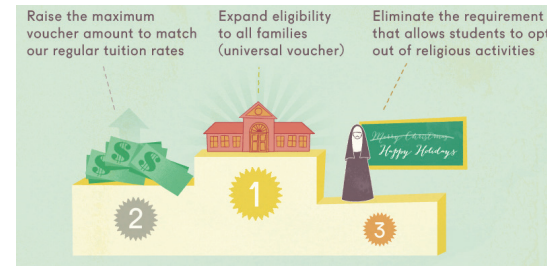


# A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF FORDHAM



## JAN

Our Columbus team releases *Pluck and Tenacity: How five private schools in Ohio have adapted to vouchers.*



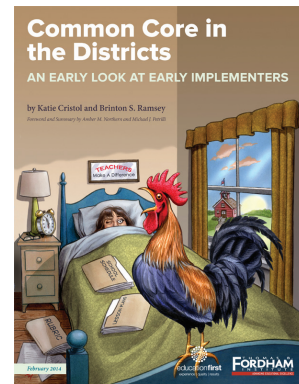
**JANUARY 8**  
We release a legislative toolkit entitled *Public accountability & private-school choice.*

**JANUARY 13**  
Fordham and AEI host our third cohort of Emerging Education Policy Scholars (EEPS).

**FEBRUARY 5**  
Teach Plus and Fordham cohost "The Student and the Stopwatch," an event about the time spent preparing for and taking standardized tests.



**FEBRUARY 20**  
Fordham and the American Institutes for Research host an event called "Right-sizing the Classroom: Making the Most of Great Teachers."



**FEB**  
We release *Common Core in the Districts: An Early Look at Early Implementers.*



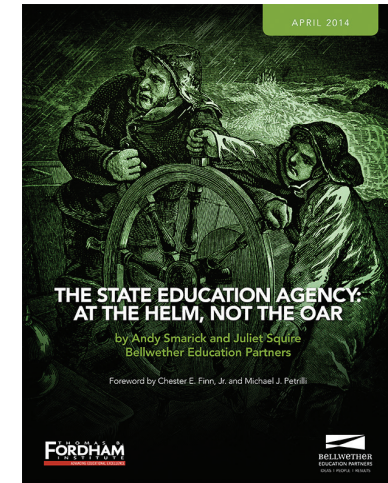
**MAR**  
*Slate* runs Mike Petrilli's op-ed "Kid, I'm Sorry, but You're Just Not College Material," which is shared over 32,000 times.



**APRIL 22**  
Fordham's national policy director Michael Brickman testifies at the Nevada Statehouse about the need for Common Core.



**APRIL 17**  
*New York Times* columnist David Brooks cites Fordham's work in a column on the Common Core.



**APR**  
Fordham releases *The State Education Agency: At the Helm, Not the Oar.*

*"We shouldn't force anyone into [career education], but we also shouldn't guilt kids with low odds of college success—regardless of their race or class—to keep trudging through academic coursework as teens."*

**MIKE PETRILLI, 'KID, I'M SORRY, BUT YOU'RE JUST NOT COLLEGE MATERIAL,' SLATE**



**MARCH 16**  
Amber Northern, Fordham's SVP for research, appears on Fox to discuss school discipline.



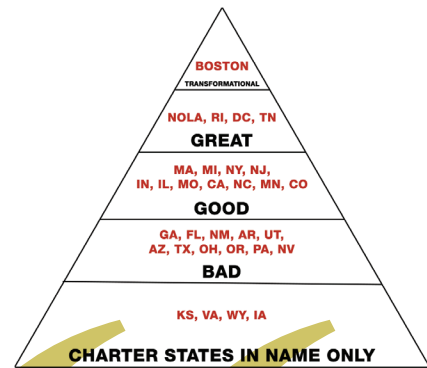
**MARCH 31, 2014**  
**@educationgadfly**  
There is a meaningful and important difference between standards and curriculum  
#CommonCore





**MAY 9**  
Kathryn Mullen-Upton, Fordham's VP for sponsorship and Dayton initiatives, is quoted on House Speaker John Boehner's blog about the need for quality charter schools.

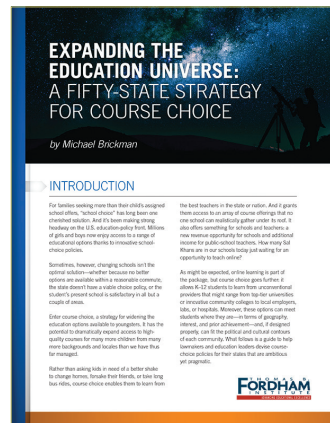
Wise Wonks' Hierarchy of Charter School Quality



# JUN

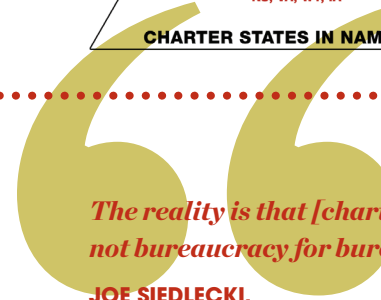
Our charter school policy “wonk-a-thon” produces eleven posts on what makes some cities’ charter sectors perform better than others.

**SEPTEMBER 2, 2014**  
**@MichaelPetrilli**  
I'm so grateful that @rpondiscio has joined our team at Fordham. A huge talent. #buildingteachers



# MAY

We publish *Expanding the Education Universe: A Fifty-State Strategy for Course Choice*.



*The reality is that [charter] governance—the right governance, not bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake—matters immensely.*

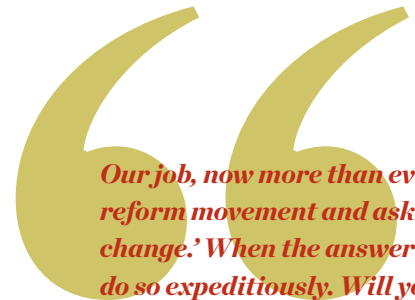
**JOE SIEDLECKI, FLYPAPER, 'SCHOOLS EDUCATE KIDS; MOVEMENTS DON'T'**

**JUNE 3**  
NPR interviews Amber about the dearth of high-quality curricular materials.

**JUNE 16**  
Robert Pondiscio joins the Fordham staff as senior fellow and vice president for external affairs.

**JUNE 24**  
Fordham publishes *Lacking Leaders: The Challenges of Principal Recruitment, Selection, and Placement*.

**JUNE 30**  
Checker is named to the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools Hall of Fame.



*Our job, now more than ever, is to hold up a mirror to the reform movement and ask whether we need to 'make a change.' When the answer is yes, let us have the courage to do so expeditiously. Will you join us?*

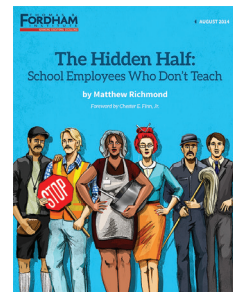
**MIKE PETRILLI, 'EDUCATION REFORM'S MOST URGENT TASK'**

# AUG

In August, Mike becomes president of Fordham.



**AUGUST 12**  
Fordham releases *The Hidden Half: School Employees Who Don't Teach*.



**JULY 31**  
Checker hosts a Fordham event on how America can steer more great leaders into the principal's office.

**JULY 7**  
Ohio policy analyst Jessica Poiner publishes her post “Teachers, Common Core, and the Freedom to teach,” which nets more than 29,000 views.



*Bad ideas in education are like horror movie monsters. You think you've killed them, but they refuse to stay dead.”*

**ROBERT PONDISCIO, 'WHY JOHNNY WON'T LEARN TO READ'**

# JUL

Robert Pondiscio pens an article on schools chancellor Carmen Fariña for the *New York Daily News*.



**AUGUST 21**  
Robert appears on *The Stossel Show*.



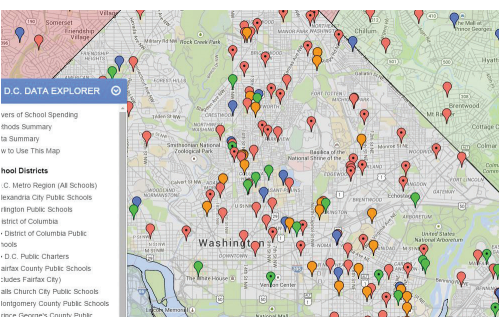
**AUGUST 14**  
Mike and AEI's Michael McShane host a livestreamed webinar called “A Fern Between Two Mikes.”





**OCTOBER 10**

Fordham's research team wins the 2014 PIE Network award for Most Actionable Research.



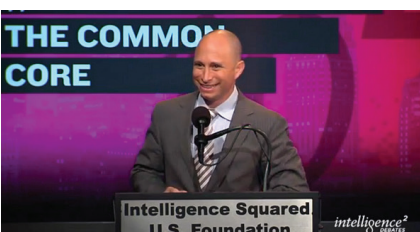
**OCT**

Fordham releases the Metro D.C. School Spending Explorer.



**OCTOBER 21**

Chad Aldis, Fordham's VP for Ohio policy and advocacy, speaks at NACSA about charter school closures.

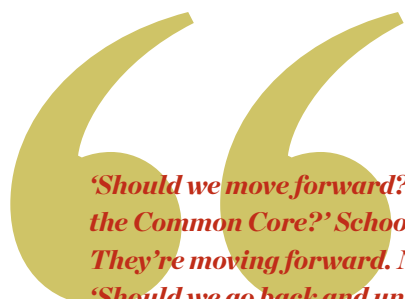


**SEP**

Mike argues the "pro" side at an Intelligence Squared debate on the Common Core.

**SEPTEMBER 3**

Mike finds common ground with Cato's Neal McCluskey in the op-ed "Restarting the Common Core Debate."



*'Should we move forward? Should we adopt the Common Core?' Schools have adopted it. They're moving forward. Now the question is, 'Should we go back and undo all the work of the last four years?'*

—MICHAEL PETRILLI, AT 'INTELLIGENCE SQUARED' DEBATE

**NOVEMBER 5**

Mike publishes a piece on what the new Republican Congress will mean for the future of education reform.



**NOV**

Fordham hosts education leaders from England for a conference on recruiting and preparing great school leaders.

**DECEMBER 9**

Fordham-Ohio releases *Charter School Performance in Ohio*, the first of two reports with major implications for charters.

**DECEMBER 18**

In response to our two Ohio reports, Ohio Governor John Kasich vows to get tough on charter authorizers in 2015.

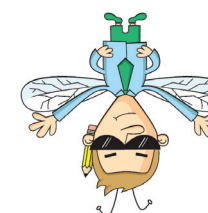
**NOVEMBER 19**

We co-host "The Future of Parent Information" with Great Schools.



**DEC**

Fordham hosts "Education for Upward Mobility," a major daylong conference about the multiple pathways to the middle class.



**DECEMBER 4, 2014**  
**@MichaelPetrilli**

Interrupting intergenerational poverty is the real goal of the #edreform movement #upwardmo

## HISTORY & MISSION

# SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM FORDHAM'S HISTORY

**1959**

Thelma Fordham Pruett founds the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in memory of her late husband, Dayton industrialist Thomas B. Fordham.

**1997**

The Foundation is relaunched following Mrs. Pruett's death, with a renewed focus on primary and secondary education in the U.S. and Ohio. Chester E. Finn, Jr. is named its president, and the board is expanded.

**1997**

Fordham publishes its first review of state academic standards, focused on English language arts.

**2001**

Fordham helps seed some of the first charter schools in Dayton.

**2003**

Fordham opens a Dayton office to serve as the base of our Ohio operations. It's joined by a Columbus office in 2006, which focuses on state-level policy.

**2004**

Ohio Department of Education approves Fordham to sponsor charter schools, making us the first nonprofit in Ohio to earn this responsibility.

**2007**

The Foundation is joined by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a public charity, which is now the face of almost all that we do.

**2008**

Fordham publishes its one-hundredth report, *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism*. To date, Fordham has published more than 230 research studies and policy briefs.

**2011**

Fordham champions legislation bringing Teach For America teachers to Ohio's schools.

**2014**

Mike Petrilli takes over as Fordham's second president.

**2015**

Fordham publishes its review of the new Common Core-aligned assessments. How do the new tests hold up? Find out this summer.



DECEMBER 10, 2014

@educationgadfly

If money is not the measure of resources an opportunity, then what is?

### THE PROBLEM WE FACE:

Too many American children receive an inferior education because too many U.S. schools and school systems are dysfunctional or ineffective. This situation is most dire for our neediest students, who lack high-quality education options, who receive dumbed-down curricula and weak instruction, and whose schools systems are too often held hostage by adult interest groups, including but not limited to teacher unions. Nor are affluent youngsters getting the education they require to succeed. As a result, U.S. students trail our international competitors, and many are ill prepared for college and career. Particularly galling is that these problems remain even as we spend more money per pupil than almost every other country.

In order for young Americans to succeed in college and the workforce, to participate knowledgeably in our democracy, and for our nation to maintain its leadership, prosperity, and security in the world, these problems must be solved. While the U.S. has made modest progress in some areas since being declared a "nation at risk," we have a long way to go to create an education system worthy of our great country.

### THE FORDHAM INSTITUTE'S MISSION:

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is the nation's leader in advancing educational excellence for every child through quality research, analysis, and commentary, as well as on-the-ground action and advocacy in Ohio.

### WE ADVANCE:

- high standards for schools, students, and educators;
- quality education options for families;
- a more productive, equitable, and efficient education system; and
- a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and excellence.

### WE PROMOTE EDUCATION REFORM BY:

- producing rigorous policy research and incisive analysis;
- building coalitions with policy makers, donors, organizations, and others who share our vision; and
- advocating bold solutions and comprehensive responses to education challenges, even when opposed by powerful interests and timid establishments.



# CHAMPIONING REFORMS IN OHIO



**A** S OHIO'S LEADING ADVOCATE FOR HIGH STANDARDS and high-quality school choice, Fordham's Columbus office plays an active role in shaping policy and reform conversations in the state. This year, we worked tirelessly to keep Ohio committed to the Common Core and related assessments, and we launched an initiative to dramatically improve charter school quality.

Macke Raymond of Stanford presents her analysis of Ohio charter performance.



Fordham takes an active part in the policymaking process. We're able to influence the debate on behalf of Ohio children by researching reforms like Ohio's voucher program; meeting with district, city, and state leaders; and framing the discussion via commentary. Although we do work on a broad range of issues (in particular, charter school quality), Common Core implementation became a divisive (and decisive) issue in the Ohio legislature in 2014; as such, we have taken an active role in building the coalition of Ohio reformers to support the Common Core, aiding in the recruitment of testimony and publishing *Gadfly* pieces that comment on the hearing and proposed legislation. We've also taken the lessons we've learned in the Buckeye State nationally via testimony and guidance in other states.

**“Ohio has a coalition of organizations and individuals fighting to maintain the Common Core standards. Fordham has been a leader in this work since the inception of the Coalition. No partner has been more engaged, committed and supportive of this work. Fordham's team, both in Ohio and Washington, have provided leadership, research and critical analysis and guidance to the Coalition, Ohio Department of Education, members of the Ohio General Assembly and the Governor's administration as Ohio tackles this critical education issue.**

LISA GRAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE OHIO STANDARD, A COALITION OF REFORM-MINDED EDUCATION GROUPS



SEPTEMBER 23, 2014  
@educationgadfly

Recent policy #edreform in Ohio reflects a shifting paradigm in K-12 education

**One of the major ways Fordham frames the debate is through commentary in the biweekly Ohio Gadfly and in newspapers. This year, Fordham-Ohio placed five op-eds in the Columbus Dispatch and Cincinnati Enquirer examining standards, accountability, and choice. During major legislative issues like the Common Core, these sources of commentary are invaluable for combating misinformation and informing the debate.**

**BAD OHIO LAW HAS LED TO BAD CHARTER SCHOOLS**  
*The Columbus Dispatch*  
December 24, 2014  
Chad Aldis

In the upcoming legislative session, Ohio lawmakers should tackle three tough but necessary tasks. First, they must craft a simpler and more coherent charter law that clearly establishes governing responsibilities, while purging conflicts of interest. Second, they should insist that any changes to charter governance not impose heavy-handed regulations on schools. Third, policymakers must ensure that charters receive more-equitable funding. After all, a child's education isn't less important or worth less just because the child chose to attend a charter school.

Ohio must recommit to its trailblazing commitment to school choice, by making certain that its charter sector is well-governed, free to innovate and adequately funded. If done well, these changes can remove the partisanship and will allow us to focus on what matters most: ensuring that Ohio's 120,000 charter students are on the right track for success in college, career and beyond.



# MODELING HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER AUTHORIZING FOR OHIO AND THE NATION

**AS THE AUTHORIZER OF ELEVEN SCHOOLS** educating children across five Ohio cities, Fordham has an unmatched lens on the trials and triumphs inherent in developing quality schools of choice. In 2014, we helped expand the high-performing United Schools and KIPP charter networks — adding 600 high-quality seats in Columbus — and earned an “exemplary” rating in the Ohio Department of Education’s comprehensive authorizer evaluation.

## OUR PLEDGE TO SCHOOLS

We have high expectations for our schools and hold them accountable for their success. But we have high expectations for ourselves as well. We pledge the following to our schools:

- Autonomy
- Integrity
- High Standards
- Comprehensive Monitoring
- Honest Reporting



Fordham schools educate some 3,200 Ohio students.



## SCHOOLS AUTHORIZED BY FORDHAM DURING THE 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR



**JULY 2, 2014**  
 @educationgadfly  
 Grammar and #edpolicy: We need to look at 'charter' as a verb, not an adjective

Our work has led to us to become even stronger advocates for high-quality charters, and deepened our commitment to cultivating best practices in authorization. This past year, we’ve spoken at conferences hosted by National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), and engaged with charter authorizers in Washington State, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

*The staff of the Fordham Foundation has become our go-to resource. Whether it is a policy, finance, or other question, they dig until we have answers. Actually, they provide a listening ear, thoughtful guidance, and national networking to help us address our most complex challenges. They understand the political, social, and economic realities of urban “break the mold” schools, while holding us accountable for results.*

**DR. JUDY HENNESSEY, DAYTON EARLY COLLEGE ACADEMY SUPERINTENDENT**



# LEADING RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS ON STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

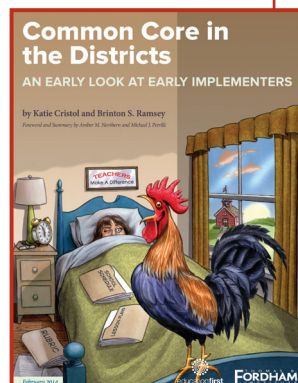


# F

**FORDHAM'S FIRST REPORT** reviewed state English standards. Since then, our research and commentary have led the conversation on standards-based reform. In 2014, we focused on implementation of Common Core State Standards, monitoring the progress made by states—and occasionally, their retreat—and offering thoughtful recommendations along the way.

## BRINGING LOCAL SUCCESSES TO THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

In 2014, we made the case for more rigorous standards through more than fifty speaking engagements (including testifying in front of state legislatures), 225 radio and TV appearances, and fifty-nine op-eds. We also examined on-the-ground implementation of those standards.



### 1 WHAT WE STUDIED

In our February report *Common Core in the Schools: An Early Look at Early Implementers*, we brought the lessons of four districts on the front lines of Common Core implementation to the national spotlight.

### 2

#### WHAT WE FOUND

While each district implemented the standards its own way, we found some overarching lessons:

- 1. Teachers and principals are the primary faces of implementation.** How parents and the community view the Common Core is largely shaped by how school faculty present new information.
- 2. Implementation gains traction when districts lock onto the standards as the linchpin of their work.** Instruction, professional development, and accountability systems all must be aligned to the standards.
- 3. In the absence of high-quality outside materials, districts are attempting to craft their own.** Good curriculum is critical, and the lack of materials is glaring. Districts are attempting to craft their own, with mixed results.
- 4. The scramble for quality professional development is critical—but patchy.** It's standard practice to sound the alarm for better professional development, but it's a chronic roadblock to good implementation.



Fordham staffers celebrate their win for "Most Actionable Research" at the 2014 PIE-Network Summit.

**FORDHAM'S WORK** on standards doesn't just influence the policy conversation—our up-to-the-moment research frequently makes its mark on the academic canon, as well. During 2014, our research was cited in more than 200 publications, including academic journals, working papers, policy briefs, and journal articles. And while our work on Common Core implementation was cited frequently, our research on school choice, governance, pension reform, gifted education, special education, and the role of the federal government in schools reverberates through academe via college syllabi and graduate courses nationwide. Our impact in the academic scholarship is reflected in the company that we keep. We have a proven capacity to team up with some of the most competent and respected scholars in the field. In 2014 alone, Fordham recruited leading scholars like David Figlio, Jonathan Plucker, Paul Manna, and Marty West to serve as principal investigators, contributing writers, and advisers to Fordham's research efforts. In January 2015, twenty-two regular collaborators made Rick Hess's annual ranking of influential education-policy intellectuals.



### 3

#### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Since the report came out, these districts have been propelled to the forefront of the national conversation.

**Kenton County:** Our "trailblazing" district was the host for a Grantmakers for Education briefing on Common Core implementation, in which Mike participated.

**Washoe County:** The "creative implementer" of the group was the focus of an NPR article on the standards as well as a Nevada Succeeds event on curriculum, at which Robert Pondiscio presented.

**Nashville:** Between innovative governance and a commitment to the standards, the "urban bellwether" continues to be the source of strong national interest.

**District 54:** This "high-performing suburb" received a great deal of state coverage after its students received the highest scores on the state math assessment, speaking to the quality of their implementation.

# “

*The Fordham Institute is a leader in guiding the field forward and breaking uncharted ground on issues that matter. With its impressive traditional and social media presence, Fordham is bringing the latest research, news and views from our field to an increasingly large audience.*

DR. CELINE COGGINS, CEO AND FOUNDER, TEACH PLUS



JULY 25, 2014  
@rpondiscio  
It's time to shift the conversation from "teacher quality" to "quality teaching." #edchat @educationgadfly



# LEADING THE CHARGE FOR QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOLS, IN OHIO AND NATIONALLY

**F**ORDHAM BELIEVES THAT EVERY FAMILY should have access to a quality school of their choice—but what makes a school good is tough to define. Fordham’s research, commentary, and policy recommendations this year sought to identify ways to improve schools and expand the universe of great school choices for all students.

A critical way Fordham leads the school-choice conversation is by convening interested parties to debate and discuss issues, ideas, and practices. The following are among this year’s eight choice events:



**March 21: Encouraging integrated schools in the District of Columbia?**

This lively discussion focused on the merits and pitfalls of “controlled choice,” which takes parent preferences into account while also ensuring diversity at public schools. The panel featured parents and policy analysts debating a problem in Fordham’s own backyard as the city considered how to redraw boundary lines at public schools.



**June 26: On the Rocketship: Expanding the high-quality charter school movement**

Education writer Richard Whitmire discussed the lessons in his new book, which followed the high-performing Rocketship charter school network. In particular, he tackled questions of how great schools can scale quickly without losing quality and how

leaders can build great charters in suburbs, which have hewed to traditional public schools.



**November 19: The Future of Parent Information**

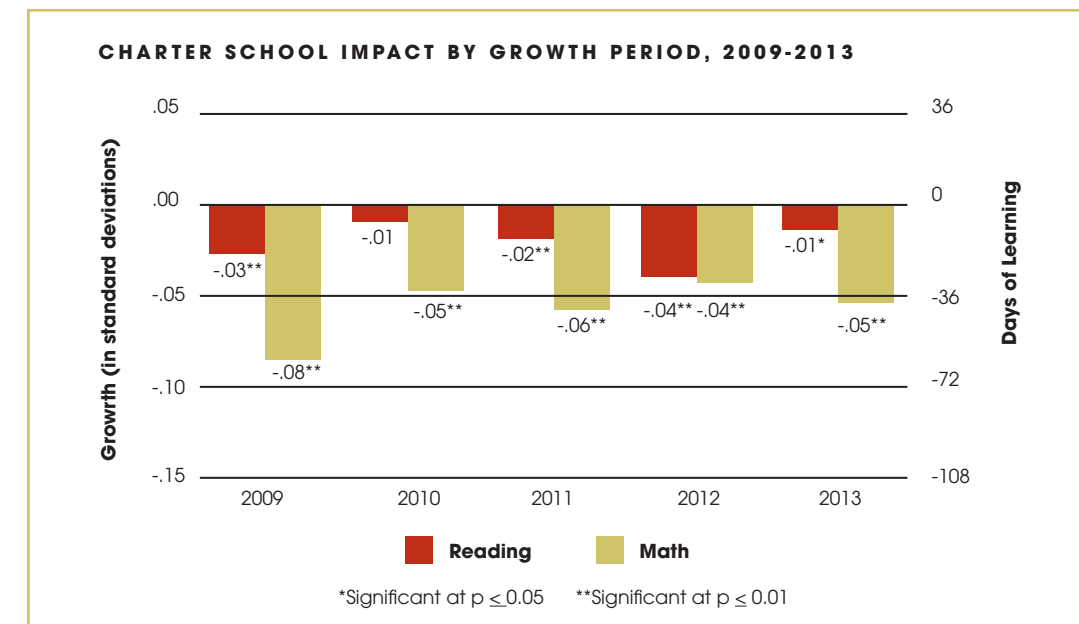
Parent information is a critical component of a quality school-choice system. Education advocates and school leaders gathered to discuss the intersection of technology and parent information, including how to crowdsource insights and harness parent power to improve the quality of schools.



**December 16: Ten Policy Recommendations for Ohio’s Charter School Sector**

Bernard Lee Schwartz Policy Fellow and Fordham report author Andy Smarick traveled to Ohio to speak on his policy recommendations for the state’s charter law. After a presentation, he was joined by a panel of Ohio-based experts, including Senate Education Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and House Education Committee Vice Chair Andrew Brenner.

A pair of Fordham reports in December, *Charter School Performance in Ohio and The Road to Redemption: Ten Policy Recommendation for Ohio’s Charter-School Sector*, examined the (mediocre) quality of the state’s charter schools—an issue that has long plagued Ohio and many other states.



**MAY 28, 2014**  
 @educationgadfly  
 When it comes to #charterschools both scale and quality matter

## ANALYSIS

The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (CREDO) conducted our analysis of charter school performance. The report found that charter school students across Ohio did not learn as much as their traditional-school counterparts: On average, charter students lost fourteen days of learning in reading and forty-three days in math. There were a few bright spots: Students in Cleveland charters, for instance, outlearned district counterparts, and overall, low-income black students benefited from charters. But as this graph demonstrates, students in traditional schools outpaced students in charter schools by as many as fifty-eight days of learning during the last five years.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The second report analyzed Ohio’s byzantine charter regulations and offered the following suggestions on how to solidify and strengthen the state’s patchy charter laws:

- Ensure high-quality sponsorship
- Address perverse incentives in sponsor funding
- Hold authorizers accountable
- Protect the independence of governing authorities
- Eliminate “sponsor hopping”
- Hold all schools accountable to high standards
- Foster high-quality schools with equitable funding, transportation, and facilities policies

## THE IMPACT

Within a month, Fordham’s dual reports reaped a media harvest—including op-eds in every major Ohio newspaper and forty mentions in the media—as well as an acknowledgement from Governor Kasich that issues of charter quality must be addressed in the next budget cycle. In 2015, we’ll work to turn research into action with policymakers in Ohio and nationwide.

# 2014: THE YEAR OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



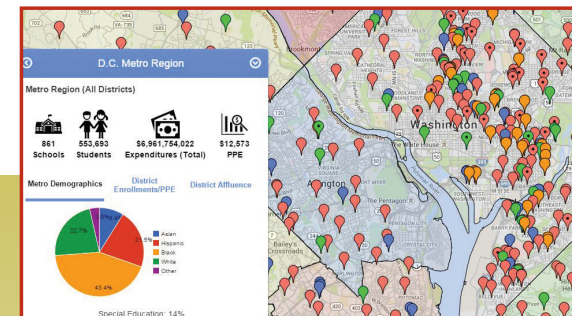
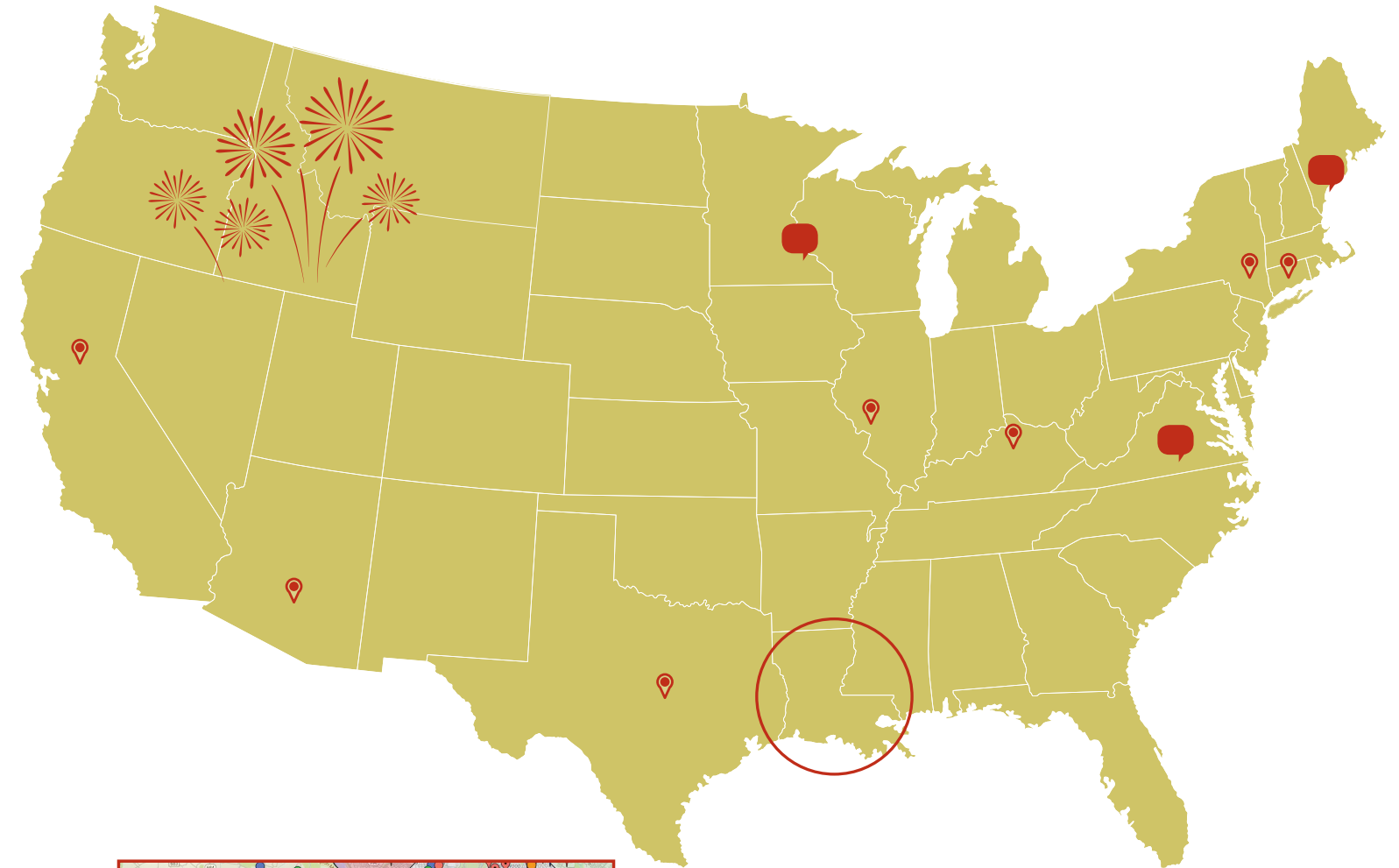
## ORDHAM TARGETED EDUCATION GOVERNANCE—

this year—which many find intractable and a bit boring, but is both central to every reform and an obstacle to reform. We drew attention to the need to recruit top school leaders, questioned the proliferation of nonteachers, and reimagined the role of state education agencies. Our bold recommendations caught the eyes of lawmakers, district leaders, and policymakers nationwide.

Andy Smarick talks about how to reimagine the state education agency at a March event on state governance.

In March, we asked, *Does School Board Leadership Matter?* The answer was that “it can, especially when boards are focused on academics.” We spent the rest of the year discussing these findings with school-board associations nationwide. This is the sort of targeted impact that we strive for with all our studies and reports.

- VIRGINIA:** Amber spoke at the Virginia School Boards Association.
- MINNESOTA:** We authored a journal article for the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) on the findings, and Fordham’s national research director Dara Zeehandelaar spoke at MSBA’s delegate assembly.
- MAINE:** Report authors Arnold Shober and Michael Hartney spoke at the Maine School Boards Association.
- CONNECTICUT, NEW YORK, CALIFORNIA, ARIZONA, ILLINOIS, and KENTUCKY’S** school-board associations all mentioned the report in their member newsletters.
- In **IDAHO**, Dara Zeehandelaar spoke at the National School Boards Association conference for state executive directors.
- TEXAS:** Dallas school-board member Mike Morath cited the report in advocating legislation to reshape the way Dallas—the nation’s fourteenth-largest district—approaches school governance.
- LOUISIANA:** After proponents consulted with the report’s authors, the Louisiana House passed a bill to introduce on-cycle elections of board members to the Louisiana Parish School Board, aligning their practices to the report’s finding that districts with on-cycle elections are more likely to “beat the odds” academically. This became law.



## SOLVING LOCAL PROBLEMS INTERACTIVELY

How much does it cost to educate a child? In the D.C. metro region, as elsewhere, that question is not easily answered. In September, we released an interactive, online tool to help citizens better understand how much money their schools spend per student. We found a wide disparity: Forest Heights Elementary in Prince George’s County, Maryland, spends \$10,040 per student; one mile away, D.C.’s Patterson Elementary spends \$17,100 per pupil to educate a very similar population of students.

The spending calculations were eye openers for many and received coverage in the *Washington Post*, *Education Week*, and the *Kojo Nmandi Show* on NPR. Dozens of researchers, parents, and educators contacted us to ask additional questions on our methodology and results or to comment on how the tool informed their district. In Prince George’s County, for instance, a board member used the tool with his colleagues to discuss spending inequity between schools.



OCTOBER 27, 2014  
@educationgadfly  
In all the talk about accountability, the way education dollars are spent is too often left out of the conversation



# CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ED REFORM LEADERS

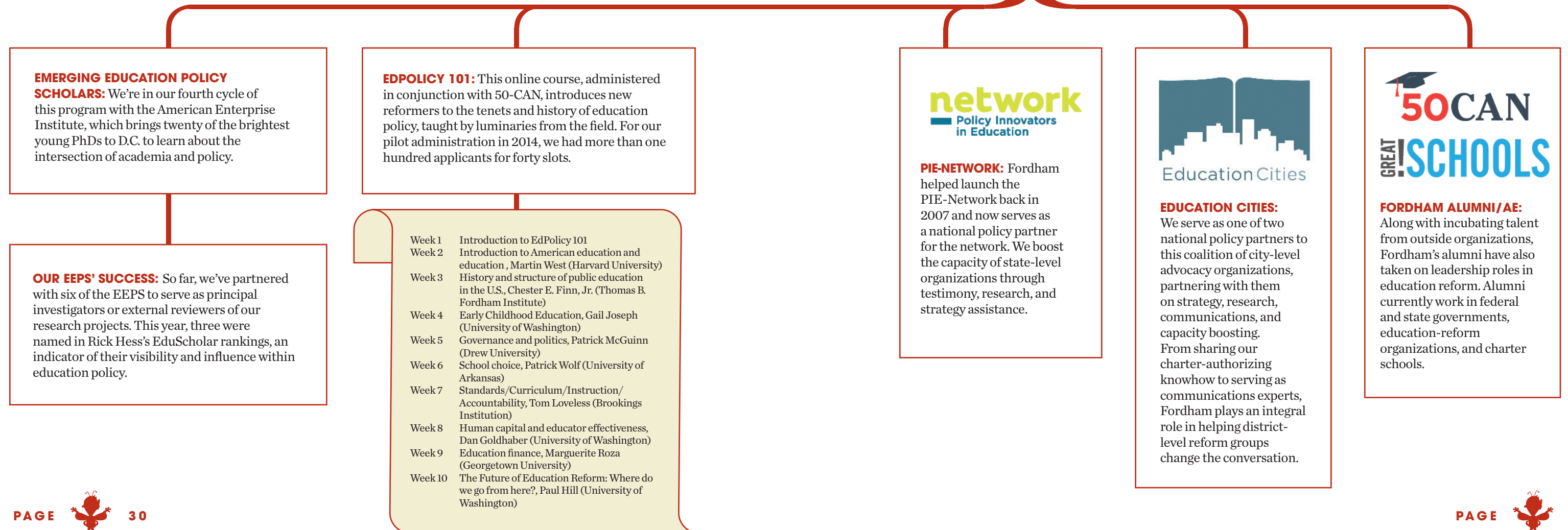


**EDUCATION REFORM NEEDS** passionate, smart, and committed people to create and sustain change. Fordham plays a significant role in developing the next generation of such leaders: We incubate some internally, of course—our alumni/ae list is truly impressive—but we also team up with other organizations to prepare former and current staff to take leadership positions across the sector and develop programming to kick-start careers for young scholars and advocates outside of Fordham.



Dr. Marguerite Rosa of Georgetown leads a session on education finance for EdPolicy 101.

## FORDHAM





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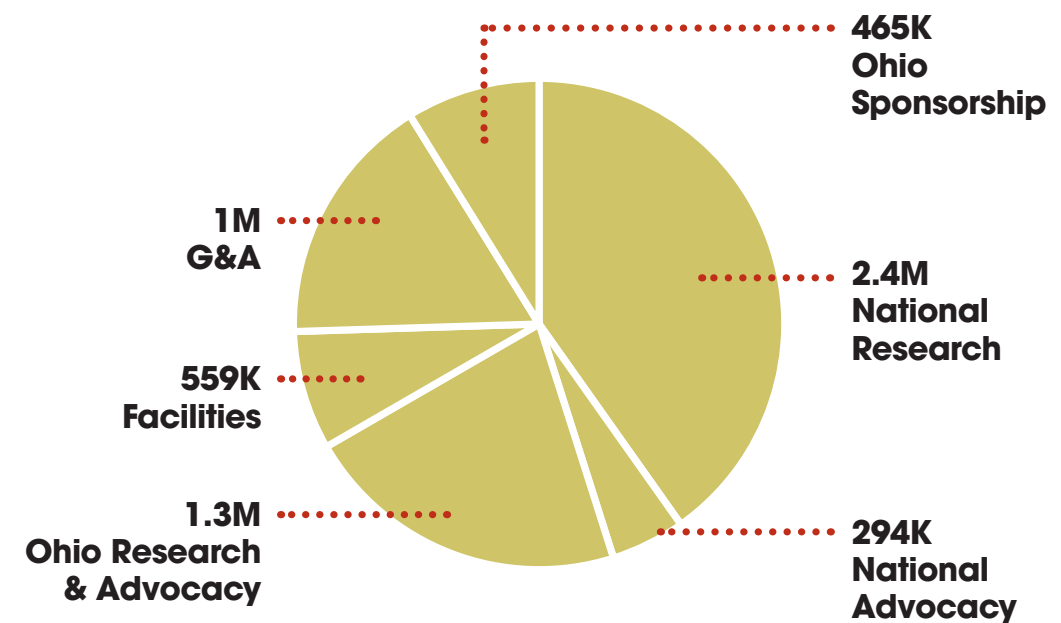


**Caprice Young**  
CEO, Magnolia Public  
Schools

## FINANCES IN BRIEF

Fordham's budget for 2014 was \$5.9 million dollars and is projected to be about \$6.2 million in 2015. Of that, roughly one-third will be supported by our endowment, and the remainder will be raised from private donors. Our charter-sponsorship operation is largely supported by school fees.

### BUDGET:



#### How quickly is Fordham growing?

Fordham continues to expand prudently as we boost our capacity to deliver thoughtful research, studies, news analysis, and policy briefs. We currently have a full-time staff of twenty-four.

#### Isn't Fordham also a foundation? Does it make grants?

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation is a "Type I supporting organization," controlled by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. These sister organizations are both tax-exempt public charities under section 501(c)3 of the tax code. Today, most of our work is conducted under the Institute name, ordinarily with partial funding from the Foundation's endowment, which—combined with the Institute's modest endowment—reached \$58 million in late 2007 before falling to a low of \$34 million in early 2009. As of January 2015, it had rebounded to \$54.2 million.

Fordham does make a few grants each year, but these are targeted and small. Many go toward our on-the-ground work in Ohio, where we play an active role in the state's education landscape. Recent grantees include School Choice Ohio, Teach For America—Southwest Ohio, College Promise, Learn to Earn/Ready Set Soar, and the Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio.

Fordham is audited annually by Lane & Company in Washington, D.C. Copies of our audited statements are available on request. Fordham's 990 and 990-PF IRS filings are also available by request or online at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org).



# FUNDERS



Fordham is grateful for the support of the following organizations:

THE ACHELIS AND BODMAN FOUNDATIONS



DORIS & DONALD FISHER FUND



TheJoyceFoundation



Fordham is also grateful for the support of the Kovner Foundation and the Bernard Lee Schwartz Foundation.