

Yearning to Break Free: Ohio Superintendents Speak Out



March 2011

Conducted by the FDR Group for
the Thomas B. Fordham Institute

FDR GROUP
When Research Matters.



Yearning to Break Free: Ohio Superintendents Speak Out

A statewide survey of Ohio school district superintendents and other education leaders on the most critical issues facing K-12 education in the Buckeye State, including budgets, school effectiveness, and troublesome laws.

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FOREWORD

Can Ohio schools produce better-educated students on leaner rations? Only if their leaders are free to deploy their available resources in the most effective and efficient ways, unburdened by state mandates, regulatory constraints, and dysfunctional contract clauses. That's the message that comes through loudest from this important new survey of the state's school superintendents and other education leaders.

Ohio simply can't afford *not* to seek dramatic achievement gains and gap reductions, no matter how tough the fiscal situation is.

Education in the Buckeye State, as in most of the country, is coming to terms with "the new normal" – a prolonged period of having to produce better results with diminished resources. Ohio faces a daunting budget shortfall of some \$8 billion over the next two years. The resolution of this shortfall will surely affect every aspect of state and local services, including K-12 education, which now consumes about 40 percent of state dollars.

At the same time, the need to strengthen academic achievement has never been greater, both nationally and in Ohio. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Ohio's weak reading and math scores in the fourth and eighth grades have barely budged over the past decade. Along with this stagnation, yawning achievement gaps persist among racial and socioeconomic subgroups. For example, in 2009 42 percent of Ohio's white eighth graders were "proficient" (or better) on the reading portion of NAEP, while that level was attained by just 13 percent of the state's African American students.

In math, the gap was a staggering 30 percentage points. And students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch also reached proficiency at far lower rates than their more prosperous peers.

In short, Ohio simply can't afford *not* to seek dramatic achievement gains and gap reductions, no matter how tough the fiscal situation is. While Governor Kasich and state lawmakers have the responsibility to balance the state's budget, it is district and school leaders who will have to make their schools work on tighter resources while still boosting pupil achievement and school performance. This, however, can only happen if those leaders have the capacity and the authority to act on their best judgment of what their teachers and students need. If the state shackles them with rules and envelops them in mandates even as it cuts their budgets, achievement will inevitably head down, not up. The same is true of teacher (and other employee) contracts that force them to spend scarce money in educationally unproductive ways because of provisions attuned to the interests of adults rather than students.

If the state shackles local education leaders with rules and envelops them in mandates even as it cuts their budgets, achievement will inevitably head down, not up.

Over the past year, as the Thomas B. Fordham Institute has organized various discussions, conferences, and symposia in Ohio on the big challenge of "doing more with less" in K-12 education, we've been privy to all manner of comments – usually off the

record – by superintendents and other school leaders along the lines of, “We could survive these cuts if we had real control over our budgets.” They called for more day-to-day authority to manage school-system personnel. In fact, superintendents and other district administrators said that enhancing that authority was more important than receiving more funding and that, if the state wants to see academic achievement rise in the coming years, district leaders need more autonomy.

Because of political sensitivities – their colleagues, the media, teachers unions, even their own school boards – few of these leaders have wanted their names attached to such comments. But when the door is closed they voice them over and over.

In order to open that door to the public without making trouble for individual superintendents, Fordham chose to undertake a careful survey of district superintendents and other public-education leaders in Ohio. We also wanted to determine how widespread these attitudes and priorities are – and not just among those who turned up at events where we were present.

Superintendents said that enhancing their authority was more important than receiving more funding and that, if the state wants to see academic achievement rise in the coming years, district leaders need more autonomy.

So we enlisted the expert assistance of the nonpartisan FDR Group, a respected survey research firm led by veteran public opinion analysts Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett. In September 2010, we com-

missioned the FDR Group to conduct three focus groups, one with Dayton-area superintendents, one with Columbus-area and southeastern-Ohio superintendents, and another with regional Educational Service Center superintendents.

Superintendents made clear that they understood the scale of the fiscal challenges their districts face and declared they want the responsibility and flexibility to make the tough calls necessary to see their schools through times of deep budget cuts.

During these focus groups – and at least partly thanks to the confidentiality of the setting – superintendents again made clear that they understood the scale of the fiscal challenges their districts face and again declared that they want the responsibility and flexibility to make the tough calls necessary to see their schools through times of deep budget cuts. They said that the easy reductions had already been taken; no small cost savings remained on the table. They called for increased managerial flexibility to lead their districts in ways that protected and boosted pupil achievement but stated that their hands are tied by state law and their local collective bargaining agreements. Without changes to these, they feared they couldn’t accomplish much. But both must change together.

One superintendent captured the feeling of many colleagues when he said,

“Collective bargaining must be addressed by the legislature. It is very political. Can the system really re-invent itself given the need? Even if you take a hard

line stance, short of a strike, you're going to get incremental change, occasionally if you have tough external conditions you can get more. The system can't change from within."

The superintendents didn't blame the teachers unions for all of their problems. Several national studies – including one conducted by Fordham – have found that school administrators and their boards often have more potential leverage in negotiating these contracts than they have attempted to exercise, whether out of nervousness or a desire for labor peace or the fact that unions in a number of cities have considerable influence over school board members. Ohio superintendents basically agree. In the new survey, they acknowledged that negotiations involved two sides and that, as a group, superintendents and their school boards were as much to blame as anyone else for the present-day situation. But still, according to superintendents, things must change if the fiscal pinch is to be endured, much less if student achievement is to rise.

The superintendents didn't blame the teachers unions for all of their problems. They acknowledged that negotiations involved two sides and that, as a group, superintendents and their school boards were as much to blame as anyone else for the present-day situation.

During one focus group, a new superintendent, for example, admitted his surprise at learning that the collective bargaining agreement he inherited determined the highest and lowest temperature allowed in his classrooms. Another superintendent noted,

"Everything goes back to collective bargaining. I'd want more flexibility on the school day. We have buildings that sit two-thirds of the day empty. Attack the collective bargaining; it's killing us."

Overwhelmingly, superintendents say that if state leaders want academic achievement to rise in a time of austerity, they must give district and school leaders more autonomy.

The attitudes of these superintendents intrigued us even as their candor (in private) impressed us, but we still wondered how representative the focus-group participants were. We needed a broader survey. So we turned once more to the FDR Group. They created an online survey tool of about 45 questions that superintendents could access and answer anonymously. It was clear from conversations with district leaders that they had much to say but didn't want to say it publicly. Further, because most superintendents are really busy, the survey had to take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

We also understood that, for superintendents across the state to take the survey seriously, it needed some respected figures to vouch for the quality of the work and the credentials of the research team. Here we owe much gratitude to Bart Anderson, superintendent of the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio, and Craig Burford, executive director of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association. Both advised us on the best manner to reach superintendents and encouraged them to participate in our survey. They also sent notes to their colleagues across the state, asking them to keep their eyes open for the survey, and to respond to it. Thanks to this encouragement,

the FDR Group received survey responses from 246 district superintendents across Ohio (out of a total of just over 600).

Overall, the survey results align with what we had heard at earlier events and in the three focus groups. Overwhelmingly, superintendents say that if state leaders want academic achievement to rise in a time of austerity, they must give district and school leaders more autonomy.

On state measures that affect collective bargaining, among the most important changes they urge:

- Get rid of the provision that mandates automatic step increases in teacher salaries – about seven in ten say this would be very important.
- Repeal the provision that “requires a last-in, first-out approach to layoffs” – this is very important to two-thirds of superintendents.
- Change state law to make it “easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured” – about eight in ten view this as very important.

On other state mandates, superintendents would like to:

- Combine state revenue streams while giving them more flexibility over how the money is spent – about eight in ten point to this as very important.
- Create a statewide health insurance plan that would serve all of Ohio’s K-12 employees – about three in four point to this as very important.

Conclusion

Readers of these pages should understand that untying such state mandates is not solely about granting flexibility to administrators or saving money. Enabling education leaders to ensure that the most effective instructors occupy the classrooms that need them the most is critical if Ohio wants to lift the achievement of its children. While many policy or

legislative changes could save money in Ohio’s education system, undoing mandates related to personnel policy is key to changing the academic trajectory of its students. And superintendents believe that it’s possible: By an overwhelming majority (72 percent) they say that more authority – especially over staffing – would result not just in greater efficiency but also in real achievement gains.

Untying state mandates is not solely about granting flexibility to administrators or saving money. Enabling education leaders to ensure that the most effective instructors occupy the classrooms that need them the most is critical if Ohio wants to lift the achievement of its children.

In this tumultuous period of having to do more with less in education as well as other sectors, district leaders are key players. They are the educators-in-chief for the state’s 1.75 million pupils, the front-line professionals responsible for executing state and federal education policies. They are the decision makers charged with making schools and districts more effective even as resources shrink. It is critical that their voices are heard in Columbus as changes to state funding and state laws are debated and adopted. Ohio’s superintendents are ready and willing to lead. They want the flexibility to do so. Now is the time to give it to them.

Acknowledgments

Many people put their time and talents toward helping make this survey and document possible.

Most importantly, we thank the district superintendents, regional Educational Service Center superin-

tendents (ESC), and charter school leaders who responded to the survey – as well as the district and ESC superintendents who participated in focus groups in Columbus and Dayton in September 2010.

Special thanks are due to Fordham Institute Board Chair David Ponitz and Ohio Committee Chair David Driscoll for their help in developing and launching this project. Their vast expertise, thoughtful comments, and critical prodding all along the way were pivotal to making this project a success. Thanks also to Todd Hanes, associate superintendent at the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio, for his input and assistance as we developed the survey tool and refined the questions – no easy task to be sure.

We are grateful to those people who helped promote the survey to superintendents and charter school leaders and encouraged them to respond to it. These include Bart Anderson, superintendent of the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio; Craig Burford, executive director of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association; State Senator Peggy Lehner; State Representative Gerald Stebelton; and Bill Sims, president of the Ohio Association for Public Charter Schools.

We also thank Emi Ryan for her layout and design talents, which are evident throughout this report, and Chan Cochran, for his sage advice about the survey's release.

Finally, at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, we are especially thankful to Senior Ohio Policy Analyst & Associate Editor Jamie Davies O'Leary for her timely comments and able assistance at every turn on this project, from mere concept to final product; to Policy & Research Assistant Bianca Speranza, Program Associate Whitney Gilbert, and interns Nick Joch and Andrew Proctor for their diligence and help.

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

Terry Ryan
Vice President for Ohio Programs and Policy

Emmy L. Partin
Director of Ohio Policy and Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Lack of money is not the bigger problem facing education, superintendents say; it's how and on what the money is spent.

- When it comes to doing what is best for their districts, 42 percent of district superintendents say they often feel like their hands are tied by the system, 34 percent that they work around the system to get things done, and only 18 percent that the system helps them do the things they think are needed.
- Fifty-two percent say the real problem with public education today is “how and where the money is spent,” compared with 37 percent who say it's that not enough money is spent on the schools. When asked to think about their own districts, the numbers reverse: 39 percent say the problem is “how and where” and 50 percent that's it is too little money.
- A majority (62 percent) would rather avoid “harmful cutbacks,” but a sizeable one in three (33 percent) say that, to them, financial hard times in their district are a chance to make necessary changes that would be tough to make in ordinary times.

2. Strengthening managerial authority over staff would be decisive to delivering gains in student achievement in their districts, even more decisive than increased funding, according to district superintendents.

- When forced to choose, 50 percent of district superintendents think “significant expansion of management authority over staff” would be likelier to lead to improvement in student achievement, compared with 44 percent who give the nod to the more obvious “significant increases in school funding.”
- By an overwhelming 72 percent to 14 percent margin, district superintendents say greater managerial authority would result in measurable

improvement in student achievement, not just better management of resources. And superintendents are so confident they can deliver better student achievement that 78 percent favor linking superintendents' own pay to improved student outcomes – in exchange for that greater authority over staff.

- Fifty-seven percent believe that evaluating schools and districts based on how well students do on standardized tests and publicizing the results is mostly a good thing “because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed.”

3. In the view of district superintendents, Ohio's collective bargaining system needs fundamental transformation. Much as they may dislike state mandates, they favor new legislation to correct this problem.

- About two-thirds (65 percent) of district superintendents say the collective bargaining process needs fundamental overhaul, and another 32 percent would press for some modification. Only two percent say it should be left alone.
- More than eight in ten (84 percent) believe that “while a district's leadership is on its own” during negotiations, local union chapters “can count on statewide or even national support.”
- District superintendents point to school boards as part of the problem: 76 percent believe that boards are “often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord.” But 92 percent believe that if state law were to strengthen management authority over staff, it's likely that their boards would press for contract changes during future rounds of collective bargaining.
- Fifty-five percent of district superintendents acknowledge that there have been labor issues

where “the leadership of my district – including myself – should have done more to hold the line.”

- Fully eight in ten (81 percent) say “I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio’s school districts require state legislation.”

4. State laws governing staffing and pay are a big part of the problem and need to change.

- Fully 93 percent view state law that “permits district-labor negotiations over a variety of workforce issues that really should be off the table” as a serious obstacle to improving public education.
- Almost nine in ten (89 percent) say the same about state law “requiring that teacher pay be based upon longevity and university credits instead of demonstrated skill and performance.”
- Asked to rank five elements of Ohio state law according to what they’d most like to see repealed, the two items that rise to the top are to get rid of the provision that mandates automatic step increases in teacher salaries (73 percent) and the requirement of the last-in, first-out approach to layoffs (66 percent).
- One priority emerges when superintendents are asked to rank six hypothetical changes to laws relating to school staffing and pay: 82 percent point to making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured.
- Superintendents believe Ohio’s way of licensing teachers fails to assure good teaching. Just five percent believe “that going through the licensure process in Ohio guarantees that a teacher is well-prepared to succeed in the classroom.”

5. Ohio’s district superintendents think two promising ways to save districts money are to give superintendents greater control over combined state revenue streams and to mandate a statewide health insurance plan for the K-12 system. On the other hand, merging actual

districts and/or back-office operations are not viewed as particularly promising.

- District superintendents strongly support two of six proposals that superintendents say, if implemented, would bring districts across the state considerable cost savings.
 - Combining state revenue streams while giving districts more flexibility over how the money is spent – 82 percent
 - Creating a state-mandated health insurance plan that would serve all of Ohio’s K-12 system – 74 percent
 - Relying a lot more on technological innovations such as online instruction – 54 percent
 - Outsourcing or merging back-office operations such as accounting and payroll – 44 percent
 - Merging school districts – 31 percent
 - Giving districts a lot more freedom to convert traditional schools to charter or community schools – 23 percent

6. District superintendents in Ohio share many of the same points of view as other public school leaders, namely regional ESC superintendents and charter school leaders. But on several survey items, the groups significantly differ.

- Ohio’s regional ESC superintendents differ from district superintendents in that:
 - They are more likely to think that the real problem facing public education today is misuse of resources rather than lack of funding (76 percent vs. 52 percent).
 - They are more likely to view school boards as at least somewhat of an obstacle to progress: 92 percent believe that school boards are often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord, compared with 76 percent of district superintendents.

- They are stronger supporters of publicizing student test scores as a way to hold schools and districts accountable (72 percent vs. 57 percent).
 - ESC superintendents are almost twice as likely as local ones to think that outsourcing or merging back-office operations would result in substantial cost savings (80 percent vs. 44 percent).
 - Ohio’s charter school leaders differ from district superintendents in that:
 - They are more likely to think that the real problem in education today is how and where the money is spent (71 percent vs. 52 percent).
 - They are far more likely to choose “significant increases in school funding” as a better route to improved student achievement than “significant expansion of management authority over staff” (73 percent vs. 44 percent).
- 7. On some measures, the views of district superintendents vary depending on the type of school district they are in.**
- Superintendents from historically high-need districts are more likely to point the finger at the “how and where” money is spent, as opposed to the “how much” money is spent:
 - Superintendents from urban districts (55 percent)
 - Superintendents from districts where a majority of students are economically disadvantaged (48 percent)
 - Superintendents from districts with low (Continuing Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency) state academic ratings (56 percent)
 - Suburban superintendents stand out when it comes to the belief that school boards are “often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord”:
 - 89 percent of suburban
 - 71 percent of urban
 - 73 percent of rural
 - Superintendents from rural districts stand out in that they are more likely to disagree about the cost savings that would come from merging full districts or even just administrative tasks:
 - Percent who disagree that merging school districts would bring significant cost savings to Ohio’s school districts:
 - 75 percent of rural
 - 50 percent of suburban
 - 52 percent of urban
 - Percent who disagree that outsourcing or merging back-office operations would bring significant cost savings to Ohio’s school districts:
 - 63 percent of rural
 - 30 percent of suburban
 - 41 percent of urban

OHIO SUPERINTENDENTS SPEAK: Statewide Survey Findings

FINDING ONE

District superintendents say that Ohio's K-12 system is standing in the way of academic progress. Even in tight budgetary times, they argue, lack of money is not the bigger problem facing education; rather, it's how and on what the money is spent. Superintendents in urban or economically disadvantaged districts are more likely to say that the real problem is misdirected money.

Superintendents report that their ability to lead their school systems effectively is stymied by the education system's rules, policies, and mandates. When it comes to doing what is best for their districts, 42 percent say they often feel like their hands are tied, and another 34 percent say they "must often work around the system to get things done." Only 18 percent say the system helps them do the things they think are needed.

"Most school [leaders'] hands are tied with continuing contracts and negotiated agreements."

"Treat us like you do charter schools. Give us the relief from regulations.... I would love the ability to be able to do what they can do. The system is constraining us."

"We need to stop the one-size-fits-all policies required of every district in the state."

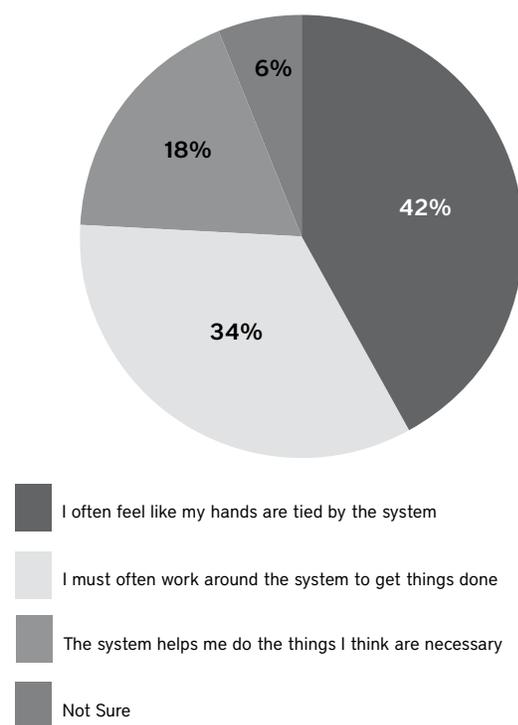
More often than not, in the judgment of these district superintendents, lack of money is not the central problem facing public education today – it's where and how the money is spent. Even in the midst of a tightening fiscal environment only 37 percent say that, looking at public education as a whole, the real problem is "that too little money is spent on the schools;" 52 percent instead say the real problem is "how and where the money is spent."

As one might expect, superintendents have more flattering assessments of how money is handled in their own districts. But even there, almost two superintendents in five (39 percent) say the real problem is the "how and where;" 50 percent say it's too little money.

"We are doing more with less all the time. What we need is to have more flexibility with how we spend our money...."

"Eliminate the evidence-based model for districts that have high achievement. Why do you need all-day kindergarten in a district that's doing very well? Some need it; some don't."

When it comes to doing things according to your own judgment of what is best for your district, which of these statements comes closest to your view?



Which of the following comes closer to your view about the real problem in public education today?

	"The real problem in public education in general is:"	"The real problem in in my own district is:"
Too little money is spent on the schools	37	50
How and where the money is spent	52	39

“In small districts like ours, it is impossible to spend what has to be set aside [for professional development]. Although our school provides many, many, many opportunities for growth, much of the money is unspent, which could be reallocated to programming and salaries where it is needed most in our schools.”

It is perhaps most striking that superintendents from historically high-need districts are more likely to point the finger at the “how and where” money is spent – as opposed to the “how much” money is spent. Superintendents from urban districts (55 percent) or those where a majority of students are economically disadvantaged (48 percent) are more likely to say that in their districts the real problem is “how and where the money is spent.” The same is true for 56 percent of those in districts rated less effective by the Ohio Department of Education (i.e., ratings of Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency).

In the focus groups, some superintendents talked about a budgetary shortfall in their own districts as an opportunity to pursue much needed change. To be sure, a majority (62 percent) would rather avoid “harmful cutbacks,” but a sizeable one in three (33 percent) are so anxious for reform that they view financial hard times in their districts as a chance to make much-needed changes.

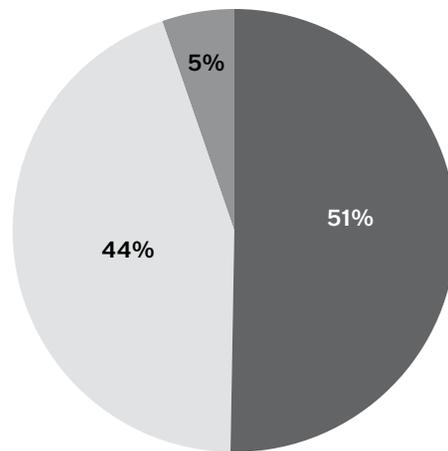
“When we faced our first rounds of cuts, we did view them as an opportunity to make cuts and change procedures for the better – but we are long past that point, now.”

FINDING TWO

Superintendents believe that strengthening managerial authority over staff would be decisive to delivering gains in student achievement in their districts, even more decisive than increased funding. Leaders from districts that are historically high-need are more likely to feel this way.

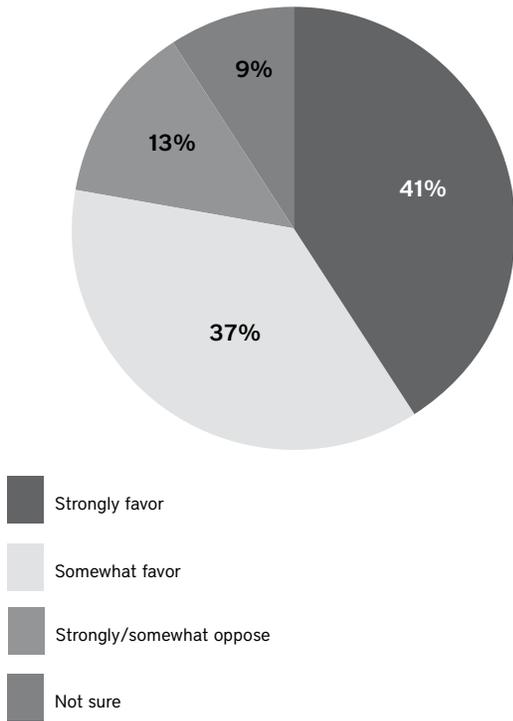
It is no surprise that the area in which superintendents are most interested in changing the ground rules is in their capacity to direct staff, which is the most expensive – and in terms of student achievement, the

If you had to choose between these two things, which do you think would be MORE likely to lead to improvement in student achievement in your district?



- Significant expansion of management authority over staff
- Significant increases in school funding
- Not Sure

How much would you favor or oppose a proposal that would give district superintendents greater authority over managing staff but would also link superintendent pay to improvements in student achievement?



most important – resource. What may be surprising is that when forced to choose, 50 percent of district superintendents think “significant expansion of management authority over staff” would be likelier to lead to improvement in student achievement, compared with 44 percent who give the nod to the more obvious “significant increases in school funding.”

“Cut the budget 15 percent, allow districts to get rid of their bad employees easily and without repercussions, and education would actually improve.”

“I believe that any reduction in state funding for public education needs to provide for greater district flexibility in managing staff beyond the collective bargaining agreement.”

Superintendents from high-need districts are even more persuaded that expanding management authority is the surer way to deliver improvement, with 73 percent of urban and 60 percent of majority economically disadvantaged districts choosing greater authority over more money.

The survey prompted district superintendents to be specific: Would greater managerial authority actually deliver “measurable improvement in student achievement” or simply “better management of resources”? By an overwhelming 72 percent to 14 percent margin, superintendents said increased authority would result in measurable improvements in achievement, not just efficiency. Moreover, they are so confident that they can deliver better student achievement that nearly eight in ten (78 percent) favor linking the superintendents’ own pay to improved outcomes – in exchange for greater authority over staff.

There is little doubt that administrators understand that “measurable improvement in student achievement” means data, and that data predominantly mean test scores. Most expect that their districts will be evaluated based on how well students do on standardized tests. In fact, 57 percent of superintendents think that evaluating schools and districts in this way and publicizing the results is mostly a good thing “because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed,” compared with 30 percent who think it’s mostly harmful “because it puts students and educators under unfair pressure.”

FINDING THREE

In the view of superintendents, Ohio’s collective bargaining system needs fundamental transformation. According to them, the political forces at work – that of school boards, statewide and national unions, and even themselves – mean they are at a perennial disadvantage during contract negotiations. Much as they may dislike state mandates, they favor new legislation to correct this problem.

Percent of district superintendents who:	%
Believe that the following are serious obstacles to improving public education:	
Local union chapters that can count on statewide or even national support during negotiations or litigation, while a district's leadership is on its own	84
School boards that are often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord	76
Agree with the following statements:	
I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio's school districts require state legislation	81
There have been labor issues where the leadership of my district—including myself—should have done more to hold the line	55

District superintendents feel handicapped by the collective bargaining process – so much so that virtually none want to leave it as is. About two-thirds (65 percent) say the collective bargaining process needs fundamental overhaul, and another 32 percent would press for some modification. Only two percent say it should be left alone.

“Please gut collective bargaining.... Have some ‘stones’ at the state level to mandate changes rather than forcing school districts to have to collectively bargain these changes.”

“If you want to be more efficient, minimize the constraints of collective bargaining. I want to treat my teachers fairly as most are hardworking people who care about kids; however, I can’t effectively manage my district as we have experienced 24 years of a gradual erosion of management rights since the passing of the collective bargaining law.”

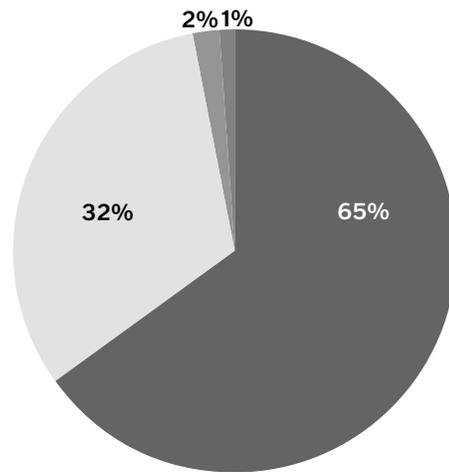
“Everything... goes back to the collective bargaining. I’d want more flexibility on the school day. We have buildings that sit two-thirds of the day empty. Attack the collective bargaining; it’s killing us.”

The vast majority of superintendents indicate that politics at the local level create a negotiating environment that leaves them at a fundamental disadvantage during collective bargaining. More than eight in ten (84 percent) believe that “while a district’s leadership is on its own” during negotiations, local union

chapters “can count on statewide or even national support.”

“Reduce the scope of collective bargaining in the state of Ohio. At every turn, the OEA has limited our ability to improve and/or operate schools more effectively and efficiently. Unions have such a stranglehold on

In your view does the collective bargaining process in Ohio’s school district need:



- Fundamental overhaul
- Some modification
- To be left as is
- Not sure

management rights creating a very difficult environment to impact change.”

In the privacy of a survey, superintendents say that school boards are part of the problem: 76 percent believe that boards are “often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord.” Here superintendents from suburban districts stand out, with 89 percent citing boards’ reluctance to stand firm (compared with 71 percent in urban and 73 percent in rural districts). When superintendents broached this topic during the focus groups, the more they talked, the more powerless they sounded.

In interviews conducted at the initial phase of the research (see Appendix A for a description of the research), some experts in the field blamed superintendents for failing to bargain forcefully enough. Interestingly, district superintendents themselves show unusual willingness to be self-critical: 55 percent agree that there have been labor issues where “the leadership of my district – including myself – should have done more to hold the line.” Suburban and rural superintendents (64 percent and 62 percent) are more likely to feel this way, their urban counterparts (46 percent) less likely.

Superintendents are notoriously resentful of state mandates, but the confluence of these forces – reluctant school boards, strong unions, and their own lapses – lead them to believe that solutions will require some new state laws. Fully eight in ten (81 percent) say “I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio’s school districts require state legislation.” Suburban superintendents (93 percent) are more likely to say this, urban (73 percent) and rural (79 percent) less so.

Is the future likely to bring change? Some of the experts that were interviewed for this research effort were doubtful that districts would ever “get tougher,” but superintendents think otherwise. Strengthen my hand, 92 percent of superintendents say, and my

school board is likely “to press for contract changes during future rounds of collective bargaining.”

FINDING FOUR

State laws governing staffing and pay are a big part of the problem and need to change. Among the most urgent changes district superintendents call for: repealing automatic step increases in teacher salaries; repealing the last-in, first-out approach to layoffs; and making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers, even if they are tenured.

State laws and licensure requirements create structural flaws in Ohio’s education system, according to superintendents, that conspire to severely constrain their authority to manage the workforces in their districts.

Fully 93 percent view state law that “permits district-labor negotiations over a variety of workforce issues that really should be off the table” as a serious obstacle to improving public education. Almost nine in ten (89 percent) say the same about state law “requiring that teacher pay be based upon longevity and university credits instead of demonstrated skill and performance.”

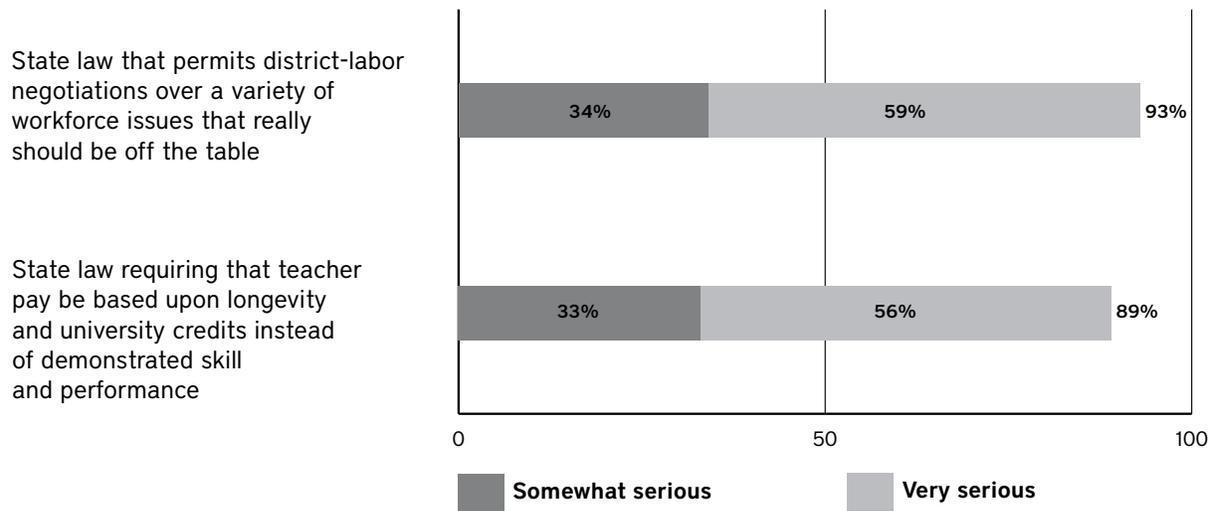
“Having the opportunity to execute a district’s plan without resistance from the union would go a long way in doing what is best for students. Being able to RIF teachers by ability as opposed to longevity would be a great step in that direction.”

“Ninety-five percent of my teachers are dynamite and deserve their salaries! I would like the discretion to eliminate the remaining five percent.”

“We tried to get 12 more minutes on the school day. We would’ve been able to save lots of money. You would’ve thought we were asking for their first-born.”

Superintendents also believe Ohio’s way of licensing teachers fails to assure good teaching. Just five percent

How serious an obstacle is each of the following when it comes to improving public education?



believe “that going through the licensure process in Ohio guarantees that a teacher is well-prepared to succeed in the classroom.” Instead, 55 percent say it is a guarantee only that a teacher will start with at least “a base-line of acceptable quality,” and another 39 percent dismiss it as little more than “procedural compliance.”

The survey gave superintendents an opportunity to prioritize what would be most important for them to change about state laws regulating staffing and pay by asking them two series of questions. In the first series, they were asked to rank five elements of the law according to what they’d most like to see repealed. Clearly, the most burdensome provision for them is the one that “mandates automatic step increases in teacher salaries” – fully 73 percent said this would be their first or second most important change. Slated second for repeal is the provision that “requires a last-in, first-out approach to layoffs” – fully 66 percent said this would be their first or second most important change.

“Freezing the pay of all public employees (that is, no automatic step increases) would greatly enable us to get through this budget crisis and would be a bold move on the governor’s/legislature’s part.”

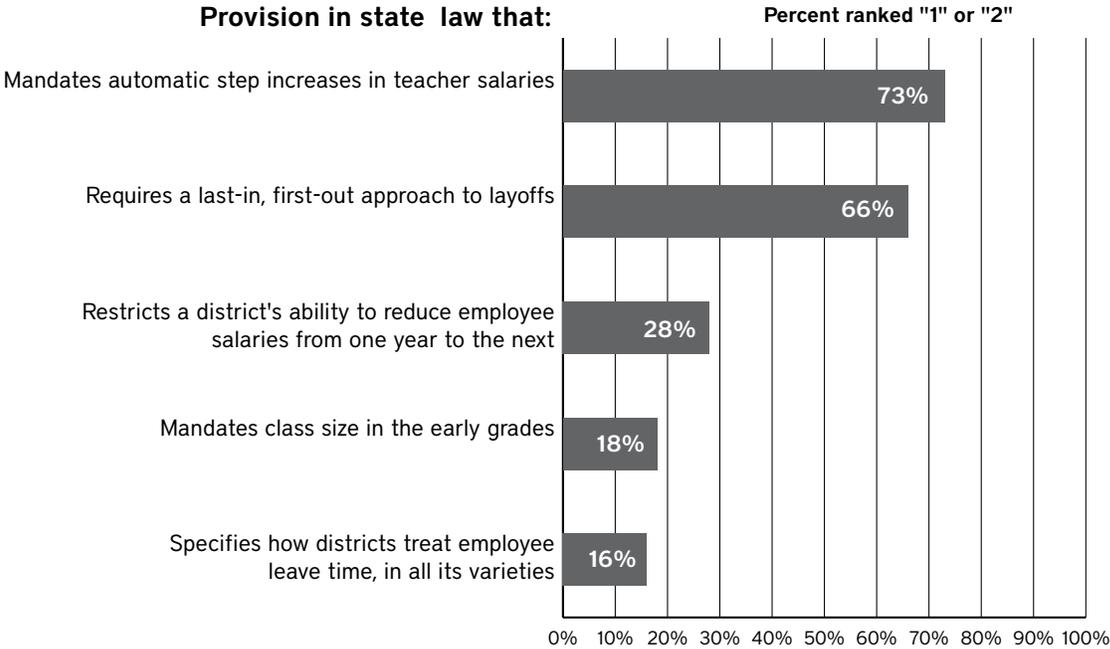
“Public schools in Ohio are following exactly in the footsteps of the auto industry – we are pricing ourselves out of business by automatic salary step increases and unrealistic health care costs on behalf of the employees.”

Superintendents in districts rated less effective by the Ohio Department of Education (i.e., ratings of Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency) are particularly maddened by the last-in, first-out approach to layoffs; 88 percent rate this item first or second to repeal. Those in suburban and rural districts, for their part, are mostly troubled by automatic step increases in teacher pay (79 percent and 75 percent, respectively).

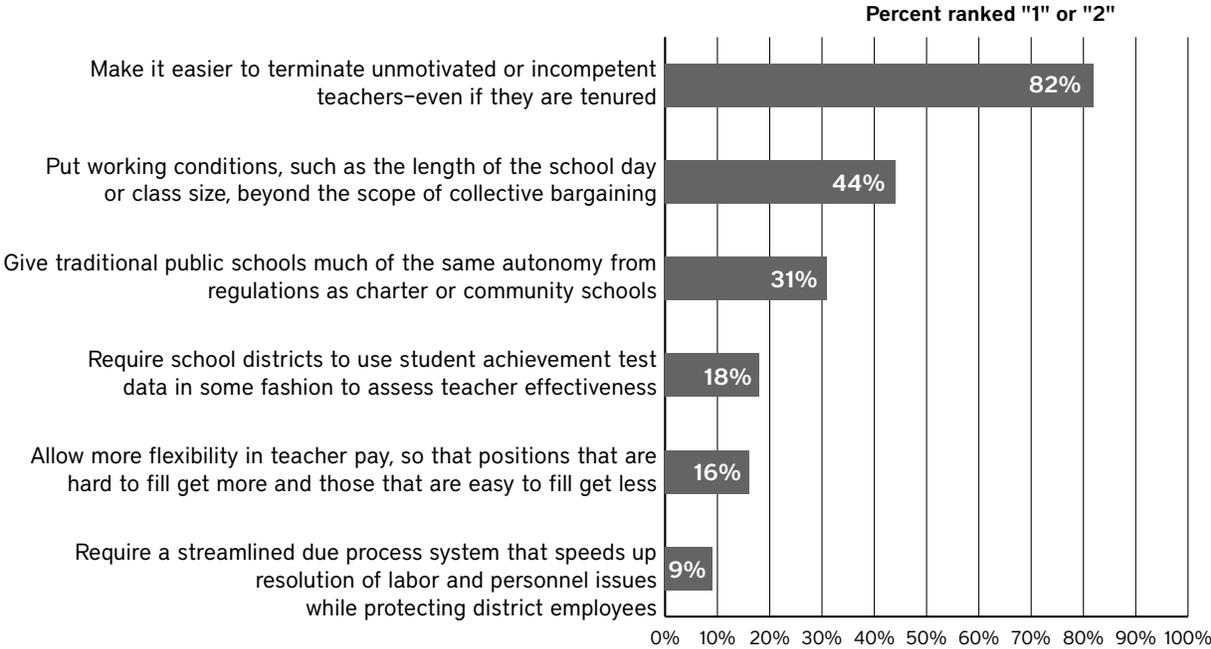
The three other suggestions for repeal don’t come close in importance – specifying how districts treat employee leave time (16 percent), mandating class size in the early grades (18 percent), or restricting a district’s ability to reduce employee salaries from one year to the next (28 percent).

In the second series of questions, the survey asked superintendents about six hypothetical changes to laws relating to school staffing and pay and asked

Suppose some provisions of state law related to school staffing and pay were going to be repealed. Which of the five provisions below do you think would be most and least important to eliminate? [Ranked on a scale of 1-highest to 5-lowest]



Suppose there was an effort to change Ohio’s laws relating to school staffing and pay. Which of these six changes do you think would be most and least important to make? [Ranked on a scale of 1-highest to 6-lowest]



them to rank these in order of importance. One clear priority emerges: 82 percent point to making it “easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured” as their first or second choice. Far fewer superintendents (almost half as many) selected other changes as the highest priority – for example, 44 percent would choose putting “working conditions, such as the length of the school day or class size, beyond the scope of collective bargaining.”

“In education, we all know who our bottom employees are. Lopping off the bottom four percent of employees would not only not hurt school districts, but some research indicates would actually improve districts.”

It is interesting to note the potential changes to state law that are least important to superintendents. Only nine percent rank requiring “a streamlined due process system that speeds up resolution of labor and personnel issues while protecting district employees” first or second in importance; just 16 percent rank allowing “more flexibility in teacher pay, so that positions that are hard to fill get more and those that are easy to fill get less;” and only 18 percent point to requiring “school districts to use student achievement test data in some fashion to assess teacher effectiveness.” About three in ten (31 percent) would opt for giving “traditional public schools much of the same autonomy from regulations as charter or community schools.”

The survey questions pushed superintendents further: In an era of shrinking budgets, would they be willing to give up an additional 15 percent of state funding in return for greater autonomy? Some – but not most – are willing to cross even this threshold. For example, 55 percent oppose a proposal to “greatly expand your district’s ability to hire, fire, and deploy instructional staff” in exchange for a 15 percent reduction in state funding, but three in ten (30 percent) favor it and another 15 percent are not sure. Trading 15 percent of state funding for greater control over working

conditions, such as class schedules and meetings is opposed by 61 percent; but one in four (25 percent) favor it and 15 percent are not sure. Trading state funding in order to expand “your district’s ability to differentially compensate teachers based on the needs of the district and assessment of teachers’ skills” is opposed by 64 percent, but approximately one in four (24 percent) favor doing so and 13 percent are not sure.

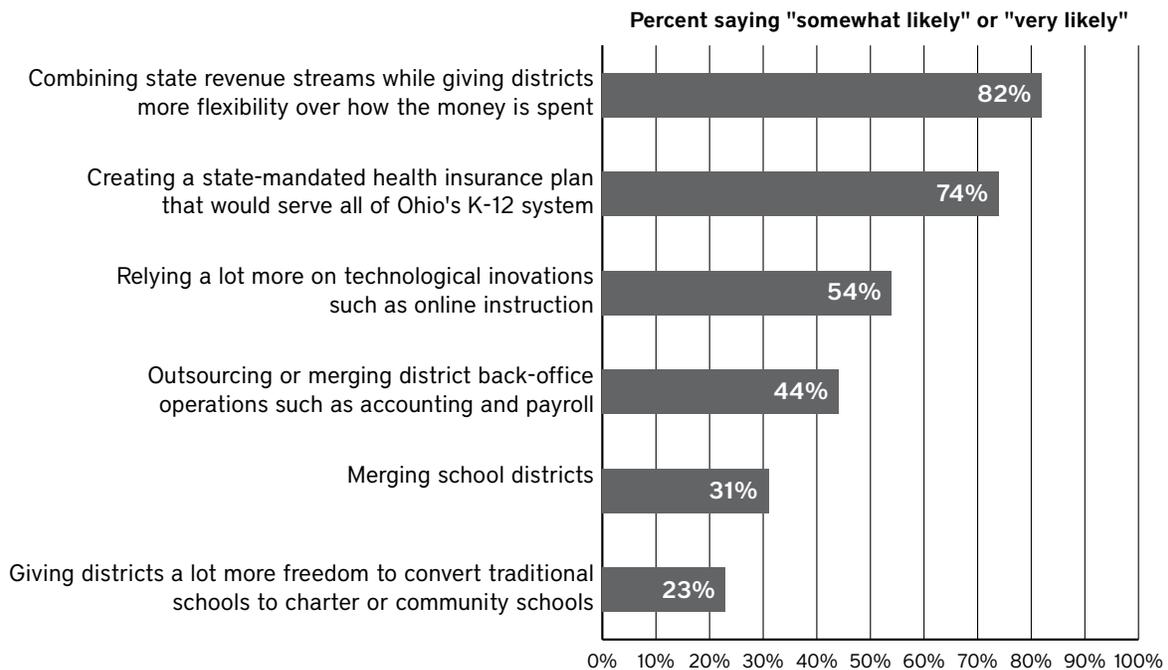
Superintendents from suburban districts are much more willing to trade some state funding for measures such as these. For example, they favor trading state money for expanding their ability “to hire, fire, and deploy instructional staff” by a 47 percent to 33 percent margin (in rural areas, by comparison, they are opposed 64 percent to 24 percent). The explanation, however, may itself involve money: Only 11 percent of suburban districts get more than half their operating budget from the state. In rural districts, 62 percent do so, and in urban districts, 48 percent do so.

FINDING FIVE

Ohio’s superintendents think two promising ways to save districts money are to give superintendents greater control over combined state revenue streams and to mandate a statewide health insurance plan for the K-12 system. On the other hand, merging actual districts and/or back-office operations are not viewed as particularly promising – least of all by the small or rural districts that some experts view as the likeliest candidates for such mergers.

More and more of Ohio’s school districts are expected to face a budgetary squeeze in the next two years; thus the survey included questions that asked superintendents for their take on how to save money at the local level. They strongly support two of six proposals. One is “combining state revenue streams while giving districts more flexibility over how the money is spent” – 82 percent think this is likely to save districts considerable money. The second proposal that a large majority endorses is “creating

If implemented, how likely is it that each of the following would bring substantial cost savings to school districts in Ohio?



a state-mandated health insurance plan that would serve all of Ohio’s K-12 system” – approximately three in four superintendents (74 percent) say this is likely to bring substantial cost savings.

Eagerness for state-mandated health insurance is particularly strong among superintendents in large districts (88 percent for those with enrollments of more than 2,500), less so in small ones (61 percent for those with 1,200 or less). This openness to statewide health insurance is one example of district superintendents – who are typically resistant to state mandates – seeking intervention from state government.

“Relying a lot more on technological innovations such as online instruction” is seen by 54 percent as likely to bring noticeable cost savings to school districts; 43 percent think it’s unlikely. Several of the experts interviewed in preparation for the survey viewed online instruction as particularly well-suited to small, rural school districts. But ironically, sub-

urban superintendents (73 percent) are the most hopeful about this measure and rural (46 percent) the least; urban superintendents are in between (57 percent). And while 75 percent of superintendents from large districts are bullish, just 43 percent of those in small districts are.

Although some may argue that districts can realize significant cost savings by combining operations to reduce administrative overhead, most superintendents disagree. For example, they don’t believe that merging school districts will be a budget saver. Only 31 percent says this is likely to bring substantial cost savings while 66 percent say it is not. For a proposal that may seem most promising for small or non-urban school districts, it is superintendents from precisely these districts that display the strongest doubts: 74 percent of superintendents from small districts (vs. 45 percent from large) say this proposal is unlikely to bring substantial cost savings, as are 75 percent of those from rural districts (vs. 52 percent from urban and 50 percent from suburban).

Merging only back-office operations – as opposed to merging whole districts – is deemed more promising by the overall sample, but only slightly. While 44 percent say this would likely bring significant savings to Ohio’s school districts, most (55 percent) say it would not. And again superintendents from rural districts (63 percent) are more likely to say the proposal won’t lead to significant budget savings, compared to 30 percent of suburban and 41 percent of urban superintendents who feel this way.

Of the six cost-cutting measures, the one found least promising by superintendents was the notion of giving districts a lot more freedom to convert traditional schools to charter or community schools. Only 23 percent say this is likely to lead to substantial cost savings, while 67 percent say it is unlikely to do so.

FINDING SIX

Local district superintendents in Ohio share many of the same points of view as other public school leaders, namely regional ESC superintendents and charter school leaders. But on several survey items, the groups significantly differ.

Ohio’s regional Educational Service Center (ESC) superintendents and charter school leaders serve under the same economic constraints as their local district counterparts. Whether leading just one building, a single district, or a regional service provider, each of these school leaders is under pressure to juggle the educational needs of their students, the human resource needs of their staffs, and the day-to-day needs of running their business – all in fiscally trying times. To what extent do district superintendents differ from their peers at the regional and school levels? To what extent do they share similar experiences and points of view?

ESC Superintendents

Eighty percent of the ESC superintendents in this sample served as district superintendents before moving to the regional position. As a result, one would expect those at the regional level to come at these

issues from a sympathetic and supportive perspective. And in many ways they do. But on several measures, there are notable differences.

Majorities of both groups indicate that state laws and collective bargaining rules impede students’ educational achievement and should change. They share similar priorities in that they would most like to eliminate automatic step increases in teacher salaries and that if they could change one thing in current state law it would be to make it easier to terminate low-performing teachers even if they have tenure. Most in both groups recognize, however, that there is a role for the state to play in solving some of Ohio’s K-12 education problems. And majorities of both believe that tying superintendents’ salaries to student test scores in exchange for more managerial authority would be a good thing.

But on several survey items, local superintendents and regional superintendents differ at a statistically significant level. Ohio’s ESC superintendents are even more likely than their local counterparts to think that the real problem facing public education today is misuse of resources rather than lack of funding. Virtually all ESC superintendents view school boards as at least somewhat of an obstacle to progress, compared with a smaller majority of district superintendents. Those at the regional level are stronger supporters of publicizing student test scores as a way to hold schools and districts accountable.

Finally, while large majorities of both groups say it’s unlikely that merging school districts would result in significant cost savings, ESC superintendents are almost twice as likely as local ones to think that outsourcing or merging back-office operations would do so. But they are less sanguine than their local counterparts on combining state revenue streams. Perhaps because ESC superintendents are privy to the goings-on in multiple districts, they have more information on which to base their decisions. Or perhaps because they are serving at the regional level theirs is a broader and thus more realistic perspective.

Local District Superintendents Versus Regional ESC Superintendents: Shared Perspectives

	Local District Superintendents (n=246)	Regional ESC Superintendents (n=25)
Change in Ohio's laws that would be most important:		
Make it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured	82	88
Agree with statement:		
I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio's school districts require state legislation	81	84
Favor proposal that would:		
Give district superintendents greater authority over managing staff but would also link superintendent pay to improvements in student achievement	78	72
Provision they would most like to see repealed:		
Mandate automatic step increases in teacher salaries	73	68

Local District Superintendents Versus Regional ESC Superintendents: Differing Points of View

	Local District Superintendents (n=246)	Regional ESC Superintendents (n=25)
It is a serious obstacle that:		
School boards are often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord	76	92
It is likely that these items would bring substantial cost savings to school districts in Ohio:		
Outsourcing or merging district back-office operations such as accounting and payroll	44	80
Combining state revenue streams while giving districts more flexibility over how the money is spent	82	60
The real problem in public education today is:		
Too little money is spent on the schools	37	12
How and where the money is spent	52	76
Publicizing student test results and holding schools and districts accountable is:		
Mostly good because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed	57	72
Mostly harmful because it puts students and educators under unfair pressure	30	12

Charter School Leaders

Because so much of this questionnaire focused on administrative constraints facing school leaders, many of the questions were inappropriate for charter school

leaders who, by definition, are free from such constraints. On only two substantive items did charter school leaders differ from district superintendents. Charter school leaders are more likely to think that

Local District Superintendents Versus Charter School Leaders

	Local District Superintendents (n=246)	Charter School Leaders (n=44)
The real problem in public education today is:		
Too little money is spent on the schools	37	18
How and where the money is spent	52	71
The real problem in <i>my own district/school</i> is:		
Too little money is spent on the schools	50	48
How and where the money is spent	39	32
More likely to lead to improvement in student achievement in your district/school:		
Significant increases in school funding	44	73
Significant expansion of management authority over staff	50	14
View financial hard times in my district/school as:		
Only leading to harmful cutbacks that would be better off avoided	62	68
A chance to make necessary changes that would be tough to make in ordinary times	33	27

the real problem in education today is how and where the money is spent – not that there’s too little money making its way into classrooms. Yet when asked to personalize this scenario – How about in your own school? – a plurality of charter school leaders points to too little money as the real problem. On this more personal level, they do not differ from district superintendents.

The two groups also think differently regarding the impact of increased school funding versus expanded management authority as the better way to lead to improved student achievement. It will come as no surprise that charter school leaders are far less likely than district superintendents to choose “significant

expansion of management authority over staff.” Since this is already part of their tool kit, it makes sense that most would instead choose “significant increases in school funding” as the better route to improved student achievement. Interestingly, charter school leaders and local superintendents are equally likely to view financial hard times as something to avoid rather than “a chance to make necessary changes that would be tough to make in ordinary times.”

The charter school leaders in this sample stand out demographically in that fully 82 percent are from urban school districts, compared to 19 percent of the district superintendents.

APPENDIX A: Methodology

For *Yearning to Break Free*, the universe of 610 K-12 local public school district superintendents in Ohio was invited to participate in an online survey; the findings in this report are based on 246 completed surveys. The quantitative findings are supplemented by additional interviews conducted with 25 regional superintendents from Educational Service Centers (ESCs) across the state, as well as 44 charter school leaders. The survey was conducted by the Farkas Duffett Research Group (FDR Group) for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. It was fielded between January 6 and January 30, 2011. The margin of error for the sample of 246 district superintendents is plus or minus seven percentage points; it is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. The survey was preceded by three focus groups with district and regional superintendents and 14 in-depth interviews with a variety of people knowledgeable about K-12 education in Ohio.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed and programmed for the Internet and contained approximately 45 items. All data collection took place online. Each superintendent and charter school leader was provided a confidential and unique survey link to ensure authenticity of the data and that each potential respondent could take the survey only once.

In crafting the survey instrument, it became evident that including views of other education leaders – specifically, regional ESC superintendents and people running charter schools – might provide interesting

perspectives. To that end, virtually all regional ESC superintendents and charter school leaders in Ohio were invited to participate in the online survey. The findings show few substantive differences.

Fielding the Survey

Multiple approaches were used to reach school leaders and to ensure the highest possible rate of participation. Several barriers to reaching potential respondents were encountered. Internet firewalls at some school districts blocked e-mails. Also, many of the e-mails reached their recipients' SPAM folders and remained there unopened. The sensitivity of the questions, the importance of confidentiality, and the local nature of the project all required a personal touch on the part of the researchers that is unusual in survey work in general but was essential for this particular survey to succeed.

It became clear early on that more than an e-mail campaign would be required to reach district superintendents in sufficient numbers. To that end, a systematic telephone calling campaign was implemented. Each district superintendent who had not completed the survey was contacted by phone, and provided with a description of why the survey was important and a request that they take part at their earliest convenience. In addition, a letter from the FDR Group describing the research was sent to all non-respondents in the hopes that receiving something in writing would lend credibility to the research effort and encourage more superintendents to participate.

Step-by-Step Accounting of the Fielding Process:

December 2010 - January 2011	Fordham conducts outreach to key lawmakers and regional ESC superintendents, and shares information about the survey at superintendent-attended events.
January 4	Executive Director of the Ohio ESC Association sends message via e-mail to all ESC superintendents alerting them to the survey and asking them to encourage their local district superintendents to participate.
January 6	FDR Group sends e-mail with survey link sent to all district superintendents, ESC superintendents, and charter school leaders (n=949).
January 10	FDR Group conducts in-depth telephone interviews with several ESC superintendents who completed the survey to gather information on how it is being perceived and how to make the appeal more effective.
January 11	Terry Ryan, Vice President for Ohio Programs and Policy of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, sends e-mail to all superintendents, ESC superintendents, and charter leaders, encouraging participation.
January 12	FDR Group sends follow-up e-mail with survey link to non-respondents (n=811).
January 18-26	Fordham staff reach out via telephone to district superintendents who had not yet responded, encouraging participation in an effort to improve response rate (n=449).
January 21	FDR Group sends letter via U.S. mail to district superintendents who had not yet responded in another effort to improve response rate (n=414).
January 6-30	FDR Group responds to approximately 95 requests for the survey link from superintendents replying to an e-mail, telephone call, or letter.

As a result of these efforts, approximately 95 district superintendents contacted the FDR Group directly to ask questions about the survey and/or to request that their unique survey link be re-sent so they could participate.

The comprehensive lists of district superintendents, regional ESC superintendents, and charter school leaders were provided by the sources listed below. Also shown below are the response rates for each group, which are calculated by dividing the number of completed interviews by the number of total records.

Type	Source	Total Records	Number of Completed Surveys	Response Rate
Local district superintendents	Ohio Department of Education's Ohio Educational Directory System Interactive, http://education.ohio.gov , accessed December 15, 2010.	610	246	40%
Regional ESC superintendents	Same as above.	55	25	45%
Charter school leaders	Same as above.	284	44	15%

Non-sampling sources of error could have an impact on survey results. To mitigate this, the survey instrument used in this study was pre-tested with superintendents to ensure that the language was accessible and appropriate. Also, questions were randomized and answer categories rotated in an effort to minimize non-sampling sources of error.

The FDR Group crafted the questionnaire, managed the online programming and fielding, and is solely responsible for the interpretation and analysis of survey findings contained within this report.

Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

Prior to the design of the survey, three focus groups were conducted, one each with: Dayton-area district superintendents, Columbus-area and southeastern Ohio district superintendents, and regional ESC superintendents.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gain firsthand understanding of what superintendents were think-

ing, to develop new hypotheses based on their input, and to design the survey items using language and terms these education professionals were comfortable with.

Quotes in the report are drawn either directly from the focus group discussions or from verbatim responses entered for open-end questions in the online survey. All of the focus groups were moderated by Steve Farkas of the FDR Group. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute recruited potential focus group participants through its relationships with school districts throughout the state.

In addition to the focus groups, 14 in-depth interviews, mostly via telephone but some in-person, were conducted with various individuals who are familiar with Ohio K-12 education, including district and ESC superintendents, a former state government official, and other experts in the field. The information gathered in these interviews was used to inform both the survey instrument and the fielding process.

APPENDIX B: Full Survey Data

OHIO SCHOOL LEADER SURVEY FINAL DATA (n=246)

Survey conducted online January 6-30, 2011

Margin of error is +/- 7 percentage points

Percentages don't always total to 100% due to rounding

1. Are you:

100 District superintendent

2. When it comes to doing things according to your own judgment of what is best for your district, which of these statements comes closest to your view?

- 42 I often feel like my hands are tied by the system (i.e., rules, policies, mandates)
- 34 I must often work around the system to get things done
- 18 The system helps me do the things I think are necessary
- 6 Not sure

3. If you had to choose between these two things, which do you think would be MORE likely to lead to improvement in student achievement in your district?

- 44 Significant increases in school funding
- 50 Significant expansion of management authority over staff
- 5 Not sure

4. Do you view financial hard times in your district as:

- 33 A chance to make necessary changes that would be tough to make in ordinary times
- 62 Only leading to harmful cutbacks that would be better off avoided
- 1 Not applicable – have not experienced or do not expect to experience financial hard times
- 5 Not sure

5. Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- 37 The real problem in public education today is that too little money is spent on the schools
- 52 The real problem in public education today is how and where the money is spent
- 11 Not sure

6. How about in your OWN district? Would you say that the real problem today is:

- 50 That too little money is spent
- 39 How and where the money is spent
- 11 Not sure

7. If you had to name the one or two items in your district's budget whose costs are rising at an alarming rate, what would they be?

[Open-end]

[Does not add to 100% due to multiple responses.]

- 85 Health insurance
- 33 Salaries and benefits
- 31 Special education
- 24 Facilities (transportation, fuel, utilities, maintenance)
- 8 Unfunded mandates (unspecified)
- 14 Other (technology, curriculum, workers' comp., purchased services, supplies)

8. If your district had to go through – or has already gone through – significant cost reductions, what are the top three ways you would – or did – cut spending?

[Open-end] [Does not add to 100% due to multiple responses.]

- 100 Staff (reduction in force, attrition; includes all staff)
- 24 Salary and benefits
- 24 Programs (educational, vocational, extra-curricular)
- 22 Materials, supplies, equipment, technology
- 15 Transportation (bus)
- 12 Health insurance

9. Imagine that you had no contractual or political constraints. Would your answer to the previous question be the same or different?

- 49 Same
- 42 Different
- 9 Not sure

11. Suppose you were given more managerial authority over staff in your district. Do you think this would only lead to better management of resources, or do you think that it would also lead to measurable improvement in student achievement?

- 14 Only lead to better management of resources
- 72 Also lead to measurable improvement in student achievement
- 9 Neither
- 5 Not sure

12. How much would you favor or oppose a proposal that would give district superintendents greater authority over managing staff but would also link superintendent pay to improvements in student achievement?

- 78 NET FAVOR
- 41 Strongly favor
- 37 Somewhat favor
- 13 NET OPPOSE
- 7 Somewhat oppose
- 6 Strongly oppose
- 9 Not sure

13. In Ohio, schools and districts are evaluated by how well students do on standardized tests, and the results are publicized. Schools that do very badly are identified, watched carefully, and must put an improvement plan into action. Do you think that using test scores this way:

- 30 Is mostly HARMFUL because it puts students and educators under unfair pressure
- 57 Is mostly GOOD because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed
- 13 Not sure

14. Would you say that going through the licensure process in Ohio guarantees that a teacher:

- 5 Is well-prepared to succeed in the classroom
- 55 At least starts with a base-line of acceptable quality
- 39 Has done little more than gone through procedural compliance
- 2 Not sure

15. In your view, does the collective bargaining process in Ohio's school districts need:

- 65 Fundamental overhaul
- 32 Some modification
- 2 To be left as is
- 1 Not sure

HOW SERIOUS AN OBSTACLE IS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING WHEN IT COMES TO IMPROVING PUBLIC EDUCATION?

16. School boards that are often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord

- 76 NET SERIOUS
- 33 Very serious
- 42 Somewhat serious
- 22 NET NOT SERIOUS
- 18 Not too serious
- 5 Not serious at all
- 2 Not sure

17. State law requiring that teacher pay be based upon longevity and university credits instead of demonstrated skill and performance

- 89 NET SERIOUS
- 56 Very serious
- 33 Somewhat serious
- 11 NET NOT SERIOUS
- 10 Not too serious
- 1 Not serious at all
- 0 Not sure

18. State law that permits district-labor negotiations over a variety of workforce issues that really should be off the table

- 93 NET SERIOUS
- 59 Very serious

- 34 Somewhat serious
- 6 NET NOT SERIOUS
- 5 Not too serious
- 1 Not serious at all
- 1 Not sure

19. Local union chapters that can count on statewide or even national support during negotiations or litigation, while a district's leadership is on its own

- 84 NET SERIOUS
- 52 Very serious
- 31 Somewhat serious
- 15 NET NOT SERIOUS
- 13 Not too serious
- 2 Not serious at all
- 1 Not sure

20. If state law were to strengthen management authority over staff, how likely would your school board be to press for contract changes during future rounds of collective bargaining?

- 92 NET LIKELY
- 61 Very likely
- 31 Somewhat likely
- 5 NET NOT LIKELY
- 4 Not too likely
- 1 Not likely at all
- 4 Not sure

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?

21. I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio’s school districts require state legislation

- 81 NET AGREE
- 33 Strongly agree
- 48 Somewhat agree
- 18 NET DISAGREE
- 10 Somewhat disagree
- 8 Strongly disagree
- 1 Not sure

22. There have been labor issues where the leadership of my district – including myself – should have done more to hold the line

- 55 NET AGREE
- 17 Strongly agree
- 39 Somewhat agree
- 41 NET DISAGREE
- 24 Somewhat disagree
- 17 Strongly disagree
- 4 Not sure

23. Suppose some provisions of state law related to school staffing and pay were going to be repealed. Which of the five provisions below do you think would be most and least important to eliminate? Rank them from 1 to 5, where 1 is the provision you would MOST like to see repealed and 5 is the provision that you would LEAST like to see repealed.

% Ranked “1” or “2”

Provision in state law that:

- 73 Mandates automatic step increases in teacher salaries
- 66 Requires a last-in, first-out approach to layoffs

- 28 Restricts a district’s ability to reduce employee salaries from one year to the next
- 18 Mandates class size in the early grades
- 16 Specifies how districts treat employee leave time, in all its varieties

24. Suppose there was an effort to change Ohio’s laws relating to school staffing and pay. Which of these six changes below do you think would be most and least important to make? Rank them from 1 to 6, where 1 is the change that is MOST important in your view and 6 is the change that is LEAST important to you.

% Ranked “1” or “2”

- 82 Make it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured
- 44 Put working conditions, such as the length of the school day or class size, beyond the scope of collective bargaining
- 31 Give traditional public schools much of the same autonomy from regulations as charter or community schools
- 18 Require school districts to use student achievement test data in some fashion to assess teacher effectiveness
- 16 Allow more flexibility in teacher pay, so that positions that are hard to fill get more and those that are easy to fill get less
- 9 Require a streamlined due process system that speeds up resolution of labor and personnel issues while protecting district employees

26. Approximately what percentage of your district’s operating budget is state funded?

- 12 1-25
- 36 26-50
- 39 51-75
- 8 76-100
- 0 Zero – district does not receive state funds
- 6 Not sure

27. Would you favor or oppose a proposal that would greatly expand your district’s ability to hire, fire, and deploy instructional staff – in exchange for a 15% reduction in state funding?

- 30 Favor
- 55 Oppose
- 15 Not sure

28. Would you favor or oppose a proposal that would greatly expand your district’s ability to differentially compensate teachers based on the needs of the district and assessment of teachers’ skills – in exchange for a 15% reduction in state funding?

- 24 Favor
- 64 Oppose
- 13 Not sure

29. Would you favor or oppose a proposal that would greatly expand your district’s ability to control working conditions like daily class schedules, staff meetings, and the physical conditions in classrooms and buildings – in exchange for a 15% reduction in state funding?

- 25 Favor
- 61 Oppose
- 15 Not sure

IF IMPLEMENTED, HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD BRING SUBSTANTIAL COST SAVINGS TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OHIO?

30. Relying a lot more on technological innovations such as online instruction

- 54 NET LIKELY
- 12 Very likely
- 42 Somewhat likely
- 43 NET UNLIKELY
- 33 Not too likely
- 9 Not likely at all
- 4 Not sure

31. Merging school districts

- 31 NET LIKELY
- 8 Very likely
- 23 Somewhat likely
- 66 NET UNLIKELY
- 26 Not too likely
- 40 Not likely at all
- 2 Not sure

32. Combining state revenue streams while giving districts more flexibility over how the money is spent

- 82 NET LIKELY
- 31 Very likely
- 50 Somewhat likely
- 13 NET UNLIKELY
- 11 Not too likely
- 2 Not likely at all
- 5 Not sure

33. Outsourcing or merging district back-office operations such as accounting and payroll

44 NET LIKELY
9 Very likely
34 Somewhat likely
55 NET UNLIKELY
38 Not too likely
17 Not likely at all
2 Not sure

34. Creating a state-mandated health insurance plan that would serve all of Ohio's K-12 system

74 NET LIKELY
46 Very likely
28 Somewhat likely
22 NET UNLIKELY
11 Not too likely
11 Not likely at all
4 Not sure

35. Giving districts a lot more freedom to convert traditional schools to charter or community schools

23 NET LIKELY
5 Very likely
18 Somewhat likely
67 NET UNLIKELY
30 Not too likely
37 Not likely at all
10 Not sure

36. For how many years have you been the superintendent of your current school district?

63 1-5
26 6-10
7 11-15

2 16-20
2 21 or more

37. And for how many years in total have you been a district superintendent?

49 1-5
26 6-10
13 11-15
5 16-20
7 21 or more

40. Location

19 Urban
19 Suburban
13 Small town
49 Rural

[Population statistics: 19% (urban); 18% (suburban); 13% (town); 50% (rural)]

41. Student Enrollment

31 1,200 or less
41 1,201-2,500
28 2,501 or more

[Population statistics: 31% (1,200 or less); 40% (1,201-2,500); 29% (2,501+)]

43. Percent Students Economically Disadvantaged

27 0-25%
50 26-50%
19 51-75%
3 76-100%
* Not sure

44. 2009-2010 Ohio Department of Education Rating

- 49 Excellent or Excellent with Distinction
- 40 Effective
- 11 Continuous Improvement / Academic Watch / Academic Emergency

[Population statistics: 47% (excellent or excellent with distinction); 42% (effective); 11% (combined: continuous improvement, academic watch, academic emergency)]

45. Are you:

- 83 Male
- 17 Female



**Thomas B. Fordham Institute
37 W. Broad Street, Suite 400
Columbus, Ohio 43215**

**Telephone: 614-223-1580
Fax: 614-223-1494**



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