Weighted Student Formula Yearbook

Cincinnati

by Katie Furtick & Lisa Snell
Cincinnati Public School District

**Program Name:** Student-Based Funding  
**Implementation:** 1999–2000  
**Program Type:** District-Wide Program  
**Legal Authorization:** School Board

**Overall Grade:** A–

### Category | Grade | Rank
--- | --- | ---
Overall Grade ** | A- | 3
Principal Autonomy | B | 4
School Empowerment Benchmarks | C | 12
2011 Proficiency Rates | C+ | 8
Proficiency Rate Improvement | A- | 2
Expected Proficiency vs. Actual | D | 13
Expected Proficiency Improvement | B+ | 4
2011 Graduation Rates | B | 4
2011 Achievement Gaps | C+ | 8
Achievement Gap Improvement | B+ | 4

**Achievement Gap Closures:**
- **Internal District** | B+ | 3
- **Internal District vs. Internal State** | B+ | 4
- **External Achievement Gaps** | B+ | 4


**Overall grades and ranks may not equal the average of individual grades and ranks because categories are weighted differently to reflect their importance.**

### Demographics
- **African-American** 65%
- **White** 25%
- **Asian** 1%
- **Hispanic** 3%
- **Other** 6%

**Low-Income Students**
- 73%
- **Non-ELL/Non-Low-Income** 27%

**English Language Learners**
- 96%

Source: Ohio DOE, 2012 District Profile Report

### School Empowerment Benchmarks
- **Money directly to schools**
  - 45.2%

**2013–2014 Principal Autonomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark</th>
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<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School budgets based on students not staffing</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge schools actual versus average salaries</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School choice and open enrollment policies</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal autonomy over budgets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal autonomy over hiring</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal training and school capacity building</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published transparent school-level budgets</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Published transparent school-level outcomes</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicit accountability goals</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective bargaining relief, flat contracts, etc.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CPS Met 7 out of 10 School Empowerment Benchmarks

Source: CPS 2013–2014 Operating Budget
1. Overview of Cincinnati’s Weighted Student Formula Program

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) serves about 42,000 students in preschool through 12th grade.¹ Student demographics in the Cincinnati public schools include 65 percent African-American, 25 percent White, three percent Hispanic, one percent Asian, and six percent other.² In Cincinnati 73 percent of students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program and 4 percent are English language learners.³

Cincinnati Public Schools is among only a few school districts nationwide to pioneer the use of student-based budgeting. After three years of discussion and development, student-based budgeting—a new way of distributing resources—took effect in the 1999–2000 school year.⁴

Unlike the previous centrally controlled allocation system that resulted in wide swings in funding levels from school to school, dollars follow the student under student-based budgeting. A key premise of student-based budgeting is that all students with the same level of need receive the same level of funding within school categories. Money to schools follows the students—meaning a school’s budget is tied to its enrollment in each student category—and schools determine how allotted money is spent.

The bottom line is greater equity for students and schools. By equalizing the per-pupil funding amounts within major student categories, the district took an important step toward closing the equity gap that existed among schools.

Besides being a fairer system of funding schools, student-based budgeting is designed to motivate schools to keep current students and attract additional ones. The district measures enrollment three times a year, with budgets adjusted for decreases as well as increases in enrollment, accordingly. Student-based budgeting ties a school's funding to its enrollment.

In the 2014 fiscal year, Cincinnati is moving away from a decentralized student-based budget and reinstating a budget based on a more centralized staffing model. Cincinnati has shifted the district’s focus to a Community Learning Center (CLC) school model, in place in 34 of 55 schools in the system. CLCs offer health services, counseling, after-school programs, nutrition classes, parent and family engagement programs, early childhood education, career and college access services, youth development activities, mentoring and arts programming.⁵

2. How Does Cincinnati’s Student-Based Budgeting Process Work?

The bulk of each school's funding is allocated on a per-student basis. These funds are used to pay for essential personnel for classrooms and educational support, and for administrative, clerical and maintenance positions as well as routine instructional and administrative goods and services. Students at different grade
levels are given different weights. Some groups of students—such as gifted, limited English proficiency, low income and vocational, and students with disabilities—receive higher weights reflecting higher educational costs.

The base weight for K-12 students is 1.0 with K-3 students and grades 9–12 getting an additional 0.2 weight. The chart below shows CPS’s student funding formula base weight and additional weights for specified student groups.

Table 1: Cincinnati Public School's Student-Based Funding Formula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Base Allocation</th>
<th>K – 3rd</th>
<th>9th – 12th</th>
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<td>Base Amount</td>
<td>$4,873</td>
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<td>$975</td>
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<td>Visual $4,873</td>
<td>Physical $13,498</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
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<td>1.7695</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>0.4645</td>
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<td>Other Health $10,818</td>
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<td>2.22</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Autistic, TBI, DB*** $17,981</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$1,413</td>
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</table>

Source: Education Resource Strategies, Fair Student Funding Summit District Summaries. * Preschool students with disabilities also receive funding with a 1.0 weight. ** Also students with cognitive disabilities. ***Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Deaf-Blind (DB)

3. How Much Autonomy Do Cincinnati Public Schools Enjoy?

There are two ways to view school-level autonomy. First, autonomy at the school site can be evaluated by budget discretion—what proportion of funds is sent to the schools versus retained at the district level? Second, one can evaluate by planning discretion—how much control over staffing and programmatic offerings do principals have?

The letter grade given to school districts in the Weighted Student Formula Yearbook indicating the level of autonomy over school budgets is based on the percentage of yearly operating funds that are allocated to
the school level. The higher the percentage of operating funds allocated to the school level, the greater budget autonomy the principal enjoys.8

Cincinnati Public Schools receives 45.2 percent of funds through student-based budgeting allocations. This is a large percentage of budget autonomy relative to other school districts highlighted in the Weighted Student Formula Yearbook, giving CPS a “B” in principal autonomy.

Although CPS principals have a relatively large amount of autonomy over their school’s budgets, they do not enjoy the same discretion over staffing and hiring practices. Cincinnati Public Schools adheres to a union contract that stipulates hiring regulations, including placing teachers in positions based on tenure.

4. How Does CPS Support Principals?

Cincinnati Public Schools contracts out school leadership development through the Mayerson Academy, which provides the district training for teachers, principals and the school site councils.9 The Mayerson Academy organizes professional development based on the Ohio standards for principals, including:

- Standard 1: Continuous Improvement
- Standard 2: Instruction
- Standard 3: School Operations, Resources and Learning Environment
- Standard 4: Collaboration
- Standard 5: Parents and Community Engagement

5. The Site-Based Management of Cincinnati Public Schools

Each school has a Local School Decision Making Committee (LSDMC) that is responsible for offering suggestions on the school's budget, helping to set school goals and sometimes selecting a new principal. The Board of Education has adopted a policy outlining the function of LSDMCs. The LSDMC’s role includes:

- Adopting bylaws, including the school's mission and vision;
- Setting measurable school goals, based on a needs assessment;
- Developing a broad plan (OnePlan) to implement those goals;
- Completing mid-year and end-of-year goal progress reports;
- Making recommendations and approving the school's budget;
- Participating in the selection of the principal, when a vacancy exists;
- Approving locally initiated changes in the school's program or focus;
• Making recommendations to the principal regarding other school issues, and
• Seeking grants to support the school's programs (optional).

Membership is comprised of four major constituencies, with a minimum of 12 members. The groups include:
• Three parents
• Three community members
• Three teachers
• Three non-teaching staff, including the principal

At least one annual meeting is required to review the purpose of the LSDMC and the OnePlan. However, it is recommended that the LSDMC meet monthly during the school year. All meetings are held at the school and are open to the public.

6. The School Choice Component of Cincinnati’s Weighted Student Formula Program

Students are assigned to neighborhood elementary schools according to residential addresses. The district determines the boundaries for each neighborhood school. Elementary students may also choose between 19 magnet elementary schools offering programs such as the arts, foreign language and Montessori education. Magnet programs attract students throughout the district who are interested in specific areas such as foreign language or the arts, or a teaching style such as Montessori. Magnet programs are offered either to students living anywhere in the district (citywide) or to students living in a specific area (quadrant).

There are no school assignments based on address at the high school level. Instead, students select from 16 high-school programs with special focuses leading students into careers and higher education. The public schools host school fairs and open houses to allow students to learn about their elementary and high school choices.

7. Initiatives to Increase School-Level Accountability in Cincinnati

The main mechanism for accountability is school-level transparency. The district offers parents a financial and academic report of every school in the district through an online “Dashboard” that displays various district performance indicators. Also, all parents have access to an online program called PowerSchool that offers all parents in the district real-time access to their student’s progress, including
assignments and grades. Each classroom maintains a computer with PowerSchool to allow parents access at the school level.

In addition, every school in the district must complete a school accountability plan called “OnePlan” that is a comprehensive operational plan for attaining school and district goals.

Finally, in order to target struggling schools, in 2009 Cincinnati began a new initiative whereby schools are grouped according to performance, with a progression of services provided according to need. High-performing schools receive coaching only by request, improving schools receive part-time coaching, and schools in need of academic intervention receive intensive, prescriptive coaching. The district created three Turnaround Teams, each consisting of a principal and two lead teachers, to work with the district’s 16 lowest-performing elementary schools.

8. Performance Outcomes in Cincinnati Public Schools

Cincinnati public schools continue to make gains in student achievement. The state of Ohio uses the Performance Index (PI) to provide an overall indication of how well students perform on its standardized tests each year.

The PI scores are based upon how well each student does on all tested subjects in grades three through eight and 10. Schools and districts earn anywhere from 1.2 points for each student scoring at the advanced level to zero points for each untested student. The Performance Index ranges between 0 and 120, with 100 as the statewide goal for all students.

CPS raised the Performance Index score of overall gains in all tests in all subjects from 80.6 in 2009 to 83.1 in 2010. PI scores have continued to rise over the years, reaching a record high of 88.5 by the 2011–2012 school year.\textsuperscript{11}

While compiling this Weighted Student Formula Yearbook, Reason Foundation conducted an analysis to determine how the school districts that have adopted a Weighted Student Formula are performing relative to other districts in their state, and relative to each other.
Reason’s analysis grades 10 performance metrics. Scores are determined by comparing the school district in question—in this case Cincinnati—with other school districts in the same state (Ohio, in this instance), and sorting them into a decile ranking. Based on the school district’s decile rank within its own state, the analysis then compares it with the other districts studied in this *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*. Finally, the analysis assigns the studied school districts a grade based on how they measure up against one another. This analysis also grades and ranks studied school districts on two other measures: the number of school empowerment benchmarks the district has reached, and the degree of autonomy principals have over school budgets. In determining the grades on these two measures, districts are compared only with the other districts covered in this *Yearbook*. A detailed explanation of the methodology used to determine performance metrics and grading can be found in the methodology chapter of the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*.

Student proficiency rates, as determined by standardized state tests and student enrollment data, were used to calculate the following:

- 2011 proficiency rates;
- Improvement (average change) in proficiency rates from 2008 to 2011;
- Expected versus actual proficiency rates;
- Improvement in expected proficiency from 2008 to 2011;
- Achievement gap, and
- Each of three achievement gap closure metrics.

CPS proficiency rate data were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education Power User Reports. Elementary and middle school student proficiency rates in reading, mathematics and science are derived from Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) results. Cincinnati high school students are tested for proficiency in English/Language Arts, mathematics and science. For purposes of comparison, these specific subjects are categorized as reading, mathematics and science, respectively. High school students’ proficiency rates are derived from Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) results.

This analysis discusses student achievement including 2012 proficiency rates, but 2012 data were not included because in many school districts the data were not yet available at the time of analysis. Therefore, 2012 student achievement is mentioned, but not compared relative to other school districts in Ohio and in the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*.

Graduation rates were collected from Data.gov based on adjusted cohort graduation rates at the school level for school year 2010–11 (most recent data available). Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates are calculated by state education agencies in accordance with U.S. Department of Education regulations on
ESEA, Title I, published in 2008. Adjusted cohort graduation rates are reported for each school as a whole and for key sub-groups of students.

The grade given for school empowerment benchmarks is based on 10 benchmarks determined to be best practices within existing weighted student formula programs, and recommendations of other studies on student-based budgeting.

The following sections expand upon each graded category by highlighting areas in which CPS performed exceptionally well relative to other districts in Ohio, and to other districts in the Weighted Student Formula Yearbook. This analysis also discuss areas in which Cincinnati has fallen behind or could use improvement.

**Student Achievement**

**Cincinnati Public Schools is quickly improving proficiency rates in reading and mathematics relative to other Ohio school districts.** CPS students had low 2011 proficiency rates across most school subjects and grade levels compared to most other Ohio school districts. However, CPS proficiency rates have been quickly improving over time.

Across the board, CPS elementary, middle and high school proficiency rates in mathematics, reading and science have been the fastest increasing of most Ohio school districts, as shown in Figure 2. CPS is among the top:

- 30 percent of fastest improving Ohio school districts for high school mathematics and reading proficiency;
- 20 percent of fastest improving Ohio school districts for high school science and middle and elementary school mathematics proficiency and;
- 10 percent of fastest improving Ohio school districts for elementary and middle school reading proficiency.

Reading proficiency rates among African-American and low-income high school students have increased each year since 2008, bringing proficiency rates among these groups of students up to speed with the rest of the state. In 2011 both sub-groups of students were among the middle 50 percent of Ohio school districts in reading proficiency.
Figure 3 shows CPS African-American and low-income high school students’ proficiency rates in reading over time compared to the “rest of state” average. Proficiency rates have not only improved, but they have surpassed the state average.¹⁴

Predicted or expected proficiency rates are calculated relative to all other school districts in Ohio, controlling for the percentage of low-income students at each grade level. Generally, a large, low-income student body is an indicator of low performance. By controlling for, or taking into account, the percentage of low-income students in each grade level across school districts this analysis could more effectively determine how well a given school district should be performing relative to others in its state.

If the predicted proficiency rate is higher than the actual proficiency rate, then a school district is underperforming. In other words, the school district is not reaching its potential achievement level. If a school
district’s actual proficiency is above its predicted proficiency, the district is over-performing what is expected, given the low-income student population.

CPS elementary and middle school students had below-expected proficiency rates in 2011. Elementary school students’ predicted proficiency rates were among the bottom 10 percent of Ohio school districts. Also, middle school students’ proficiency rates were below expected, placing the district in the bottom 10 to 20 percent of Ohio school districts on this measure. High school students performed worse than expected in mathematics and science. However, their 2011 reading proficiency was above expected and continues to improve.

Cincinnati Public Schools high school students are among those in the top 20 percent of Ohio school districts for increase in expected proficiency. This means that, given the percentage of low-income high school students in the district, CPS made sizable gains in mathematics, reading and science proficiency rates from 2008 to 2011 relative to other Ohio school districts, so much so that high school students performed above expected 2011 reading proficiency rates. Figure 4 shows high school students’ proficiency rates in English, mathematics and science, with the corresponding dotted line showing expected proficiency rates.

CPS 2011 graduation rates among Hispanic students are among the top 30 percent of all Ohio school districts. African-American students’ graduation rates fell in the middle of all school districts, and graduation rates among low-income students fell in the bottom 40 percent. The aggregate district population 2011 four-year cohort graduation rates were among the bottom 20 percent of all Ohio school districts. Even though CPS was low-performing overall, the district has increased its graduation rate since 2010.
According to CPS 2012–2013 report card, the district increased its overall four-year cohort graduation rate by nearly six percentage points from 2010 to 2012.

**Achievement Gaps**

The following three achievement gaps are measured across all grade levels (elementary, middle and high school) and school subjects (reading, mathematics and science):

- African-American versus White student proficiency;
- Hispanic versus White student proficiency, and
- Low-income versus non-low-income student proficiency.

Internal district achievement gaps (IDG) reflect proficiency gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged student groups within a given district. Because internal district achievement gaps are measured for each district in the state, this analysis ranks relative size of achievement gaps across districts in the state, and how quickly those achievement gaps are closing from 2008 to 2011. An achievement gap is considered to be closing if the disadvantaged student group proficiency rate is increasing faster than the advantaged student group proficiency rate.

**CPS is among the top Ohio school districts with the fastest closing achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income elementary school students.** CPS has large relative achievement gaps among this student population, but more importantly, these gaps are quickly closing.

**Figure 6: Achievement Gap Closure, Elementary School Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement in Achievement Gaps</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Achievement Gap Closures:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal District</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal District vs. Internal State</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Achievement Gaps</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ohio Department of Education Power User Reports
CPS is also among the fastest Ohio school districts in closing achievement gaps in mathematics and reading proficiency between African-American and White elementary and middle school students.

In addition to internal district achievement gaps (IDG) discussed above, this analysis also measures internal district versus internal state (ID vs. IS) achievement gaps and external district achievement gaps (EDG).

Table 2: All Achievement Gap Closures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Gap</th>
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<th>Subject</th>
<th>IDG</th>
<th>ID vs. IS</th>
<th>EDG</th>
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<td>Hispanic vs. White</td>
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<td>t</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income vs. Non-low-income</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Total Gaps Closing out of Total Available: 15/18  6/18  11/18

† Data were suppressed due to unreliability or group represented less than 5 percent of test-takers at that grade level.
Internal district achievement gaps (IDG) compare student groups within the district. Internal district versus internal state (ID vs. IS) achievement gaps reflect the district’s achievement gap versus the average achievement gap of every other district in Ohio (excluding CPS). If a given Cincinnati Public Schools achievement gap is closing faster than that of the rest of the state, the ID vs. IS gap is considered to be closing. Finally, external achievement gaps (EDG) show the difference between the district’s disadvantaged student group proficiency rate and the advantaged student group average proficiency rate of all other districts in the state. External achievement gaps are considered to be closing if the district disadvantaged group proficiency rate is increasing faster than the state advantaged group. Table 2 shows which achievement gaps CPS is closing, and which achievement gaps are not closing, given the available data.

CPS is closing the majority of internal achievement gaps. This means that disadvantaged student groups are improving proficiency rates more quickly than advantaged students. Compared to other Ohio school districts, CPS African-American and low-income middle school students are underachieving in increasing their proficiency rates relative to White and non-low-income students. That is, other Ohio school districts are more quickly strengthening proficiency among African-American and low-income middle school students than Cincinnati Public School students.

**Areas for Improvement**

**Cincinnati Public Schools had low 2011 proficiency rates relative to other Ohio school districts.** Although CPS proficiency rates are lower than average, the district is making sizable gains in proficiency rates each year, across the board. For this reason, the fact that proficiency rates are low is less important than the fact that they are rapidly increasing. With continued improvement CPS can expect to reach and even surpass other Ohio school districts’ proficiency rates.

**Even though proficiency rates are increasing, CPS elementary school students are consistently performing below expected, given the percentage of low-income students in the school district.** A higher percentage of low-income students in a given school district has a negative correlation with proficiency rates. This means that the higher the percentage of low-income students in a school district, the lower proficiency rates generally are. Controlling for the percentage of low-income students in each school district in Ohio allows for predicting what the proficiency rate *should* be.
Figure 7 below shows the gap between actual proficiency rates among elementary school students and predicted proficiency rates.

**Figure 7: Expected Proficiency Rates vs. Real Proficiency Rates among Elementary School Students**

Source: Ohio Department of Education Power User Reports

**School Empowerment Benchmarks**

Cincinnati Public Schools reached seven out of 10 WSF benchmarks, giving the district a “C” letter grade. CPS has not reached the following benchmarks:

- District charges actual rather than average teacher salaries;
- Principal autonomy over hiring and;
- Achieving some collective bargaining relief.

If CPS were able to reach these benchmarks, teachers would have more accountability for their performance. Also, by charging teachers actual versus average salaries, a larger percentage of school budgets could be directed to specific student needs.
9. Lessons Learned in Cincinnati

1. CPS demonstrates that districts can use technology to provide parents with online access to student information including grades, assignments, attendance and behavior.

2. CPS provides a good example of a system to provide schools with differentiated levels of support based on school performance. Higher performing schools need minimal support while lower-performing schools need more intense support and intervention.

3. CPS demonstrates that transparency for a variety of school- and district-level indicators is one of the most useful kinds of accountability. The bottom line is that parents need to access information easily about the performance level of district schools.

Resources


Contact Information

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Endnotes

1 Based on district total average daily membership in FY 2012.


3 Ibid.


8 The methodology used for determining principal autonomy is explained in detail in section 2 of the methodology chapter of the Weighted Student Formula Yearbook.

9 For more information see: http://www.mayersonacademy.org/Framework/frameworklead.htm


12 http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/Power_Users.asp.


14 Rest of state average is calculated excluding Cincinnati Public Schools.