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## **Ohio's Urban School Districts Reduce Graduation Gap, Outpace State Gains on Achievement Tests**

**November 5, 2007, Columbus, Ohio** – Ohio's eight big-city school districts have made dramatic gains in their graduation rates and cut in half the "graduation gap" that exists between urban districts and the state as a whole, according to the Ohio 8 coalition, an alliance of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown.

The coalition reported that four of the big-city districts – Canton, Cincinnati, Dayton and Toledo – have improved overall graduation rates by greater than 20 percentage points since the 1999-2000 school year. The average gap between the eight urban districts and the state as a whole narrowed to 11.3 percentage points from 23.9 percentage points six years ago. One district – Toledo Public Schools – has a graduation rate of 90.5 percent, which exceeds the statewide average of 86.1 percent.

The coalition compared graduation rates at the end of the 1999-2000 school year with those of 2005-2006, as compiled by the Ohio Department of Education. ODE reports graduation data on a one-year lag basis in order to reflect summer graduates. The 2005-2006 data were reported on the 2006-2007 Local Report Cards issued by ODE.

African-American students are more likely to be successful and graduate from one of the large urban districts than are African-American students in the remainder of the state. Seven of the eight large districts posted graduation rates for African-American students that exceeded the 69 percent graduation rate for African-American students statewide. During the past six years, the graduation rate for African-American students in the Ohio 8 districts has increased by an average of nearly 18 percentage points, compared with the state's gain of 12 points.

Similarly, graduation rates for Hispanic students in Cleveland, Toledo and Youngstown, which have the highest percentages of Hispanic students, have increased by 19 percentage points or more, compared with statewide increases of 12 percentage points for Hispanic students.

"Improvement in graduation rates is concrete, verifiable evidence that the work of urban educators is paying off. Greater percentages of students in Ohio's big-city school districts are staying in

school and graduating on time with the skills they need to be successful in college, the workforce and as citizens,” noted William Wendling, executive director of the Ohio 8.

“Higher high school graduation rates will enhance the competitiveness of Ohio’s central cities and improve the quality of life within those cities,” Wendling said.

He said the improved graduation rates are the result of a number of strategies employed by the urban districts. These include building a culture of high expectations, stronger one-to-one relationships between teachers and students, more time on task, stronger curriculum and instruction, better alignment between middle grades and high schools, work-based learning opportunities, and greater collaboration among teachers, building administrators, parents and community members.

### **Improvements on Achievement Tests**

In addition to narrowing the graduation gap, the Ohio 8 districts reported for the fourth year in a row that their students are making bigger gains on the state achievement tests than the state as a whole.

In progress measured through Ohio’s Performance Index – a calculation that measures test performance on all state indicator tests – the Ohio 8 districts averaged a gain of 19.2 percentage points since ODE began the calculations for the 2000-2001 school year. Each one of the Ohio 8 districts exceeded the statewide average gain of 13.4 percentage points, led by Cincinnati and Toledo, which improved their performance index by 27.5 points and 20.7 points, respectively.

Several of the Ohio 8 districts have shown steady progress on the state report card ratings, which look at test results, graduation rates and attendance. Five districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus – achieved ratings of Continuous Improvement on the latest state report cards, and both Cleveland and Columbus met the targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP).

The coalition tracked the reading and math scores for fourth and sixth graders from the 1999-2000 school year to the 2006-07 school year, as reported on Ohio’s local report cards. During that time, students in the eight big-city school districts scored significant improvements:

- **In fourth-grade reading scores**, seven of the eight districts posted gains higher than the statewide gain. Akron, Toledo and Youngstown all posted gains of greater than 30 percentage points. The statewide average gain was 21.8 points.
- **In fourth-grade math**, five of the eight districts achieved higher test score increases than the statewide gain. Youngstown gained 45 points, and Akron, Cincinnati and Columbus gained more than 34 points. The statewide average gain was 27 points.
- **In sixth-grade reading**, six of the eight districts posted gains higher than the state as a whole. For instance, Cleveland posted a gain of 36.5 percentage points; Cincinnati was up 30.3 points and Akron gained 30 points. The statewide gain was 24.5 percentage points.

#### **The Ohio 8 Coalition**

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- **In sixth-grade math**, six of the urban districts surpassed the state gain of 19.6 percentage points. Cleveland’s gain was 37.3 points, and Canton gained nearly 30 points.

“The data clearly demonstrate that students in Ohio’s urban districts have made a lot of progress over the past six years,” said William Wendling, executive director of The Ohio 8 Coalition. “We share these results not to declare the race is won but to demonstrate that high-poverty students in Ohio’s big cities are making very significant progress.

“Certainly, these districts have a way to go in terms of meeting all of the state standards. But, it’s important not to lose sight of the fact that the hard work of students, teachers, parents and administrators is clearly paying off for Ohio’s urban students,” Wendling said.

The Ohio 8 Coalition was established in 2001 as a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teachers’ union presidents from Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Coalition represents some 230,000 students. It is co-chaired by Dr. Sylvester Small, superintendent of Akron Public Schools, and Rhonda Johnson, president of the Columbus Education Association.

The Ohio 8 coalition is supported by the Cleveland, George Gund, Joyce, KnowledgeWorks and Martha Holden Jennings Foundations. For more information about the Ohio 8 coalition, go to [www.ohio8.org](http://www.ohio8.org).

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