Excellence Acceleration Plan

The Cincinnati Excellence Acceleration Plan
Executive Summary

Cincinnati Public Schools is at a crossroads. Over the past few years, we have raised student performance to its highest level since the State began accountability testing more than a decade ago. We have turned around more than a dozen low-performing schools, closing five and completely redesigning four of them, significantly improving results. We have advanced teacher quality and become an early adopter of the new Teacher Evaluation System legislation enacted by the state.

We have reached agreements with high-performing charter schools including the SEED residential school and Carpe Diem. We are implementing the New Tech model as part of our commitment to incorporate technology and project-based learning in an efficient delivery system that personalizes learning. We have received national news coverage of our private-public partnerships, including our Community Learning Centers, which offer extended academic, enrichment and other services beyond the traditional school day.

We are committed to offering families expanded school choices through the Portfolio of Schools approach, and we have invested in preschool to help build early literacy skills that are vital to success in school, college and careers.

But, there is urgency to do more.

If we are to reach the levels of excellent performance that our students deserve, the new Common Core standards require, and a globally competitive economy demand, we must deepen and expand innovative strategies to systemically raise student performance to high levels. We must move, as our partners in the business community might put it, from the startup mode to growth and expansion.

This executive summary describes our research-based strategies for acceleration. We are seeking $29 million from the State to support them.

We believe that State investment in this plan is warranted because Cincinnati is in the best position among all of Ohio’s urban school districts to systemically expand best-practice strategies and accelerate excellence. Thus, Cincinnati is strategically well placed to develop a replicable model for other districts. This amount also is beyond the means of local taxpayers, who already shoulder the majority of costs for public schools in Cincinnati, despite our city having the third highest amount of residents living in pockets of persistent poverty in the nation.
The four major components of the Cincinnati Excellence Acceleration Plan include:

• **Academics and Accountability**
  Cincinnati student performance has steadily improved over the last decade. Today, our students outperform all of their urban counterparts on the state accountability assessments. This solid growth in student performance can be attributed to solid academic and accountability programs that can be taken to scale; such as our strategic efforts to extend the school year, the addition of 40 preschool early learning opportunities, and the intentional approach to delivering wrap-around supports to our students through the creation of our public-private partnerships, including our Community Learning Centers, which offer extended academic, enrichment and other services beyond the traditional school day.
  — High quality preschool programs – early learning opportunities
  — Year round school calendars/extended school day
  — 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee
  — Data systems that allow measurement of annual student growth
  — Performance standards for all schools
  — Turnaround/Redesign/Closing Schools
  — Community Learning Centers

• **Enhance/Accelerate Portfolio Strategy**
  A growing number of urban school districts across the country are pursuing the portfolio strategy. The portfolio strategy is a continuous improvement model for districts that aims to dramatically affect student outcomes at scale. The Cincinnati Public School District is currently engaged in developing a bold vision for school choice and increasing the number of new, high quality schools within our portfolio. Our strategic investment in expanding school choice options will yield significant impact as it relates to improving student performance. To date, we have reached agreements with high performing charter schools including the SEED residential school and Carpe Diem — with plans to accelerate and aggressively pursue the recruitment of external new providers moving forward.
  — Opening of new schools based on parent/student/neighborhood need
  — Opening of new schools with outside operators (e.g. charters)
  — Closing failing schools and redesigning them
  — School choice for families
  — Coordination of enrollment and school information for families across sectors
  — Aggressive recruitment of external new school providers
  — Equity and access to charter and non-traditional schools for special populations
    (e.g. gifted & special education)
• **Mass Customization/Blended Student Learning**
  The key to increasing student performance is the mass customization of learning. This can be accomplished using a sophisticated student integration system that drives multiple, established pathways, such as project-based learning platforms, career development and preparation inventories, and student directed learning outcomes.
  
  — Project-Based Learning
  — Customized implementation of Common Core
  — College & career ready
  — Rich information systems to guide school self-assessment and planning
  — Performance standards for all schools

• **Talent Development/Human Capital**
  The Cincinnati Public Schools along with its partners, the Strive Consortium and local universities, understands the importance of teacher quality to improving student performance. Thus, this partnership has led to recruiting teachers and administrators who demonstrate effective teaching and leadership skills, developing focused programs to improve teaching and instruction, casting a wide net for teacher and principal talent, creating multiple routes to certification, and rewarding high performance.
  
  — High quality professional development for the 21st Century
  — Intensive development of strong teachers and leaders from within the district
  — Recruitment of teachers and administrators
  — Policies in place for using alternative pipelines to find/develop talent

**Finally, we believe we have the capacity to sustain funding for acceleration beyond the initial State investment.** Our opportunities include reducing costs through new efficiencies and public-private partnerships; greater flexibility to relocate current resources, including personnel costs; and sustainability of current local funding through a $65.5 million levy renewal and additional grant funding.
Moving Cincinnati to Excellence

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) already has reached a milestone by becoming the first major Ohio urban district to earn the Effective rating (2009-10 and 2010-11) and in 2011-12 raising overall student performance gains to their highest level since the state initiated its accountability system more than a decade ago.

Even as we acknowledge this progress, we understand there is urgency to accelerate student achievement. The futures of our students, the new Common Core academic standards and the vitality of our state’s economy demand no less.

We believe our track record of innovation and success in turning around low-performing schools position us for acceleration.

A Progressive Urban District

Cincinnati Public Schools has typical urban district demographics, including 77 percent ethnic minorities, 70 percent poverty and more than 20 percent students with disabilities. Yet, we have some of the top performing schools in the nation, and we have successfully turned around low-performing schools through closings, redesign and a highly structured improvement plan.

Academic Leader

• First major Ohio urban school district to earn the Effective rating on the Ohio Report Card

• Significant increases in student achievement in the lowest performing schools targeted for turnaround assistance through the district’s Elementary Initiative

• Expanding portfolio of academic choices with new CPS and charter school offerings, including a partnership with SEED for a residential school and a Carpe Diem school

• Long tradition of developing innovative school models with specialized curriculum, including the nation’s first elementary and high schools, and converting all high schools to “schools of choice” with no attendance boundaries

• Nationally recognized exemplary schools, including Clark Montessori High School and National Blue Ribbon winners Taft Information High School, Kilgour School, Walnut Hills High School and the School for Creative and Performing Arts

Performance Index Comparisons

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<td>Youngstown City SD</td>
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Preliminary Ratings as of July 2012
Excellence Acceleration Plan

Cincinnati Public Schools — Ohio’s Highest-Performing Urban School District

Pioneer in Teacher Quality and Leadership Development

- First Teacher Evaluation System in the state to pilot including student growth and achievement in teacher advancement and pay, accounting for 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation
- Early adopter of Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, using 2012-13 to identify professional growth needs and opportunities based on student progress

Driver of Innovation

- Pioneer in using technology systems to support data-informed decisions to improve student performance
- National leader in developing public-private partnerships to enhance academic and enrichment support, including a widely recognized Community Learning Centers model that expands services for students and families beyond the traditional school day
- Largest number of LEED-registered “green schools” in the state, including the first public school renovation to earn LEED Gold status (Dater Montessori School)

Fiscal Leader

- Rightsizing staff and buildings to align with enrollment demands
  - Reduced staff by more than 1,100 and closed 17 schools over the past decade
  - Aligned resources to follow the student through student-driven budgeting
- Improved efficiency of operations, including:
  - Reorganizing, consolidating and automating departments to reduce costs and increase efficiencies
  - Implementing technology advancements to improve performance management
  - Out-sourcing when cost efficient
- Negotiated in December 2010 a three-year, zero-base staff increase and raised staff health-care contributions to 20 percent
- Completing a $1 billion comprehensive facilities improvement plan with only 22 percent state funding
- Created and maintained a CPS data dashboard to be more transparent and accountable to the public
- Earned community support, and updated and maintained high bond ratings from major investors’ services
Excellence Acceleration Plan
Academics and Accountability

Common Core State Standards – Vision i5

Cincinnati Public Schools’ uncommon approach to the Common Core State Standards includes a major partnership with the GE Foundation to help students and teachers prepare for the demands of our 21st century global economy.

Moving away from rote instruction, teachers imagine, illuminate, innovate, invest and inspire their students to become inquiry-driven, technologically proficient learners who are great communicators and skilled at working in teams.

We are committed to providing our teachers with the tools needed to make the transition to these higher-order standards, including curriculum maps and pacing guides.

Professional development emphasizes instructional strategies designed to stimulate project- and problem-based learning that not only builds content proficiency, but enables students to apply concepts to real-world situations. District-level training is complemented and strengthened by Content Innovation Specialists who work with school colleagues to provide coaching and on-site professional development.

Learning transcends textbooks. For example, Capstone Projects help students delve deeply into learning across multiple core subject areas, engaging their creativity and harnessing technology and presentation skills.

We are communicating both the urgency and excitement surrounding these new standards to parents and the community, involving them in strategies to ensure our students are successful.
Third Grade Reading Guarantee

Within Senate Bill 316, there are mandates regarding the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. We, as a district, feel we have built a foundation and a structure that has shown continuous growth in our third grade reading scores over the past few years.

Those structures, or turn-around components, consist of:

• a reading framework that includes 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading time

• external coaches that help plan, monitor framework components, analyze data with teachers and prepare model lessons

We have begun adding literacy specialists and extended-learning time for those students who have not mastered indicators based on short cycle and/or benchmark assessments.

Additionally, we intend to provide prescriptive professional development for teachers and administrators based on the needs within their classrooms or schools, and have Individual Academic Success Plans for all students.

The model we have implemented over the past three years was targeted at our 16 lowest-performing schools. Of those 16 schools, all have moved out of Academic Emergency (one school was closed permanently); 11 have moved up two or more categories into the Continuous Improvement category or above; 3 have reached the Effective category; and one is rated Excellent.

At the district level, over the past four years, third grade reading achievement has risen from 60.3 percent to 74 percent student proficiency, based on Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAA).
Early Learning/Preschool

As an urban school district, we see the importance of providing instruction/formal schooling to students starting at age 3.

Data supports the power of early intervention and instruction to provide students with more opportunities for academic growth later in their academic careers.

Our parents and community understand the quality of our early learning programs. Presently, there are 546 children on a waiting list for CPS’ preschool programs.

There is an unmet need we believe warrants state investment to accelerate excellence. This year our preschool students scored above the threshold of 19 to be ready for kindergarten. Additionally, CPS’ preschool students score higher on the KRAL (Kindergarten Readiness Assessment — Literacy) than non-CPS preschool students.

Not surprisingly for us, our data clearly details that the more years of preschool, the higher the average KRAL score. Through preschool programs, we have increased the number of students who are ready for kindergarten from 55 percent to 70 percent.

We are excited about Ohio’s focus and the U.S. Department of Education’s focus on early learning. We fully understand that students who are ready to enter school have a much greater chance of success and college readiness. Our third grade Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) data confirms there is a 90 percent correlation between students who were ready for school on the KRAL and students who were at least proficient on the OAA.
Extended Learning — Elementary

As an urban school district with some students coming to school unprepared to meet academic standards, we feel it is important to provide additional instructional days before state assessments are given.

This additional classroom time would focus on accelerated learning to catch students up and to move them beyond grade-level standards.

This model of extended-learning time was piloted in Cincinnati Public Schools a few years ago using ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds. We supported three schools to have two additional weeks of classes before the school year opened. The cost per school was $60,000. We believe we can input additional efficiencies to ensure the cost is a maximum of $500 per student.

We strongly believe in this extended learning model. Of the three schools participating, all showed growth. In fact, one school earned an Excellent rating on the 2011-12 Ohio Report Card.
Extended Learning — High School

As an urban district, with unique challenges, we know that some students enter high school underprepared.

Students who are underperforming in Algebra I struggle in this content area throughout their academic experience. The current rate of failure in Algebra I is about 45 percent. This percentage is calculated over a three-year trend.

In addition, the Ohio Department of Education has increased the math requirements for graduation to four years (from three years). Our comprehensive plan to increase the rigor of high schools courses includes converting all high school to the 7-12 model and offering summer bridge programs for incoming high school students. This would allow students to take Introduction to Algebra I in seventh grade and Algebra I in eighth grade.

The model of extended learning would afford students opportunities to strengthen mathematics skills, which will be required for students to be successful with the introduction of the Common Core State Standards.
Data-Driven Instruction and Accountability

Cincinnati Public Schools is committed to a laser-like focus on using data to inform instructional improvement and public accountability.

The district has developed several data systems to provide comprehensive student- and classroom-specific data to teachers, administrators, and (with parent permission) community learning partners. In addition, the district has developed the Building Futures Dashboard to increase public access to information and enhance public accountability.

Like the dashboard in your car — which, at a glance, gives vital information about such things as your car’s speed and the status of your gas tank — CPS’ Building Futures Dashboard provides anyone with a computer unprecedented access to details about the district and individual schools.

With just a few clicks of the computer mouse, the public can find data that has been readily available to staff for several years, such as up-to-date enrollment figures, financial and budgetary information, and student academic performance.

The Dashboard is filled with charts and graphs and is easy to navigate. With a few clicks of a mouse, for example, a parent can find the percentage of highly qualified teachers at their child’s school or a taxpayer can find out how money is being spent - day by day - both centrally and at individual schools.

The Dashboard was praised in a review of the district’s operations by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).
Cincinnati Public Schools
Community Learning Centers:

- Serve as hubs for community services through a system of integrated partnerships that promote academic excellence and offer recreational, educational, social, health, civic and cultural opportunities for students, families and community

- Began as part of CPS’ Facilities Master Plan approved by taxpayers in 2003 to construct new or fully renovated school buildings for all students

- Were developed by engaging a cross section of stakeholders to develop a shared vision for each new building and to plan for partnerships and programs that would meet the needs of students, families and communities

- Have drawn national attention for successfully engaging community partnerships in school buildings

- Offer health services, counseling, after-school programs, nutrition classes, parent/family engagement programs, early childhood education, career and college access services, youth development activities, mentoring and arts programming

- Assure resource coordination – an intentional process that uses data to align partnership programs with the specific needs of individual students and the collective needs of school and family populations.

- Are guided by Board of Education policy to create Community Learning Centers at all district school buildings

- In 2011-12, engaged more than 600 partners who provide services valued at several millions to students and families
High Quality School Options

Like a growing number of urban school districts across the country, Cincinnati Public Schools is pursuing the portfolio strategy with external providers to dramatically impact student outcomes at scale.

Recent external collaborations include an agreement to bring a SEED residential charter school to the district, a Carpe Diem school and a New Tech High School.

Currently, we are engaged in developing a bold vision for school choice and plan to accelerate and aggressively recruit new external providers to seek out innovative, high-quality school options to meet the needs of our families and students.

We believe we are well positioned to be successful in this initiative because of our long track record of offering families non-traditional educational choices. Home to the first public Montessori elementary and high schools in the nation, Cincinnati Public Schools has been collaborating with parents and community partners to provide high-quality school choices for more than three decades.

We offer parents a variety of popular magnet schools featuring specialized focuses to complement student interests and learning styles. Similarly, since 2005, all of our high schools have been “Schools of Choice” with individual specialty areas and no attendance boundaries, so that students and parents can choose the best fit for them.

In response to parent interest in non-traditional schools for special populations, the district opened a gifted academy and digital academy in the 2011-12 school year and reopened a neighborhood school in 2012-13 in response to parent interest and support.
Student-Centered Learning Powered by Technology

The concept of “blended learning” is an innovation that incorporates technology to personalize – or mass customize – learning to meet students’ varying needs in much the same way that we use technology applications to customize choices in our personal lives. By blending student-to-computer interfaces with more traditional student-to-teacher interfaces, the model also presents opportunities for staffing cost efficiencies.

CPS intends to customize strategies, resources, and learning experiences aligned to student data and rigorous college and career readiness standards. CPS will utilize technology in the form of a student information system called a Playbook. The Playbook will generate a personalized learning portfolio linking all of the student’s educational experiences, ranging from online advanced placement courses to online assessments, college and career pathways. The student navigates through the playbook based on individualized needs.

A system of personalized learning environments will be sustained by an information integration system that will assimilate information housed in a personalized learner portfolio. Key to student personalization, the Playbook will be generated by the Information Integration System and Personalized Learner Portfolio. Accessible as a tool for students themselves, it is attuned to student data, learning styles, and interests that engage students in their own learning and promotes student direction in academic coursework, project based learning, and career exploration.

Via The Playbook, each student may access up to date information on grades, assessments, discipline, as well as links customized to supplement and strengthen knowledge. Teachers will serve as coaches to guide students as they navigate through rich learning experiences. The student navigates through recommended “plays” in this digital “Playbook,” both directing her or his own instructional steps and receiving counsel from a vested teacher to ensure standard mastery and progress toward personal life goals.

1. **Personalized Learner Portfolio**
   - portfolio of all tools with a single user sign-on
   - includes assessments, personal inventories, goals, college and career interest surveys, Blackboard, digital curriculum, and student services

2. **Information Integration System**
   - research based algorithm
   - provides data analysis to predict college and career readiness and generate recommendations for student Playbook

3. **Playbook**
   - the activities a student engages in based on interests, assets, and academic needs
   - includes tools for collaboration
Attracting and Developing Great Educators

Cincinnati Public Schools and our partners – the Strive consortium and local universities — understand the importance of teacher and principal quality to improving student performance. As a result, we have worked in collaboration to recruit teachers and administrators who demonstrate effective teaching and leadership skills.

We are casting a wide net for teacher and principal talent, creating multiple routes to certification, and rewarding high performance. It is our intent to accelerate these strategies to bring the “best and the brightest” instructional staff to our schools. This need is all the more critical given the expected retirements of large numbers of veteran teachers over the next few years.

Additionally, as an early adopter of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, we are developing focused programs to recognize, reward and improve teaching based on needs identified through student learning growth data.
## Budget

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<td>Literacy Specialists</td>
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<td>Extended Learning/summer school:</td>
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<td>Third grade guarantee</td>
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<td>High school math intervention</td>
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<td>College &amp; Career Ready/Common Core</td>
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<td>New models of teaching and learning, Dual enrollment, Early college</td>
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<td>Portfolio of schools</td>
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<td>New curriculum, professional development, benchmark assessments start up/recruitment costs (Carpe Diem, Aiken New Tech, SEED, plus others)</td>
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<td>Talent Development/Recruitment</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL BUDGET</strong></td>
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### Sustainability of State Investment

The majority of this request represents start-up funding we believe we have the capacity to sustain beyond the original state investment. Our opportunities include reducing costs through new efficiencies; pursuing additional public-private partnerships and grant funding through the Office of Innovation; greater flexibility to repurpose current resources, including personnel costs; and sustaining current local funding through a renewal of a $65.5 million levy in November 2014.

Given the early learning gap confronted by Cincinnati Public Schools and other urban school systems, we believe an ongoing State investment is warranted in preschool support and elementary literacy specialists.