



For Immediate Release:
Friday, March 20, 2009

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The Ohio 8 Coalition Announces Support for Governor's Education Reform Plan

Columbus, Ohio – The Ohio 8 Coalition, an alliance of superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight big-city school districts, announced support for Governor Ted Strickland's education reform and funding plan.

"While we have made significant strides over the past several years, the progress was within an antiquated system that frequently constrained our abilities. If we are to speed up the pace of progress, a fresh approach is needed that will propel our students and communities into the 21st century," the Ohio 8 Coalition said in a letter of support. "Your plan is bold, comprehensive, systemic and innovative. We applaud your commitment to student-focused reform and the principles of Academic Reform, Funding Reform and Accountability."

Governor Strickland's comprehensive plan to establish a modernized education system is designed to ensure every Ohio child learns the skills they need to be successful in the 21st century economy. The plan has been endorsed by the Ohio Business Roundtable and the State University Education Deans (SUED).

"I am grateful for the Ohio 8 Coalition's support," Strickland said. "I will continue to rely on the experienced guidance of the coalition members as we work to reform our schools to meet the needs of every Ohio child."

The full letter of support from the Ohio 8 Coalition is attached and pasted below:

Dear Governor Strickland,

The Ohio 8 Coalition is a strategic alliance of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight big-city school districts. We represent more than 220,000 students, many of whom face extraordinary challenges in realizing the fruits of a solid education. Since our

establishment in 2001, the Ohio 8 has brought a shared labor/management perspective to improving student achievement, closing achievement gaps and increasing graduation rates.

We have made significant gains in our school districts. Indeed, graduation rates in the Ohio 8 districts have improved by nearly 19 percentage points since 2000, compared with a statewide gain of just 6 percentage points. Our collective gain on Ohio's Performance Index – a calculation that measures performance on all state indicator tests – exceeds the statewide average gain.

While we have made significant strides over the past several years, the progress was within an antiquated system that frequently constrained our abilities. If we are to speed up the pace of progress, a fresh approach is needed that will propel our students and communities into the 21st century. That fresh approach, we believe, is evident in your recently released Education Reform Plan and the accompanying Executive Budget.

Your plan is bold, comprehensive, systemic and innovative. We applaud your commitment to student-focused reform and the principles of Academic Reform, Funding Reform and Accountability. We concur that the central elements of success will be those identified by the plan, namely: 21st century learning environments, expanded learning opportunities, high-quality educators, resource accountability, global benchmarking of student performance, and effective funding. Many of the initiatives envisioned by your plan are aligned with those identified by teachers and administrators throughout the Ohio 8.

Certainly, the Ohio 8 may suggest ways to strengthen the plan or alter the various timeframes or components you have suggested, and our individual districts may advocate for changes that are important to their unique circumstances.

Even though we may disagree with specific steps along the way, we do agree with you that this is the path that has the most promise for improving the lives of our children, the livability of our cities, the competitiveness of our state and the quality of our profession. We look forward to working with you, the General Assembly, the Department of Education, business and labor communities and other education stakeholders as the plan proceeds through the legislative and rulemaking processes.

A shared labor/management voice is imperative to providing the type of high-quality education our communities demand. We believe collaboration between labor and management at the district level, among our districts, and between the state and local authorities will generate the kind of education reform that is enduring and dynamic.

Thank you for your leadership in outlining a promising educational future for our state.

Sincerely,

David James, Superintendent
Akron Public Schools

William Siegfert, President

Akron Education Association

Michele Evans-Gardell, Superintendent
Canton City Schools

Pam Jackson, President
Canton Professional Educators Association

Mary Ronan, Interim Superintendent
Cincinnati Public Schools

Tim Kraus, President
Cincinnati Federation of Teachers

Eugene T.W. Sanders, CEO
Cleveland Metropolitan School District

David Quolke, President
Cleveland Teachers Union

Gene T. Harris, Superintendent
Columbus City Schools

Rhonda Johnson, President
Columbus Education Association

Kurt T. Stanic, Superintendent
Dayton Public Schools

Patricia Lynch, President
Dayton Education Association

John Foley, Superintendent
Toledo Public Schools

Francine Lawrence, President
Toledo Federation of Teachers

Wendy Webb, Superintendent
Youngstown City Schools

William Bagnola, President
Youngstown Education Association