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Education reform key messages

- “Waiting for Superman” touches the emotions — it reminds us what’s at stake for a child who does not receive a great education. However, the underlying messages — “public schools are failing,” “charters are good” and “teachers unions are bad”— oversimplifies complex issues and sets up an “us” versus “them” mentality.
- In most public schools, teachers, administrators and school boards are working very hard together to improve the quality of education for kids. Management/union relations can complicate this work. But most often, we work through the issues because it’s the right thing to do for kids.
- Making dramatic improvements in urban schools should be a concern to all of us. Our urban school systems face daunting challenges to close achievement gaps, increase graduation rates and more. The good news is that there are growing examples of urban success we can celebrate — and learn from.
 - Ohio’s urban districts continue to show improvement on the Ohio Department of Education’s Local Report Cards, released in August 2010. **Cincinnati City, Cleveland Municipal** and **South-Western City** improved the district’s designation, while 11 urban districts improved their performance index scores. In addition, nine districts increased the percentage of performance indicators achieved, eight showed improved attendance and five increased graduation rates.
- Research shows that for every outstanding charter school, two are underperforming their traditional public school counterparts.
- School boards know what works, and it can work in every public school — urban or rural, rich or poor, charter or not. It takes leadership that shifts expectations to higher levels. It takes dramatic changes in instruction that produce new results. It takes new forms of professional development to help teachers develop skills to reach struggling learners. It takes assessment systems that help us diagnose and improve, not rank and penalize. It takes greater levels of parent and community engagement that creates a support system for every child.
 - Ohio school districts, both large and small, help students achieve every day. Innovative student programs are showcased each year at the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show’s Student Achievement Fair (<http://cc.ohioschoolboards.org/2010/student-achievement-fair>) and featured in the association’s *Journal* magazine. Over the last few years, several Ohio districts have been honored by the *American School Board Journal*’s Magna Awards (www.asbj.com/magna), which are awarded to schools for innovative best practices, proven and practical solutions, and new ideas.
 - Ohio public school students have again outperformed the nation on the SAT college entrance and placement exam. The average verbal score of Ohio students was 537 compared to the national average of 498; 550 in math compared to the national average of 511; and 518 in writing compared to the national average of 488.

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- In June 2010, the State Board of Education adopted new academic content standards in English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science that were developed with career and college-readiness in mind.

- Ohio's Race to the Top strategy, which was selected for funding by the U.S. Department of Education in August 2010, includes initiatives that will help teachers transition to these new standards with a focus on instruction and assessment strategies. These activities, coupled with the enhanced requirements of the Ohio Core, will enable teachers to provide their students with the needed rigorous classroom experience and instructional support.

- Ohio's public education system has improved for the third year in a row, rising to No. 5 in the nation. It is the state's best showing ever in *Education Week's* widely respected annual "Quality Counts" report. Ohio ranked seventh in 2008 and sixth in 2009. Maryland placed first for 2010, with a B+; the majority of states received grades of C or lower. The theme of the "Quality Counts 2010" report was the push for common standards and assessments. The report, which studies a broad range of state policies for improving public education, is available at

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/96124>.

- As we work to put these practices into place in every school in Ohio, school boards need state and federal policy that pushes the system, delivers on the supports to make it happen and cuts out the red tape and micromanagement that gets in our way.

- Community involvement in education reform is crucial to its success. We need your help to make real systemic change. Get involved in your public school. Learn about the issues. Have hard conversations with your local school board if you aren't seeing the public schools you want in your community. Don't be swayed by a narrow single answer – roll up your sleeves and join us.