



## Misleading Measurements

### How Ohio school ratings foster false comparisons

Jennifer DePaoli, Ph.D.

Every Ohio child deserves an excellent education. Any source of insight, innovation and solutions should be tapped in our drive to get to that outcome. Highly rated urban schools are often held up as models for lower-rated urban districts. These high-scoring urban schools, both district and charter, get results on Ohio's standardized tests that shine compared to results many schools get in districts struggling with the effects of concentrated poverty. Administrators, journalists and policy makers often point to these schools as models for shaping school improvement policies and practices.

To better understand urban school reform, Policy Matters Ohio compared demographics of the urban schools scoring highest on state measures with the districts in which they are located. We found that the majority of the highest-rated schools serve very different populations than the districts in which they are located, generally enrolling fewer children with disabilities and fewer economically disadvantaged students. Many of these schools have selective enrollment policies, offer smaller class sizes, require applications, or engage in other practices that lower-performing public schools generally cannot follow. Some schools, particularly charters, enroll substantial numbers of students from other school districts, usually suburban or in some cases exurban districts.

### Comparing districts and top urban schools

Policy Matters looked at schools rated the highest over a two-year period in each of the eight largest urban school districts. We used state, school and district data to examine public schools – district-run and charter – that were rated Excellent or higher for either the 2010-11 or the 2011-12 school, or both.<sup>1</sup> We compared student demographics at these schools with those of the school districts in which they are located. The number of schools examined ranged from two each in Canton, Dayton, and Youngstown to 22 in Cleveland; overall, the study included 57 district and 27 charter schools. We found that a majority of these top-rated schools enrolled lower percentages of minority students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities. It is clear that most are not reaching an equal share of the students with the fewest opportunities in Ohio's urban districts.

#### Key findings

- High-rated schools, on average, serve a lower percentage of students with disabilities, of students in poverty and of minority students than Ohio's urban districts as a whole.
- The majority of Ohio's top-rated urban schools screen students, restrict enrollment, and/or limit class size.

<sup>1</sup> We looked at report cards for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years because report cards for 2012-13 changed substantially from previous years, don't yet provide a single measure, and can't be compared to previous years.

<sup>2</sup> Akron City Schools' elementary schools and all of Cleveland Municipal Schools use a 100 percent economically disadvantaged rate established by a federal provision allowing them to claim their entire student populations as eligible for free and reduced meals, even if specific schools have much lower rates. Akron last reported FLD rates in 2003-04 and

Among the most significant findings:

- **The overwhelming majority of highly rated district and charter schools served fewer students with disabilities than their home districts.** Akron’s highest-rated school, Early College High School, served no students with disabilities; neither did the Early College High Schools in Toledo and Youngstown and two of the three specialized John Hay Schools in Cleveland. Only 1.7 percent of the students enrolled at Cincinnati’s highest-rated school, Walnut Hills High School, had disabilities. Of the 27 highest-rated charter schools included in this study, 26 had lower percentages of students with disabilities than their home districts, many of them significantly lower.
- **High scorers had lower poverty rates.** On average, Ohio’s eight large urban districts had an economically disadvantaged rate of 86 percent, but many high-scoring schools had poverty rates well below this average: without weighting for school size, the high-scoring schools had an average economically disadvantaged rate of 62 percent and only 12 of the top schools around the state had an accurate measure of economic disadvantage that exceeded the percentage in their district.<sup>2</sup> Portage Collaborative Montessori Middle School in Canton served no economically disadvantaged students. Over a quarter of all high-scoring schools included in this study enrolled fewer than 50 percent economically disadvantaged students, and more than half served fewer economically disadvantaged students than their home district.
- **Most top-rated schools served fewer minority students.** Ohio’s urban districts primarily enroll African-American, Hispanic, and multi-racial students. Some top-performing schools do an excellent job of reaching minority students and most serve a far higher share of minorities than the statewide population, but on average the schools in this study enrolled a higher share of white students and a lower share of African-American students compared to district schools.
- **More than 60 percent of high-scoring district schools have selective enrollment policies.** To enroll in many of these schools, students must meet requirements such as minimum GPA, test scores, prior language study or Montessori experience; others hold auditions or interviews to screen students, or require students and parents to sign contracts to maintain enrollment. Often, top-rated district and charter schools set their enrollment levels low to maintain small class sizes, which many claim is key to their success and use as a marketing tool. Even early enrollment deadlines, application fees, or school choice procedure can skew the populations many schools serve. One example of the selectivity of top-rated schools can be seen in Cincinnati’s magnet school application process, for which parents must camp out to get a seat for their children in some of the district’s most sought after schools.<sup>3</sup>
- **None of the charter schools located in urban districts enrolled only students who live in those districts, and many top-rated districts enrolled students from other districts as well.** Comparisons of these schools with urban districts as a whole do not take this difference into account. While most top-rated district schools enrolled mostly resident students, examples abound of charters, in particular, with very low urban district enrollments even though they are

<sup>2</sup> Akron City Schools’ elementary schools and all of Cleveland Municipal Schools use a 100 percent economically disadvantaged rate established by a federal provision allowing them to claim their entire student populations as eligible for free and reduced meals, even if specific schools have much lower rates. Akron last reported E.D. rates in 2003-04 and CMSD in 2007-08.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Jessica, “Campouts at Cincinnati’s highest-demand schools have begun.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 11, 2013, <http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20131108/NEWS/311080039/>. Also see Smith Richards, Jennifer and Collin Binkley, “Columbus school board seeks OK of selective-admissions plan.” *Columbus Dispatch*, December 26, 2013. <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2013/12/26/board-seeks-approval-of-plan-for-merit-spots.html>.

located in Ohio's largest urban districts. For example, only 15 percent of students enrolled at Menlo Park Academy in Cleveland were residents of the Cleveland school district.

- **In several districts, top-rated schools, especially charters, enrolled significantly fewer students than the district average building enrollment.** Although the enrollment of some top-rated schools is higher than district average, a substantial number of charter and selective enrollment district schools enroll far fewer students. For example, Arts & College Prep Academy, a Columbus charter high school, enrolls 240 students, far below the district comprehensive high school average of 736 students.

It is essential that we use every tool available to deliver the best possible education to all children. We should not pretend that schools with larger class sizes and more troubled or disadvantaged students, for example, can easily achieve what smaller classrooms in selective schools manage.

Specialty schools can play a vital role as urban districts struggle to overcome overwhelming educational odds. We found that some high-scoring urban schools are succeeding in the face of difficult challenges, but most benefit because they serve populations that are substantially different from the students typically served in urban districts. In the end, schools must be measured in a way that accurately reflects the needs of the students they enroll, and comparisons must acknowledge that not all schools serve the same population. The following analysis examines demographics and enrollment policies of the top-rated district and charter schools in Ohio's urban school districts.

## Akron

Eight Akron schools, all district-operated, received a rating of Excellent or higher for the 2010-11 or 2011-12 school years, or both – two high schools, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. Three of the top-scoring middle and high schools were specialty schools with selective enrollment policies, while the fourth was home to two highly selective magnet programs. Table 1 shows that all of Akron's high-scoring schools served fewer economically disadvantaged and disabled students, and all but one served a lower percentage of African-American students.

### Findings:

- **Akron's specialty schools cap student enrollment to ensure lower class sizes.** Akron Early College High School, Miller-South Visual Performing Arts, and National Inventors Hall of Fame, Center for STEM accept a limited number of students each year. Akron Early College and National Inventors only accept 100 incoming students each into their 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes, and do not replace students who leave their programs. Miller-South has a teacher-student ratio of less than 9:1, substantially lower than the district average of about 14:1. These smaller class sizes likely contribute to the strong results.
- **All but two of the top-rated schools enroll fewer students than the average district school.** The biggest school-size difference shows up at the high school level; with the exception of Firestone, which at 1,172 is larger than the average Akron high school (729), the top-rated schools serving high school students enrolled considerably fewer students. (See Table 1.)
- **Seven of Akron's eight top-rated schools had lower percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged students.** Just over 55 percent of the district's student population is minority. The minority student populations at three top-rated schools – Miller-South, Windemere CLC, and Ritzman CLC – fell below 30 percent, and all but Firestone High School had minority populations below 50 percent. Of Akron's specialty secondary schools, only Akron

Early College (53.9 percent) had an economically disadvantaged population greater than 50 percent, and none came close to the district average of 86.7 percent. Because of the district’s universal eligibility for its meals program, all of the elementary schools reported a rate of 100 percent economically disadvantaged, preventing us from getting an accurate count of low-income enrollment. The last reported rates show that only Ritzman CLC, at 53.7 percent in 2003-04, surpassed the 50 percent mark.<sup>4</sup>

- **All of Akron’s high scorers served lower percentages of students with disabilities.** The four elementary schools were near the district average of 19.4 percent, but the majority of the secondary specialty schools served less than half that number. Records show that no students with disabilities were enrolled at Akron Early College, and that disability enrollment at two of the other three specialty schools – Miller-South and National Inventors – fell below 10 percent.

| Table 1   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|---|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Top-rated Akron schools compared to the district  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| District in Continuous Improvement, top-rated schools Excellent or higher (2010-11 or 2011-12)              |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|   | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-Racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Students w/ disabilities |
| <b>District average</b>   | 423        | 46.2% | 2.8%     | 6.8%         | 40.2% | 86.7%                      | 19.4%                    |
| Top-rated schools   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| Early College High <sup>1</sup>   | 326        | 32.2% | 4.0%     | 0%           | 51.3% | 53.9%                      | 0%                       |
| Miller-South Visual Performing Arts <sup>1</sup>  | 473        | 16.5% | 2.1%     | 9.1%         | 68.7% | 24.8%                      | 7.0%                     |
| King Elementary   | 371        | 30.7% | 4.2%     | 3.1%         | 58.8% | n/a                        | 6.4%                     |
| Inventors Hall of Fame School, Center for STEM <sup>1</sup>   | 377        | 30.5% | 2.9%     | 7.0%         | 56.2% | 41.5%                      | 5.1%                     |
| Firestone High <sup>1</sup>   | 1,172      | 51.4% | 2.2%     | 4.8%         | 40.0% | 49%                        | 14.6%                    |
| Resnik CLC  | 418        | 36.3% | 3.8%     | 6.5%         | 51.6% | n/a                        | 15.8%                    |
| Windemere CLC   | 356        | 6.4%  | 2.8%     | 10.8%        | 79.2% | n/a                        | 13.8%                    |
| Ritzman CLC   | 356        | 6.6%  | 0%       | 6.1%         | 85.3% | n/a                        | 15.6%                    |
| <b>Source:</b> Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year. |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| <sup>1</sup> Selective-enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school                               |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |

## Canton

Only two district schools scored Excellent on the state report card, for the 2010-11 school year, and both – Portage Collaborative Montessori Middle School and Canton Arts Academy at Summit – have selective enrollment policies. Canton Arts Academy enrolls students with a “proclivity for the visual and performing arts” and is home to the Canton High Ability Program,<sup>5</sup> with fewer than 200 students attending grades Kindergarten through 8, resulting in a student-teacher ratio of less than 10:1. Portage Montessori, created to serve students from five school districts, has an even smaller student body and is highly selective about the students it accepts after the first grade; state records show that it serves no economically disadvantaged students. The student population at Canton Arts Academy is 69.7 percent economically disadvantaged, below the district’s rate of 82.4 percent. As Table 2 shows, both

<sup>4</sup> While it’s likely that the rate of economically disadvantaged students has risen in Akron over the past decade, it’s clear that rates are not at 100 percent. We recommend that policymakers require accurate reporting from the Ohio Department of Education and the Akron district.

<sup>5</sup> Home page, Arts Academy at Summit website, <http://arts.ccsdistrict.org/>.

Canton Arts Academy and Portage Montessori enroll fewer students and fewer economically disadvantaged students, and serve about half the number of students with disabilities compared to the Canton district as a whole. No Canton charters earned Excellent ratings.

| Table 2   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|---|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Top-rated Canton schools compared to the district   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| District in Continuous Improvement, top-rated schools Excellent or higher (2010-11 or 2011-12)              |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|   | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Students w/ disabilities |
| District average  | 414        | 35.8% | 2.6%     | 13.2%        | 47.9% | 82.4%                      | 16.5%                    |
| Top-rated schools   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| Portage Montessori <sup>1</sup>   | 157        | 9.9%  | 0%       | 9.9%         | 76.4% | 0%                         | 8.3%                     |
| Canton Arts Academy <sup>1</sup>  | 191        | 26.7% | 0%       | 16.9%        | 53.3% | 69.7%                      | 8.9%                     |
| <b>Source:</b> Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year. |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| <sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school.  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |

## Cincinnati

Of the 18 Cincinnati schools identified as top-rated, 15 were district schools and three were charters. All five of the district’s high-scoring secondary schools and seven of its elementary schools have selective enrollment policies. Cincinnati’s three highest-ranked charter schools served high percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged students, but records show that they also enrolled fewer students with disabilities than the district overall, and tend to keep class sizes small. Both factors have been shown to have an impact on higher test scores. Table 3 outlines the demographic differences between Cincinnati’s top-rated schools and the district overall.

### Findings:

- **Eight of Cincinnati’s top-rated schools served a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students, while eight had a higher percentage of such students.** The five district schools scoring highest on the state’s performance index also had lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students, including the nationally recognized Walnut Hills High School (21.8 percent) and Sands Montessori Elementary School (27.9 percent).
- **About half of Cincinnati’s high-scoring schools had lower percentages of minority students than the district as a whole.** Kilgour Elementary, located in Cincinnati’s wealthy Mt. Lookout neighborhood, and Sands Montessori were both nearly 70 percent white, compared with the district average of 25 percent. Eight of the district’s high-performers had enrollments that similarly did not reflect overall district enrollment. However, nine schools had higher percentages of African-American students than the district as a whole, some quite a bit higher.
- **Six of Cincinnati’s highest-rated schools served significantly fewer students with disabilities, while seven served higher percentages.** Walnut Hills High School had a population of students with disabilities under 2 percent.

| Table 3  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                         |
|--|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Top-rated Cincinnati schools compared to the district  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                         |
| District in Continuous Improvement, top-rated schools Excellent or higher (2010-11 or 2011-12) |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                         |
|  | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-Racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Student w/ disabilities |
| District average   | 495        | 65.4% | 3%       | 5.4%         | 25.3% | 72.6%                      | 20.1%                   |
| Top-rated schools  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                         |
| Walnut Hills High <sup>1</sup>   | 2,268      | 32.4% | 1.6%     | 6.2%         | 57%   | 21.8%                      | 1.7%                    |
| Kilgour Elementary   | 633        | 17.7% | 3.1%     | 7.1%         | 69.1% | 18%                        | 8.4%                    |
| T.C.P. World Academy <sup>2</sup>  | 473        | 95.2% | 0%       | 2.4%         | 0%    | 81.1%                      | 10.4%                   |
| Sands Montessori <sup>1</sup>  | 658        | 18.1% | 3.1%     | 8.5%         | 68.4% | 27.9%                      | 14.5%                   |
| Fairview-Clifton German Language <sup>1</sup>  | 716        | 22.9% | 1.4%     | 7.7%         | 63.6% | 22.1%                      | 10.4%                   |
| Covedale Elementary <sup>1</sup>   | 530        | 27.7% | 0%       | 6.1%         | 64.2% | 61.3%                      | 18.5%                   |
| Hartwell Elementary  | 457        | 48.9% | 11.3%    | 8.4%         | 31.2% | 84.7%                      | 16.6%                   |
| Dater Montessori <sup>1</sup>  | 642        | 42.1% | 2.1%     | 7.4%         | 46.7% | 50.9%                      | 21.1%                   |
| Clark Montessori High <sup>1</sup>   | 658        | 49.2% | 0%       | 6.3%         | 42.0% | 35.8%                      | 23.3%                   |
| King Academy <sup>2</sup>  | 110        | 100%  | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 100%                       | 17.3%                   |
| College Hill Fundamental Academy <sup>1</sup>  | 428        | 89.7% | 0%       | 6.1%         | 3.8%  | 86.1%                      | 21.8%                   |
| Evanston Academy   | 373        | 94.5% | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 94%                        | 21.1%                   |
| James N. Gamble Montessori High <sup>1</sup>   | 265        | 66.1% | 0%       | 4.8%         | 26.9% | 65.2%                      | 27.4%                   |
| Mt. Washington <sup>1</sup>  | 372        | 26.4% | 0%       | 9.4%         | 61.4% | 72.8%                      | 15.3%                   |
| South Avondale   | 477        | 96.5% | 0%       | 2.7%         | 0%    | 98.9%                      | 25.3%                   |
| School for Creative and Performing Arts <sup>1</sup>   | 1,342      | 56.3% | 1.7%     | 8.1%         | 33.1% | 52.2%                      | 8.5%                    |
| Taft Information Tech <sup>1</sup>   | 564        | 94.4% | 0%       | 0%           | 3.1%  | 84.1%                      | 25%                     |
| Phoenix CLC <sup>2</sup>   | 344        | 100   | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 94%                        | 9.9%                    |

**Source:** Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year.  
<sup>1</sup>Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup>Charter school

- **Eleven of the district's 15 top-rated schools had selective enrollment policies.** Students wishing to attend Walnut Hills High School or Dater Montessori Elementary School must pass an entrance exam. To be accepted for enrollment, Covedale Elementary School requires children to score Accelerated or Advanced on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in reading or math, and Proficient in at least one other subject. Fairview-Clifton German Language School restricts admission based on a student's German language experience. College Hill Fundamental Academy requires that students and parents go through an interview process, and show proof that students have a passing record in the areas of effort, conduct, and attendance. Enrollment policies and the district application process are also determining factors in most top-rated



schools. To get a seat in some district magnets, for example, parents camp out for weeks to get a seat for their children.<sup>6</sup>

- **Top-rated district schools have greater enrollments, but charter schools enroll fewer.** Unlike the top-rated schools in many of Ohio's other urban districts, nine in Cincinnati – almost half – had enrollments larger than the district's average school enrollment. However, three of the four top-rated charter schools had lower enrollments. King Academy enrolled only 110 students in grades K-8. Phoenix CLC, also a K-8 school, enrolled only 344 students.
- **Questionable test scores at Taft High School?** In February 2012, Cincinnati's *City Beat* published a story on the remarkable turnaround at Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School, examining how the school went from academic failure to excellence almost overnight.<sup>7</sup> In 2005, 40 percent of the school's 10<sup>th</sup> graders passed the math Ohio Graduation Test while 64 percent passed in reading; by the following year, 96 percent of those same students passed in math and 97 percent in reading. The school's OGT scores have remained high, even reaching a 100 percent pass rate for 11<sup>th</sup> graders in 2010-11, but when the district tested all its students using the ACT test in 2010, Taft's average score was 15, well below Cincinnati's other high-performing high schools. More troublesome, however, are the results of a 2006 investigation into the school's rapidly rising test scores, which showed that 88 percent of the unusually high number of erasures resulted in correct answers. Despite the irregularities and unanswered questions, CPS closed its internal investigation. While the school hasn't faced scrutiny over its test scores since then, an Ohio Board of Regents report in 2009 showed that 15 of the 16 Taft students attending state universities or community colleges needed to take remedial math or English courses as freshman, once again calling into question the school's high-performing status.

*Correction: An earlier version included a charter school that is not located in Cincinnati; all references to that school, Hamilton County Math and Science, have been removed and our findings adjusted.*

## Cleveland

Nine district and 13 charter schools in Cleveland were rated Excellent or higher for the 2010-11 or 2011-12 school years, or both. Six of the district's top-ranked schools have selective and limited enrollment policies, and 12 of the charters commit to small class sizes as part of their success plans. One charter school, Menlo Park Academy, enrolls only gifted students.

Findings:

- **Cleveland's top-rated district and charter schools served fewer students with disabilities.** Four schools – John Hay Early College High School, John Hay School of Architecture and Design, Horizon Science Academy Middle School, and Phoenix Village Academy Primary 2 – served no students with disabilities, according to state records. Ten other schools served a student with disability population under 10 percent, and only two schools, both district-run, had a population within 4 percentage points of the district's 23.2 percent average.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, Jessica, "Campouts at Cincinnati's highest-demand schools have begun." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 11, 2013, <http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20131108/NEWS/311080039/>.

<sup>7</sup> McNair, James, "Miracle or mirage?" *Cincinnati City Beat*, February 21, 2012, retrieved from [http://www.citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-24967-miracle\\_or\\_mirage.html](http://www.citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-24967-miracle_or_mirage.html).

| Table 4  |            |       |          |              |       |                             |                          |
|--|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Top-rated Cleveland schools compared to the district                                       |            |       |          |              |       |                             |                          |
| District in Academic Emergency, top-rated schools Excellent or higher (2010-11 or 2011-12) |            |       |          |              |       |                             |                          |
|  | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-racial | White | Economically disadvantaged* | Students w/ disabilities |
| <b>District average</b>  | 416        | 67.7% | 13.8%    | 2.9%         | 14.6% | 95%                         | 23.2%                    |
| <b>Top-rated schools</b>   |            |       |          |              |       |                             |                          |
| John Hay Early College <sup>1</sup>  | 201        | 66.4% | 16.6%    | 0%           | 11.9% | n/a                         | 0%                       |
| Menlo Park Academy <sup>2</sup>  | 304        | 0%    | 0%       | 0%           | 79.6% | 4.2%                        | 3.8%                     |
| John Hay Science and Medicine <sup>1</sup>   | 362        | 80.4% | 5.5%     | 0%           | 10%   | n/a                         | 6.1%                     |
| Citizens Academy <sup>2</sup>  | 408        | 99.3% | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 99.5%                       | 13.1%                    |
| John Hay Arch. and Design <sup>1</sup>   | 271        | 87.6% | 4.8%     | 0%           | 0%    | n/a                         | 0%                       |
| Valley View Elementary <sup>1</sup>  | 175        | 46.1% | 10.6%    | 12%          | 30.7% | n/a                         | 16.9%                    |
| Whitney Young <sup>1</sup>   | 332        | 99.1% | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | n/a                         | 7.5%                     |
| Constellation Old Brooklyn Elem. <sup>2</sup>  | 321        | 3.8%  | 14.7%    | 6.3%         | 73.8% | 51.7%                       | 6%                       |
| Intergenerational School <sup>2</sup>  | 264        | 85.3% | 0%       | 5.2%         | 6.4%  | 62.9%                       | 6.6%                     |
| Horizon Science <sup>2</sup>   | 453        | 79.9% | 8.1%     | 3.6%         | 7.9%  | 85.2%                       | 6.8%                     |
| Const. Old Brooklyn Middle <sup>2</sup>  | 172        | 0%    | 17.8%    | 0%           | 70.6% | 52.5%                       | 8.2%                     |
| Louisa May Alcott K-5  | 203        | 41.5% | 15.1%    | 9.1%         | 32.3% | n/a                         | 26.9%                    |
| MC <sup>2</sup> STEM High <sup>1</sup>   | 274        | 74.9% | 7.7%     | 0%           | 15.5% | n/a                         | 11.5%                    |
| Riverside K-8  | 465        | 14.5% | 12%      | 7.2%         | 63.4% | n/a                         | 14.6%                    |
| W.C. Bryant K-8  | 364        | 10.3% | 19.3%    | 3.1%         | 65%   | n/a                         | 19.7%                    |
| E-Prep 6-8 <sup>2</sup>  | 307        | 92.4% | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 86.4%                       | 13.4%                    |
| Horizon Science Middle <sup>2</sup>  | 141        | 86%   | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 90.6%                       | 0%                       |
| Noble Academy K-12 <sup>2</sup>  | 253        | 92.7% | 0%       | 0%           | 4.7%  | 77.7%                       | 5.8%                     |
| Phoenix Village Academy K-5 <sup>2</sup>   | 43         | 97.5% | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 90.7%                       | 0%                       |
| Constellation Puritas K-4 <sup>2</sup>   | 202        | 15%   | 22.9%    | 0%           | 53.7% | 78.1%                       | 11%                      |
| Constellation Westpark K-4 <sup>2</sup>  | 304        | 0%    | 15.4%    | 6.6%         | 73.1% | 50%                         | 8.2%                     |
| Constellation Westpark 5-9 <sup>2</sup>  | 192        | 0%    | 16.8%    | 6.9%         | 68.8% | 45.4%                       | 9.1%                     |

**Source:** Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year. \*See footnote 6 for information on the overall economically disadvantaged rate for Cleveland; since the district has a universal free meal program, it does not track individual school rates. <sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school

- **Nearly all of the high-scoring schools had lower economically disadvantaged rates, especially those in the for-profit Constellation charter network.** Four of five Constellation schools had poverty rates around 50 percent, well below the 95 percent most recently estimated to be the district average.<sup>8</sup> The Intergenerational School served 63 percent economically disadvantaged students, and Menlo Park Academy had the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students, serving only 4.2 percent. Only one top-performing school – Citizens Academy – had a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students than the district.
- **Ten of Cleveland’s high scorers had lower minority-student populations than the district as a whole, while 11 had higher.** Many of the high-scoring schools do an excellent job of serving

<sup>8</sup> An Ohio Department of Education estimate puts the number of children who qualify for free meals in Cleveland as high as 95 percent, according to *PolitiFact Ohio*, <http://bit.ly/1hPu5wJ>.



minority students: five had more than 90 percent African-American enrollment. All five of Cleveland's high-scoring Constellation charter schools had much higher percentages of white students, including three that served over 70 percent compared with the district average of 14.6 percent. Similarly, Menlo Park Academy, a charter school for gifted students most of whom live outside the Cleveland district, had a white student population just under 80 percent. Two district K-8 schools, Riverside and William C. Bryant, also served a predominantly white student population. These demographic differences reflect the location of the schools on Cleveland's west side, which has historically had a much lower minority population than the east side.

- **Selective enrollment policies and small class sizes likely played a big part in the success of Cleveland's top-rated schools.** Menlo Park Academy requires its students to be identified as "Superior Cognitive" gifted by a state-approved test. Each of the John Hay high schools require a minimum 3.0 GPA and a score of proficient or higher on the 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments. Students wishing to attend Whitney Young, serving grades 2 through 12, must be identified as Gifted and Talented by the state. While MC<sup>2</sup>STEM High School does not have specific enrollment criteria, it does have an application process and reserves 25 percent of its seats for students living outside Cleveland. It should also be noted that MC<sup>2</sup>STEM, the John Hay schools, and Whitney Young, as part of Cleveland's school choice program, do not provide transportation for enrolled students. In addition, the majority of the city's top-rated district and charter schools limit enrollment to ensure smaller class sizes. The John Hay schools and MC<sup>2</sup>STEM enroll fewer than 100 students per grade level, Valley View, an all-boys K-8, and Whitney Young each enroll fewer than 50 students per grade. A recent story in the *Plain Dealer* reported that many of Cleveland's top-rated district and charter schools were under-enrolled, despite a campaign to fill their seats, including the three John Hay schools, MC<sup>2</sup>STEM, Louisa May Alcott K-5, Riverside, Valley View, Whitney Young, and two Breakthrough-operated charters, including E-Prep.<sup>9</sup>
- **Top-rated schools tend to be smaller than the average district school.** Overall, average enrollment in the Cleveland district is 416 students per school.<sup>10</sup> Only two of the top-rated schools enrolled more: Horizon Science Academy, a charter high school; and Riverside, a district K-8. Comparing by school type is also revealing: Only two top-rated elementary schools in the study are larger than the average K-8 size of 389 (Riverside and Citizens Academy, a K-5 charter); at the secondary level, the average traditional, comprehensive high school enrolled 929 students, while the specialty schools averaged only 292 students. Extensive research suggests that smaller schools improve achievement, particularly for disadvantaged students.<sup>11</sup>

## Columbus

Fourteen district and five charter schools in Columbus rated Excellent and above for the 2010-11 or 2011-12 school years, or both. Seven of the district's high-rated schools are "choice" schools with limited and/or selective enrollment policies, and the majority of the city's top-rated charter schools emphasize small class size.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Patrick O'Donnell, "Hundreds of spots remain in Cleveland's top-rated public schools this fall", *The Plain Dealer*, August 8, 2013, [www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2013/08/hundreds\\_of\\_spots\\_remain\\_in\\_cl.html](http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2013/08/hundreds_of_spots_remain_in_cl.html).

<sup>10</sup> Ohio Department of Education, 2011-12, at <http://education.ohio.gov>.

<sup>11</sup> See Jordan Hylden, Harvard University at [www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG05-05Hylden.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG05-05Hylden.pdf) and also National Education Association at [www.nea.org/home/13639.htm](http://www.nea.org/home/13639.htm).

<sup>12</sup> For perspective on this issue, see Smith Richards, Jennifer and Collin Binkley, "Columbus school board seeks OK of selective-admissions plan." *Columbus Dispatch*, December 26, 2013. <http://bit.ly/1arkJzt>.

| Table 5  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|--|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Top-rated Columbus schools compared to the district  |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| District in Continuous Improvement, top-rated schools Excellent or higher (2010-11 or 2011-12) |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
|  | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Students w/ disabilities |
| <b>District overall</b>  | 357        | 58.1% | 6.8%     | 5.4%         | 27.4% | 83.3%                      | 17.3%                    |
| <b>Top-rated schools</b>   |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| Col. Prep. Academy <sup>2</sup>  | 647        | 18%   | 9.2%     | 12.8%        | 57.3% | 66.9%                      | 6.6%                     |
| Clinton @Old Hubbard   | 351        | 11.4% | 0%       | 6.3%         | 78%   | 40.6%                      | 17.3%                    |
| Arts & College Prep. <sup>2</sup>  | 240        | 30.1% | 0%       | 8.8%         | 56%   | 60.6%                      | 6.5%                     |
| Col. Alternative High <sup>1</sup>   | 619        | 63.2% | 3.2%     | 0%           | 28.3% | 63.1%                      | 7.4%                     |
| Colerain Elementary  | 205        | 21.5% | 5.9%     | 8.8%         | 62.2% | 57.3%                      | 41.4%                    |
| Gables Elementary  | 388        | 10.5% | 18.7%    | 9.9%         | 39.9% | 44%                        | 7%                       |
| Indianola Informal K-8 <sup>1</sup>  | 575        | 25.2% | 2.9%     | 8.3%         | 61.6% | 33.8%                      | 16.9%                    |
| Indian Springs   | 426        | 24.3% | 0%       | 5.1%         | 66.3% | 47.2%                      | 19.4%                    |
| Horizon Science <sup>2</sup>   | 378        | 76.5% | 0%       | 8.4%         | 11.5% | 82.2%                      | 7.2%                     |
| Berwick Alternative <sup>1</sup>   | 751        | 88.2% | 1.4%     | 5.7%         | 3.8%  | 67.7%                      | 11%                      |
| Centennial High <sup>1</sup>   | 826        | 38.9% | 7.8%     | 3.7%         | 45.5% | 55.3%                      | 15.3%                    |
| Columbus City Prep. School for Girls <sup>1</sup>  | 331        | 75.3% | 4.9%     | 5.7%         | 12.3% | 82.1%                      | 8.95%                    |
| Cranbrook  | 279        | 18.5% | 8.1%     | 6%           | 46.6% | 73.6%                      | 11.3%                    |
| Ecole Kenwood <sup>1</sup>   | 366        | 57.6% | 3.8%     | 7.9%         | 29.6% | 62.9%                      | 4.4%                     |
| Ridgeview Middle   | 543        | 30.3% | 10.2%    | 5.9%         | 47.1% | 58.8%                      | 17.2%                    |
| Whetstone High <sup>1</sup>  | 952        | 33.5% | 3.7%     | 3.8%         | 57%   | 60%                        | 19.2%                    |
| Winterset  | 298        | 18.9% | 5.3%     | 12.6%        | 55.3% | 51.5%                      | 18.8%                    |
| Columbus Collegiate <sup>2</sup>   | 158        | 69.2% | 17.5%    | 0%           | 7.4%  | 83.8%                      | 9.2%                     |
| A+ Arts Academy <sup>2</sup>   | 276        | 93.2  | 0%       | 0%           | 0%    | 84.2%                      | 11.7%                    |

**Source:** Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year.  
<sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school

## Major findings:

- **Fifteen of Columbus' 19 highest-rated schools served a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students than the district as a whole, usually a much lower percentage.** Five of the district's top schools had economically disadvantaged populations under 50 percent and two of its highest-rated charter schools served fewer than 70 percent, compared with the district average of 83.3 percent. Only four top-rated schools had comparable numbers of economically disadvantaged kids – two slightly below and two slightly above.
- **Nine top-rated schools are bigger than average, but the majority of top-rated charters are much smaller.** Columbus Collegiate Academy, a 6-8 middle school, enrolls only 158 students as compared to the district comprehensive middle school average of 480 students. Similarly, the middle school campus of A+ Arts Academy can only hold 150 students, far below the district comprehensive middle school average, and its overall enrollment is also substantially lower than

the district average. Arts & College Prep Academy enrolls 240 students, lower than the district average and far below the district comprehensive high school average of 736 students.

- **Eleven high-scoring schools in Columbus had greater percentages of white students.** The district as a whole is about 30 percent white and 70 percent minority, but nine of the high-scoring schools included in this study were more than 50 percent white, including two charters and seven district schools. Seven top-rated schools had a higher share of African-American students than the district as a whole.
- **Eight high-rated schools, four charter and four district, served substantially fewer students with disabilities than the district as a whole.** The district average in 2011-12 was just over 17 percent, but charter schools like Columbus Preparatory Academy, Arts and College Prep Academy, Horizon Science Academy Columbus, and Columbus Collegiate Academy had populations of students with disabilities under 10 percent. Fewer than 5 percent of the students enrolled at Ecole Kenwood Alternative, a selective-enrollment district school, had disabilities. Five top-rated schools had higher percentages of students with disabilities, one of which was much higher.

## Dayton

The state rated only two Dayton schools Excellent during the 2010-11 or 2011-12 school years, one district and one charter. Both, Stivers School for the Arts and Dayton Early College Academy, have selective enrollment policies. They also both had lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. Fewer than 3 percent of the students at DECA, which only accepts new students in 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade and accepts fewer than 100 students for each grade, served a student with disability population under 3 percent, compared with the district average of 20 percent.

|  | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Students w/ disabilities |
|--|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| District overall                         | 492        | 65.7% | 3.2%     | 5.5%         | 25.1% | 94%                        | 19.9%                    |
| <b>Top-rated schools</b>                 |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| Early College Academy <sup>2</sup>       | 411        | 80.3% | 3.2%     | 4.3%         | 10.5% | 76.4%                      | 2.5%                     |
| Stivers School For The Arts <sup>1</sup> | 889        | 58.8% | 2.6%     | 4.7%         | 33.2% | 55.5%                      | 11.4%                    |

**Source:** Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year.  
<sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school

## Toledo

Eleven Toledo schools, seven district and four charter, were rated Excellent or higher for the 2010-11 or 2011-12 school years. Small school and class sizes are a likely factor in the success of a majority of Toledo's highest-scoring schools, and several have selective-enrollment policies.

|   | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-Racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Students w/ disabilities |
|---|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>District overall</b>                             | 424        | 42.1% | 9.4%     | 7%           | 40.7% | 77%                        | 18.4%                    |
| <b>Top-rated schools</b>                            |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                          |
| Early College High <sup>1</sup>                     | 228        | 30.2% | 6.9%     | 10.4%        | 46.1% | 42.6%                      | 0%                       |
| Tech. Academy High <sup>1</sup>                     | 176        | 24.9% | 6.3%     | 0%           | 67.7% | 49%                        | 8.7%                     |
| School For The Arts <sup>2</sup>                    | 578        | 18.1% | 9.1%     | 6.9%         | 65.1% | 32.5%                      | 5.7%                     |
| Grove Patterson <sup>1</sup>                        | 369        | 49.4% | 7.2%     | 4.6%         | 37.7% | 47.6%                      | 7.3%                     |
| Elmhurst Elementary                                 | 456        | 11%   | 3.5%     | 7.2%         | 78.4% | 38.9%                      | 12.1%                    |
| Beverly Elementary                                  | 638        | 9%    | 6.6%     | 5.3%         | 78.1% | 39.6%                      | 10.1%                    |
| Start High School                                   | 1,248      | 37.3% | 7.4%     | 6%           | 48.9% | 57.7%                      | 17.2%                    |
| MLK Boys Academy <sup>1</sup>                       | 224        | 91.8% | 0%       | 5.3%         | 0%    | 98.7%                      | 17.7%                    |
| Toledo Preparatory and Fitness Academy <sup>2</sup> | 143        | 67.6% | 0%       | 10.7%        | 14.8% | 90.7%                      | 29.3%                    |
| Horizon Science Academy-Springfield <sup>2</sup>    | 264        | 59.2% | 0%       | 14.2%        | 22.4% | 91.6%                      | 8.1%                     |
| Maritime Academy <sup>2</sup>                       | 183        | 38.9% | 16.6%    | 6.8%         | 37.7% | 44.8%                      | 10.9%                    |

Source: Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year.  
<sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school

### Major findings:

- **Of the 11 top schools, four served higher percentages of African-American students while five enrolled substantially fewer.** MLK Boys Academy served more than 90 percent African-American students, compared to the district average of 42 percent, while three schools served fewer than 20 percent.
- **Eight of Toledo's top-rated schools, including six district and two charters, served much smaller proportions of economically disadvantaged students than the district; three top performers were almost entirely made up of students in poverty.** While the Toledo district averaged 77 percent low-income students, seven of the district's highest scorers served fewer than 50 percent, including Toledo School for the Arts, the highest-rated charter, which served only 32.5 percent economically disadvantaged students.
- **All but one of Toledo's high scorers served fewer students with disabilities.** There were no students with disabilities enrolled at the district's highest-rated school, Toledo Early College High School, according to state records. The three next highest-rated schools – Toledo Tech Academy High, Toledo School for the Arts, and Grove Patterson Academy Elementary – all served fewer than 10 percent students with disabilities, as did Horizon Science Academy-Springfield.

- **More than half of Toledo’s top-rated schools enroll fewer students than the district average.** Two district schools, Toledo Early College and Toledo Tech Academy, enroll fewer students than the district average of 424 students. With respective enrollments of 228 students and 176 students, Early College and Tech Academy also enroll far fewer students than the district’s three comprehensive high schools, averaging 900 students. Three of Toledo’s four top-rated charter schools enroll significantly fewer students than the district average.

## Youngstown

Two schools, Youngstown Early College, a district high school, and Youngstown Community School, a K-6 charter, were rated Excellent for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. Both schools had percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged students that were similar to the Youngstown district as a whole. Both had much lower percentages of students with disabilities. Youngstown Early College served no students with disabilities while Youngstown Community School served 12.2 percent, compared with 21.6 percent of students in the district.

|  | Enrollment | Black | Hispanic | Multi-racial | White | Economically disadvantaged | Student w/ disabilities |
|--|------------|-------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>District overall</b>                  | 327        | 67.1% | 11.2%    | 5.4%         | 16%   | 92.6%                      | 21.6%                   |
| <b>Top-rated schools</b>                 |            |       |          |              |       |                            |                         |
| Early College <sup>1</sup>               | 200        | 68.7% | 9.7%     | 9.5%         | 11.7% | 84.5%                      | 0%                      |
| Youngstown Community School <sup>2</sup> | 333        | 94.3% | 3.2%     | 0%           | 0%    | 91.8%                      | 12.2%                   |

**Source:** Policy Matters Ohio from Ohio Department of Education report-card data, 2011-12 school year.  
<sup>1</sup> Selective enrollment district school <sup>2</sup> Charter school

## Conclusion

Schools deserve recognition for positively impacting students’ lives and improving educational opportunities for children from underserved communities. Many of the top-rated schools in this report are doing this crucially important work. The hard work and dedication of teachers in all schools, especially those working within challenging circumstances, should be praised. But test scores are too often the only measure used to evaluate schools, and increasingly, teachers.

This focus leads many education advocates and policymakers to push the notion that simply replicating top-rated schools is the best solution for struggling urban districts. Our analysis shows that many of the highest-rated district and charter schools in Ohio’s cities don’t reach the same population served by struggling schools in those same urban districts. While much can be learned from some top-rated urban schools, as a whole they tend to serve fewer students from low-income families and lower percentages of children with disabilities than do the urban districts in which they are located. The majority of these schools also enroll fewer minorities than their home districts. It is essential that we create an educational system in which all children can learn and succeed. We should do that in smart ways, not by using misleading comparisons.

In addition to demographic differences, we found that many top-rated schools selectively enroll students, often based on academic criteria. Some of these practices are overt: requiring certain test results, GPA minimums, or prior foreign language experience. Subtler practices, like early enrollment deadlines, required school visits before enrollment, and cumbersome application processes, lead to self-selection as families with greater motivation or more savvy to navigate systems are more likely to get seats. While there may be a place for schools that employ such practices, in the end this approach undercuts the democratic principles of our public school system. Our work echoes the findings of other recent reports revealing how many charter schools, in particular, screen students<sup>13</sup> and employ selective criteria<sup>14</sup> to ensure they get the students they want. Other high-scoring schools benefit from proven policies, like small class sizes.

There are clearly some standouts among top-rated schools. When compared to urban districts, most of them serve a lower percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged, have disabilities, or come from black, Latino or multi-racial communities. But many of them still serve a high percentage of such students, certainly higher than many suburban districts. Selective enrollment policies cannot be a model for districts, which must be able to serve every student. But with adequate resources, small class sizes can, and this seems to be a factor that contributes to the success of many of these top-rated schools.

What goes into a school being rated Excellent or falling into Academic Emergency is more complex than a simplified report card. As appealing as a “no-excuses” approach may be, we must carefully examine success stories to figure out which successes are replicable and which are not. We need to find solutions that clearly assist educators working against great odds to educate every child who walks through their doors. To turn around urban schools we need to reward high performance, replicate what works, and be honest about what leads to excellence.

Ohio’s urban districts are taking promising steps to reach all children and families, and a focus on replicating top-rated schools that doesn’t run the risk of undermining other efforts. We urge advocates, reporters and policymakers to be honest about the challenges and avoid misleading comparisons.

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<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Simon, “Special report: Class struggle – How charter schools get the students they want”, Reuters, February 15, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/15/us-usa-charters-admissions-idUSBRE91E0HF20130215>.

<sup>14</sup> K.G. Wellner, (April 2013) “The dirty dozen: How charter schools influence student enrollment,” *Teachers College Record* [Online], <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 17104. For a summary of “The Dirty Dozen,” go to <http://cloakinginequity.com/2013/08/04/breaking-news-kevin-welners-charter-school-dirty-dozen/>.