

Agency Review
The Ohio Department of Education

Prepared for the
Strickland/Fisher Transition Team

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Executive Summary

Today in Ohio there is a renewed sense of hope, energy, and expectation about the power and significance of public education. New sources and forms of educational leadership and innovation are waiting to be unleashed. There is strong anticipation that the new Strickland/Fisher Administration will listen to and act upon recommendations for change that move Ohio toward a system of public schools that prepare all young people for a future of lifelong learning and engaged citizenship. This agency review focuses on the Ohio Department of Education's role and capacity to move this vision forward. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the leadership roles that ODE and the Governor could take to support public school renewal as part of the effort to "Turn Around Ohio."

Leadership from the Ohio Department of Education

Over the past decade ODE has played a key leadership role to move our system of public schools to where it is today. During this time educational standards have been developed and then linked to a system of assessments to measure how well these standards are being met. The Department has worked hard, despite some initial setbacks, to enhance information technology access to every school and to improve management information systems. It has spent considerable resources to increase awareness and to support ways of closing achievement gaps.

At the same time, there has been little significant progress on issues related to school funding and ODE has not been seen as being a positive force in the resolution of these issues. This includes a perceived failure on the part of ODE to devote its own resources to helping alleviate gaps in the 'conditions to learn' across the state. A growing charter school movement has caught the Department somewhat flatfooted in its capacity to monitor and regulate the financial and academic integrity of these new schools. Local school districts and classroom teachers have been staggered by increasing demands and decreasing resources, and have grown weary of *reforms done to them rather than with them*.

ODE faces a number of dilemmas. It is expected to be a strong enforcer of federal and state regulations while at the same time serve as a sponsor of innovation and partnership. It must serve a variety of masters that often are not of one mind (i.e., the federal government, the state board, the Ohio General Assembly, the Governor, the "field"). It manages a large array of data and information systems but it often is not seen as a credible source for policy and/or information analysis.

So how can ODE assets be optimized and ODE dilemmas be minimized? And what changes are needed in terms of its vision, leadership, organizational capacity, and culture? The following agency review begins with a four point list of *opportunities* for

ODE in the first section under “Major Issues” and returns to these four points in the last section under “Questions for Agency Leadership.” In brief, these four points are:

- Making school funding a question of intelligent accountability and infrastructure innovations while simultaneously dealing with issues of disparity and inequity;
- Creating a renewed commitment to standards based school renewal that moves beyond the current system in the name of developing higher order thinking skills, more sensitive and informative assessments, and pushing for federal changes in education law that better meet the needs of Ohio;
- Reviving the lagging morale of Ohio’s educators through moving to more of a partnership between educators in the field and ODE policy makers by using Ohio’s successes and research and development capacities in the name of school renewal;
- Articulating a clear and focused vision for ODE that brings together all of Ohio’s educational resources around coherent policy analyses and proposals, replicable educational innovations, and powerful local, regional, and state partnerships.

The leadership of the Department must move on these four opportunities with full commitment. As schools change so should their systems of support, and it is that sea change that must resonate throughout the Department.

Leadership from Ohio’s new Governor and Staff

While the Governor does not appoint the State Superintendent of Schools or the entire State Board of Education, he can use his budgetary powers as well as his position as head of state to lead on educational issues. He can further enlist the State Superintendent as well as educational leaders throughout Ohio to support an educational agenda. That agenda should simultaneously deal with Ohio’s school funding crisis and school renewal in ways that captures the attention and commitment of all Ohioans. Based on the issues raised throughout this Agency Review, short-term and long-term strategies are presented for consideration.

Short Term Opportunities and Strategies

As noted, there is a great deal of anticipation around the new Administration and its commitment to public education. In order to build on that anticipation and goodwill, the Governor could set out a short term agenda that yields immediate results for Ohio’s schools. Further, I should symbolically demonstrate a commitment to the state’s educators and children. This agenda could include:

- Some clear, symbolic recognition from the Governor himself that he believes in public schools and supports Ohio’s public educators.
- Budgetary relief in the next biennium budget as we wait for a restructuring of the entire system of financing schools. This could include holding harmless districts for students enrolled in the PSEO program, fully funding all day kindergarten in low wealth districts that currently offer this program, eliminating the sales tax on diesel fuel for school districts, fully funding the special education formula, increasing the transportation subsidy, using the

multi-program count for poverty-based assistance, funding poverty based assistance on the basis of costs, and similar items. These changes would both support districts that serve the most vulnerable of our students as well as supporting students taking advantage of college options during high school.

- Create a task force that is to report within a very short period of time on the charter/community school system. This report should include both a research and reform agenda. Research on how to use what is learned from charters to assist with school renewal. Reform that immediately closes charters which are not serving children and sets out new regulations for current and future charters in order to level the playing field with public schools and provide financial accountability.
- Regulatory relief for schools including a moratorium on any mandates for schools until a vision for where our schools are headed is developed (see long term items below).

Long-Term Opportunities and Strategies

The state currently lacks a clear direction for school renewal. As noted in this report, one policy analyst views Ohio's current state of affairs as an "incoherent rush to excellence." Nothing more clearly demonstrates this than the recent passage of the "Ohio Core" bill. While the general idea may in and of itself be positive (strong high school curricula taken by students), the structure set in place (designating more courses for students to take) does not fit with Ohio's standards based approach to school reform. The Governor's office could seize the current state of affairs as an opportunity to develop a long term strategy for schools in two ways:

- Through the use of a 'task force' or some other structure, develop a vision of what we want the education system in Ohio to look like in the near future. The work of this group should include traveling the state to visit outstanding programs already in place and to listen to Ohio's educators and citizens. The effort should be seen as building the public will to not only restructure our schools, but to provide the resources for this restructuring as well.
- Clearly the system of governing Ohio's schools is not functional. While the State Superintendent of Education is a constitutional office, some consideration must be given to the restructuring of school governance that brings PreK-16 and beyond under one roof. This could be done via the route of a constitutional amendment, or perhaps legislative action that restructures the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education. But if Ohio is to have a unified approach to educational improvement, the current system of governance must be reorganized.

With leadership from both ODE and the Governor's Office significant change can be made. Most importantly this leadership can draw on the willingness and energy of the educators and citizens of this state to ensure a high quality education for all of our children. Our best resource in this endeavor are the citizens of Ohio, they await the leadership to direct their efforts.

Agency Review
The Ohio Department of Education

A. Major Issues and Opportunities

The Ohio Department of Education has, over the past decade, taken on some major challenges including the development of Ohio's Content Standards, an overhaul of the assessment system linked to those standards, launching Ohio's Community Schools program, grappling with the nagging problem of school finance in the face of the DeRolph decision, and responding to the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The strengths and weaknesses of ODE in response to many of these pressures provide a way of looking at future opportunities for the Department. In fact, the opportunities identified frame the remainder of this review as they can encompass ODE's work in all of its key areas.

Strengths

1. ODE and Ohio's Content Standards

The Department is generally given positive marks for its leadership on the development of Ohio's Content Standards. Further, after nearly a decade of having a high stakes graduation test (the Ohio Proficiency Test) with no clear standards upon which to base either the test or instruction, the Content Standards provide Ohio Schools with a road map to overall instruction. The recent *Education Week* assessment of states and their standards places Ohio near the top in having clear standards and assessments linked to them.

2. Teacher Quality

The same *Education Week* assessment of states gave Ohio a grade of "B" when it comes to Teacher Quality (the national average was a grade of "C+"). This reflects the improvements led by the Department in the 'entry year' program for both teachers and administrators and the work of the Center for The Teaching Profession within ODE. The Education Standards Board created by Senate Bill 2 in 2004 has developed a fairly solid set of new standards for teachers and principals. The expected statewide implementation of these standards in 2007-2008 is a key opportunity for ODE to lead and serve school districts in a positive and powerful way. Districts are going to need help aligning these new standards with smart human resource policies and practices related to the selection, induction, professional development and assessment of teachers and principals. Clearly the single most important factor in the education any child receives is the quality of his/her teacher, and in this area Ohio has been making important strides.

3. Identifying Key Structural Levers for Change

ODE has helped identify some of the key areas for educational renewal through the issuing of several major studies. In 2003 the Department released *Toward High Achievement for All Students* which focused attention on the gaps in achievement between rich and poor, majority and minority students. In 2005 the Department released

High Schools for A Lifetime of Opportunity which identified major structural changes that were necessary and possible in order to increase the relevance, challenge, and engagement of high school students. This report was recently followed up with the Quality Middle and High Schools Subcommittee of the Ohio Board of Education's report on funding high school and middle school innovation. In 2006 ODE issued *From the Beginning* which provided an extensive set of recommendations for early childhood programmatic change in Ohio.

4. Particular Services offered by ODE

A number of areas and strategies within ODE are often cited as centers of strength and innovation. These include the following:

- “Ohio’s Schools To Watch” program which focuses on Middle Schools
- School nutrition programs in collaboration with outside non-governmental agencies
- The Center for the Teaching Profession
- Entry Year programs for teachers and administrators
- The D3A2 program being developed (see Information Technology section)
- Availability of data on the Department’s web site
- Fiscal services to districts in fiscal watch, caution, and/or emergency

Weaknesses

1. School Funding and Support

Virtually every discussion on public education in Ohio begins with the current system of funding public schools. This policy question is beyond the scope of this review and will not be solved by ODE. However, there are several areas in which it is perceived that the Department has not been an advocate or supporter of public schools when funding issues are addressed.

It is perceived by the field that ODE is not an advocate for solving issues of disparity when it comes to support for schools. In particular, amongst those districts that serve poor children (including but not limited to the urban and rural districts) there is a perception that ODE does not understand their issues and the need for additional support for these children.

ODE is perceived as failing to speak out about the resources needed to enable the public school system to meet the new demands being placed on the system in terms of accountability and closing the achievement gap. Rather than advocate for the schools, the Department is seen as pushing educators to ‘do more with less.’ For example, when benchmarks such as the Ohio Graduation Tests were put into place, ODE did not advocate for the resources that would help schools meet this new, higher standard. A similar issue occurred in the recent debates around the Ohio Core, with the department not providing leadership on what resources would need to be in place to carry out this program.

Finally, the Department receives low marks from the field in terms of its ability to get what resources it has ‘out the door’ to districts. Several examples include the slow response of the Department to moving the \$60 million in “Intervention” funds out to the districts, the inordinately slow movement on diagnostic testing which was requested and

funded in order to see what disparities low income students bring with them to school, and the recent missed projections on student enrollment state wide. In general, the Department is not seen as making the effort necessary to get what funds there are to deal with disparity to the districts in a smooth and timely fashion.

2. Accountability and Assessment

In general, the work of the Department on developing the current State Academic Content Standards was seen as a good thing. However, there is growing concern in the state that the approach used to assess the standards, with its exclusive reliance upon high-stakes standardized tests, is narrowing the focus of Ohio's schools. Throughout this review virtually all parties noted the loss of looking at the 'whole child' when it comes to education.¹

Additionally, to many practitioners, the assessments developed by ODE seem to be more about reporting scores than they are about understanding what children have learned. Ohio was one of the first states to respond to NCLB with a rather limited vision of what we wanted to know about student learning. ODE could, with the assistance of practitioners and the field, explore richer and deeper assessment tools but, to date, has shown little willingness to do this. Many schools which take innovative approaches to standards report that the current assessment system is beginning to tie their hands when it comes to approaches they know work with students. Part of this change could involve the 'value-added' approaches being led by Battelle For Kids. ODE must address the use of such systems and how they will satisfy NCLB reporting.

The overall challenge ODE faces is moving towards a more genuine "Standards Based System" which would include looking back at the standards to insure they are focused, clear, and fundamental; rethinking the State's current reliance on high-stakes single-test accountability; and giving local educators the support and freedom to move students to higher standards in ways that make sense in each school and community. The Department must assess whether it wants to be seen as an 'enforcer' of regulations or a 'supporter' of school renewal.

3. Charter Schools

Ohio's system of charter schools (called "community" schools under Ohio legislation) is viewed across the state as a train-wreck waiting to happen. Unfortunately, the perception is that there is little or no oversight coming from ODE on charters. The organizational arrangement for charter schools places this division under "Operations" as opposed to "Educational Programs" and this placement is widely viewed as politically motivated as the Operations office is directed by proponents of the charter school movement.

Ohio's urban districts are especially impacted by charters, not only through loss of students, but through the additional record-keeping they must take on to make sure the enrollments reported by charters are correct. Several districts report hiring additional staff just to handle this burden, using dollars that they need to educate their students in

¹ This reflects the findings of KnowledgeWorks Foundation's recent state wide survey where 57% of respondents said standardized tests ARE NOT an accurate indicator of a student's progress and abilities and 55% said public schools in Ohio place TOO MUCH of an emphasis on standardized tests ("Public Priorities for the Future of Ohio Education," KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2006).

order to carry out a record keeping function that they feel is more properly the purview of ODE.

Many educators feel that the playing field is not level when it comes to charters, pointing to everything from charters not being held accountable by ODE on testing to incomplete SF3 forms being submitted by charters and accepted by the Department. Several districts have secured their own legal counsel to deal with these issues. Charter schools themselves, as well as several educational foundations, have called for improving oversight in this area. The Department needs to examine how it plays its regulatory role in the area of charter schools. Additionally, if charters were intended to provide models of exemplary educational practices, ODE should do extensive research on these schools and share the lessons learned with the wider educational community.

4. Direction and Focus of ODE

The Department has been characterized as a ‘graduate seminar’. From month to month new ideas are brought forth, papers commissioned, reports filed, and then it moves on to the next interesting idea. Certainly as a department which has to respond to demands from the legislature, governor’s office, and its own board, some of this mission creep is to be expected. However, the overall agency seems unable and/or unwilling to shed some responsibilities or agendas in order to focus on its core mission. This may be due to the very way ODE sees itself. The mission of the agency (“To be the best state department of education in the nation.”) seems to almost invite the Department to take on every thing and all comers. Perhaps refocusing on providing service to the state’s schools so that every child has a high quality education that equips him/her for a life of learning would better focus the Department’s attention.

Opportunities

1. Funding Equity

In the often fractious debates over school funding and the funding formula, ODE could focus on leading in three ways:

- Devote its energy and expertise to making funding policy more a question of equitable use of state dollars to support core operations and provide ‘targeted funding’ to innovative work in our schools. ODE could play an important part in convening all the stakeholders around this issue, perhaps in conjunction with such efforts as the “Ohio Public School Dialogue” or the “Prepare the Future” initiative.²
- ODE could lead in connecting resources, creating partnerships, funding unfunded mandates, and unleashing local innovation to implement most effective parts of the wide range of reforms now going on (STEM, Ohio Core, PSEO, early childhood, high school reform, value added) targeted to *high poverty districts*

² Ohio Public School Dialogue is a 501c3 created to “Foster community dialogue activities that educate, engage and empower citizens to develop solutions and advocate change in school funding for the benefit of all Ohio’s students.” The Prepare the Future initiative is being launched in California, Colorado, and Ohio by David Hornbeck with the support of private funders to initiate community discussion of school funding and accountability.

particularly in rural and urban areas. Additionally, a targeted effort to provide these districts with the ability to attract and the strategies to keep good teachers could be developed.³ In this way, pending a restructuring of school funding, resources could be marshaled and targeted in Ohio's most fiscally challenged areas. Every possible resource should be marshaled in the name of closing 'opportunity to learn gaps' in Ohio's schools.

- To stem the flow of students to charter schools from the most challenged districts ODE could work with them to create meaningful choice within the public system. A careful examination of charter reform bills, such as SB129 in the 126th General Assembly, should be conducted by ODE with attention to how it would 'level the playing field' between charter/community schools and public schools. There is sufficient interest in this work to bring to the table some of Ohio's major foundations to both help with accountability here and to develop a research strategy on lessons that can be learned from effective charter schools.⁴ Further, ways of providing for choice within the public system such as the Ohio Alternative Education Challenge Grant Program could provide crucial lessons on such a strategy and be potentially targeted for increased support.⁵

2. Standards, Accountability, and Assessment

Ohio has the opportunity to turn its status as leading in the area of Standards Based reform into becoming the cutting edge for this type of work. ODE could lead an effort to develop a more genuinely 'standards based' system that focuses energy on core standards as opposed to trying to do all things for all people. This will require a multi-faceted approach that could center on three strategic areas:

- A careful revision of the content standards to make them more focused on the generative concepts in the fields and the logical processes in each area. The standards, while instructive, are often seen as 'a mile wide and an inch deep' especially in the areas of math, science, and social studies. A careful revision that *focused* rather than *changed* the standards would be a very powerful move.
- Rethinking assessment tools so that they are more comprehensive and not as reliant upon single test, high stakes, and standardized measures. Ohio could lead the nation in collaboration with other states and major foundations on an effort to look at the development of the 'whole child' in assessment strategies. The possibility for this work has been opened up by the US Department of Education's approval of Nebraska's assessment system which does not rely on a single, state-wide test.
- Working with key stakeholders, ODE could mobilize to influence and shape the upcoming reauthorization of NCLB to best serve Ohio's children and educational infrastructure. With a Democratic congress and Democratic governor in Ohio,

³ The work out of the Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, NC could be used to support school districts in creating the climates where teachers want to work in addition to the financial incentives necessary to keep good teachers in challenging environments.

⁴ See the Ohio Grantmakers Forum document, "Education for Ohio's Future," December, 2006.

⁵ A review of the Ohio Alternative Education Challenge Grant Program was produced by The Center for Learning Excellence at Ohio State University, 2006.

ODE could move from trying merely to meet NCLB standards to being a state that brings clarity and coherence to federal, state, and local educational policy.

3. Reinventing Ohio's Educational Professionals

According to surveys of Ohio's educators, teachers and administrators feel they do a good job but are not appreciated for the efforts they put forward. They believe they are constantly being asked to do more with less and are losing control of their profession. There is a sense that rather than rely upon the wisdom of Ohio's teachers and administrators, they seldom have a seat at the table when decisions are being made about educational policy. Further, much of the good work that has gone on in Ohio around educational renewal is not used as potential models for change in the state. As one foundation head put it, 'it seems as if most educational reform is done *to* schools rather than *with* them. You get a lot more buy in and work when you are working together as opposed to when you are merely obeying orders.'

The opportunity exists for the new Governor to state clearly his support for Ohio's educators and direct ODE to develop the capacity within the state for leadership, research, policy analysis, and innovation all focused on school renewal. In concert with the Governor using his bully-pulpit to elevate the education profession and to praise our system of public schools, ODE could develop additional services to the profession, bring more educators 'to the table' on reforms, and feature Ohio scholarship and innovation.⁶

4. Clarifying a Compelling Vision for ODE

As a hybrid agency, with its own board and beholden to the legislature for funding and the governor for direction, ODE has a difficult time establishing a clear and compelling vision for its work. However, given the centrality of its mission to the welfare of the state and its children, it is crucial that the Department play a leading role in any attempt to 'turn around Ohio.' With that in mind, the Department needs to develop a vision of itself and its mission that is single-mindedly focused on how to create classrooms where every child in Ohio is engaged, challenged, well-known, and supported in order that he/she can become the lifelong learner and engaged citizen our state and nation needs. This means re-examining organization, staffing, and internal budgeting so that the emphasis is on clear-eyed policy analysis, the creation of service networks that serve children not adults, and the development of powerful alliances that can support school renewal in every Ohio community.

⁶ In the past, ODE provided a platform for Ohio's educators to be viewed as leading efforts to improve schools. The Ohio Venture Capital program in the early 1990s funded locally developed reform efforts across the state and was captured in a series of reports put out by ODE. A similar program could again be launched with 'innovation zones' being clusters of schools working on innovative and cutting edge approaches to Ohio's educational challenges while being relieved of regulations that limit such creative approaches.

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B. Major Budgetary Issues

ODE has control over internal budgets and projects and can lobby the Governor and Ohio General Assembly for funding for particular projects. Additionally, the Department is a major source of federal dollars to Ohio through various targeted federal programs. The budgetary issues identified as well as future opportunities are tied to the four major opportunities for the Department identified under “Major Issues.”

Strengths

1. Accessing Federal Dollars

The Department has been successful in accessing federal dollars that often flow through to local schools districts. Most recently ODE was the first state agency to receive a Teacher Incentive Fund Grant in the amount of \$5 million from the federal government to focus on improving teacher talent and quality in Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, and Toledo. Through its work with the Children’s Hunger Alliance the Department has also been able to access federal dollars for programs that feed Ohio’s most needy children. While a recent federal audit raised some questions about the Department’s accounting for federal funds,⁷ in general these are small matters compared to the resources brought to the state by ODE.

2. Collaboration with Major Foundations

In collaboration with KnowledgeWorks Foundation, ODE assisted in bringing the Gates Foundation to Ohio to launch the only state-wide initiative around Gates’ small, personalized high schools program. ODE has worked with KnowledgeWorks Foundation in providing assistance to schools through leveraging state dollars and talent for this effort. Such collaboration is precisely what is needed if ODE is to redefine and refocus its mission.

Weaknesses

1. Outsourcing Expertise

ODE spends significant resources on outside vendors for core programs. For example, the current assessment system is estimated to cost over \$70 million a year to vendors outside of the State of Ohio. Additionally, consultants from around the nation are often brought in to create new programs while similar expertise in Ohio is underutilized. ODE should assess how to work with Ohio’s colleges and universities to develop the capacity to work in concert with our PreK-12 system on research, assessment, professional development, and school renewal. Had such an investment been made a decade ago in response to the developing standards based reforms and the lessons learned from the Venture Capital program, funds now spent on outside consultants would be redirected to Ohio’s own capacity for reform.

⁷ November 13, 2006, Final Audit Report of the Department of Education office of the Inspector General.

2. 'Red Tape'

Many district leaders report an abundance of red tape in applying for and accessing programmatic funds from the Department. Additionally, they report that they receive inconsistent answers from Department staff on regulations involving programmatic dollars. There is some concern that a 'revolving door' of key staff members has led to an inability to get consistent and helpful answers. As noted earlier, this was especially the case with intervention funds targeted to low income, low performing districts.

3. Lack of Targeting Resources

While ODE cannot change the school funding formula, it can use its discretionary dollars to get assistance to the districts which face the greatest resource challenges. As noted in the section on major issues, ODE needs to pull together all of its resources and do such targeting, not allowing political pressures to change how dollars are distributed to children in the most need.

Opportunities

1. Develop Capacity

Returning to the opportunities identified under 'major issues', ODE could focus its energy on developing the capacity for school renewal within Ohio. For example, in the areas of policy analysis, standards and assessment revisions, effective schooling models and practices, support and development of teachers and administrators, and community engagement with schools, the Department could utilize Ohio's universities, colleges, and schools to create networks of research and development expertise. The investment would be in 'turning around Ohio' through the use of the skills and abilities of our own citizens, making Ohio a center of educational resources.

2. Streamline Offices

A challenge in dealing with ODE is the changing cast of players that schools must deal with to get answers to fiscal questions. An opportunity for ODE in becoming more sensitive to the needs of Ohio's schools would be to rethink its fiscal services so that districts can get quick and responsive answers to their concerns.

3. Immediate retargeting of internal grants to neediest children

An immediate reassessment by the Department of its internal grant making programs should be undertaken to target districts serving Ohio's most needy students. Particular attention could be given to the funds for high school innovation which, in internal ODE documents funding eligibility, was initially designated for "all Districts in District Improvement Year Three" and then changed to "All Middle and High Schools"⁸ in a revised report. This means that wealthier districts with full time grant writers will be quicker to access these funds and the needs of Ohio's neediest children will be shortchanged. In general a policy that begins with any discretionary funds going to the

⁸ From "School Improvement Budget Strategy" and "Fund to Support Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships", Ohio State School Board Subcommittee on Quality Middle and High Schools, no date.

most fiscally and academically challenged districts should be instituted. This would begin to put the Department on record as working on funding disparities by targeting their own resources. (Again, see Opportunity Number One under Major Issues.)⁹

⁹ An example of targeting crucial funding dollars is in Illinois where the political coalition pushing early childhood education, Voices for Illinois Children (President Jerry Stermer, 208 LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill.), is pursuing an agenda of state support for early childhood beginning in those districts that serve the highest concentration of poor children.

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C. Regulatory Review

One of the tensions that the Department faces is that it is in charge of regulating the same schools and educators that it is also charged with supporting and assisting. Further, the Department must often take on regulation practices given to it by the General Assembly when the regulatory environment is not clear. Again, the opportunities identified in this section are linked to those identified in the lead section on “Major Issues.”

Regulations that Generate the Most Traffic for ODE

1. Regulations related to the educational accountability system, more particularly the achievement and graduation tests.
2. Regulations relating to funding and financial reporting.
3. Regulations relating to provision of services to special needs and gifted students.
4. Regulations relating to teacher certification and training.
5. Regulations relating to operations, including EMIS/ESIS and student attendance.

Regulations that Generate the Most Controversy for ODE

1. Regulations related to the educational accountability system.
 - It is perceived that the department lacks flexibility and often insists that ‘this is the way the legislature/federal agency wants it’ even when other districts or states receive waivers or alternatives.
2. Regulations related to charter schools.
 - Generally believed that ODE is falling down on its duty to insure quality of these schools.
3. Regulations related to funding and financial reporting.
 - Unclear and shifting regulations, making it difficult to obtain funds in a timely manner.
4. Regulations related to teacher training and certification.
5. Regulations related to special needs students.
 - For four and five, a concern that answers vary depending upon whom one talks to.

Opportunities

1. Leading on NCLB and Standards Based Reform

As noted under Opportunity Number Two, Major Issues, ODE could put Ohio on the map as a leader in standards based reform and work with its congressional delegation and governor in the reauthorization of NCLB to make this national legislation more flexible in meeting state and local needs. Further, this could be a form of *regulatory*

relief, as it could reduce the number and frequency of test administrations, focus and sharpen our Content Standards, and provide opportunity for local districts to use innovative strategies to meet state and federal mandates.

2. Charter Schools

As noted in Opportunity Number One, Major Issues, ODE could marshal a wide range of stake holders, including members of the General Assembly, to bring some regulation to the current chaos in Ohio's Community Schools program. This would not only be done in the name of leveling the playing field between charters and public schools, it could also include a serious research agenda, based in Ohio's universities and colleges, to find out what can be learned from the charter school experience in order to improve all schools in Ohio.

3. Redirecting Resources

Again referring to Opportunity Number One, Major Issues, internal operations of ODE should be shaped so all regulations were focused on the quickest provision of the most resources to our children who live in poverty.

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D. Interagency Cooperation

Given that the Department deals with a distinct time period in the life of every Ohio citizen, from birth to approximately age eighteen, ODE needs to work in concert with other agencies concerned both with this age group cohort along with the agencies that work with Ohioans immediately after they leave school. This provides a wide range of possibilities for interagency cooperation. This review only highlights the most wide-ranging of these connections.

Strengths

1. Early Childhood Education

As noted, ODE produced the “From the Beginning” report which could focus attention on the prenatal to kindergarten years for our children. It is currently only in report status and while it has the possibility of genuine movement here it will face the challenge of multiple agencies, including the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS). The question is whether or not ODE is the appropriate center for this work and how it will marshal resources to take it on. Additional components of this work include the Help Me Grow initiative and Head Start.

2. Childhood Nutrition

ODE manages the food programs that flow through the schools, including the summer programs. It is cooperatively run with non-governmental agencies as well as ODJFS and Agriculture.

Weaknesses

1. PreK-16 work

In spite of the fact that the transition from high school to college is crucial, ODE and The Board of Regents continue to have difficulty in working together. The Partnership for Continuous Learning is a start on this effort; however public educators are woefully under-represented on this panel. Additionally, the panel is more a creature of special interests than it is of thoughtful educators. The panel has met approximately four times and has yet to produce extensive work documents. The Governor has appointment powers on this panel as well as chairs it.

2. Medicaid Funds for Students with Special Needs

This is cited only as a weakness because ODJFS failed to follow through on nearly \$68 million that were available to Ohio’s poor children with special needs through the CAVS program. This was not seen as a failing of ODE. Ohio is *one of only two states* that have not benefited from this program.

Opportunities

1. PK-16 Articulation

The Department could use its seat on the Partnership for Continuous Learning to push for the one major change that virtually everyone agrees is necessary—a system of tracking student success through the public school system all the way to college graduation. It is unclear that this Partnership will accomplish anything else, but this one task would feed directly into Opportunity Numbers Three and Four under Major Issues by providing ODE with the research base to move forward on a wide range of initiatives.

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E. Information Technology

Clearly our children will be asked to navigate a world of information technology that was only imagined just a decade ago. The Department will need to be flexible and nimble in supporting how Ohio's students obtain equitable access to the technology tools every Ohio citizen will need.

Strengths

1. SchoolNet

The Department took a lead role in working to create equitable access for all Ohio's children through the SchoolNet program. This effort brought computers and infrastructure to all schools through grade eight. The Department has also been effective at helping schools access the 'erate' programs for additional services for schools serving low income areas.

2. D3A2

This new initiative integrates the work and technologies of multiple organizations across the state to provide web-based access to data and educational resources for use in the classroom. D3A2 leadership has leveraged existing technologies while adding state and federal funds to provide tools to all districts, especially those who traditionally could not afford such services. Participation in the program is free and voluntary to districts and educators. A forthcoming case study of the program notes that "In a departure from many state education agency efforts, the Ohio Department of Education abandoned a top-down, state-owned solution in favor of a customer-centric approach...State and local education leaders should view D3A2 design as a lesson as to what can be accomplished by focusing on the essential purpose of data in education and leveraging the resources and expertise of stakeholders rather than on ownership and top-down control."

Weaknesses

1. eTech

Not a product of ODE, eTech combined educational broadcasting and SchoolNet. This has been seen as a failure by the field as it abandoned the agenda of providing services and support to all of Ohio's children.

2. Looming Infrastructure Crisis

The aging infrastructure from SchoolNet is beginning to drain school district resources. There was not a plan to continue to maintain these services when SchoolNet was launched and now multiple districts have broken or unserviceable computers taking up space in classrooms. Additionally, there is no plan for providing broadband access to rural areas in order to take advantage of new technologies. In sum, districts across the

state face a crisis of fiscal support for repair, replacement, upgrades, and in-service training.

Opportunities

1. Marshaling Partnerships and Network for IT Development

Linking back again to the opportunities identified under “Major Issues”, ODE could step forward as a builder of networks and partnerships to facilitate a renovation of the aging information technology system in Ohio’s schools. At a minimum this would include:

- Cooperatives across Ohio’s learning organizations, including colleges, schools, universities, libraries, etc. to purchase information resources and data bases at reduced costs.
- Providing ‘technology coordinators’ on a shared basis across districts to facilitate both cost savings and coordination of services and purchases.
- Designing a ‘look back’ system focused on the parts of SchoolNet that either were not completed or need to be updated.

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F. Stakeholder and Constituent Groups and Relationships

The Ohio Department of Education has perhaps the largest group of stakeholders and constituent groups of any agency; that being every child, parent, citizen, employer, and post-secondary educator in Ohio. The ability of the Department to be involved as a leader in the effort to ‘turn around Ohio’ will be dependent upon its relationship with all of these stakeholders. Perhaps nothing is more important to the Department’s ability to move on the opportunities presented in this review than these relationships.

Strengths

1. Provision of Services

There are a number of areas previously identified in this review that are cited as strengths in developing positive relationships with constituent groups and stakeholders. These include:

- Assistance to schools in fiscal emergency;
- Centers such as the Center for the Teaching Profession, the D3A2 initiative, SchoolNet, receive high marks.

2. Leadership on Standards

The Department worked with a large number of stakeholders in developing the Ohio Content Standards, engineering a complex task over a number of years.

3. Reporting of Information

The Department provides extensive information, readily available to the press, researchers, and the public, on its website. This information is made accessible promptly and without charge to all interested parties.

Weaknesses

1. Advocacy on Behalf of Fiscal Equity

As noted, the Department is not seen as an advocate for rethinking Ohio’s system of funding nor focusing attention on the disparities of the system. For example, ODE is perceived as missing opportunities to advocate for greater resources for schools in the way in which it reports the fiscal challenges many districts face. ODE’s 2006 “Analysis of School District Five-Year Forecasts” based on the October 31, 2006 Forecast Submissions reported that 164 of Ohio’s districts are facing negative fund balances within the next three years. This could have been an opportunity to highlight this problem through requesting a hearing with the legislature or through public communications. Rather, the report was quietly submitted and a search of available press reports reveals no activity on this matter.

2. Partnerships with the Field

There is a sense in the profession that educators in the field are not partners with ODE, making it difficult to work together on educational renewal. In conducting interviews for this review, the words of one superintendent summed up the thinking of many when she said: “We are willing to be accountable for what we do; in fact, no one is more accountable than local school people as we meet parents and students face to face every day. Nobody holds you more accountable than the parent who meets you in the grocery store and wants to know what you are going to do to improve the quality of a teacher...But when it comes to controlling what we are doing, we just are not at the table when decisions are being made. We need to be invited in and asked to be a part of school reform, we’d be happy to be asked and to work collaboratively with the Department.” When teachers and administrators are asked to be part of the Department’s work, they often feel as if they were ‘window dressing.’

3. Regulations

As noted earlier, many regulations seem to be applied in an inconsistent manner. It should be noted again that this often brings up the issue of changing personnel and a lack of oversight of charter/community schools.

4. Services Sensitive to Context

Educators in both urban and rural settings feel that ODE does not have either a rural or urban agenda or strategy. There is a concern in the field that Department staff lack experience in these settings and thus are unresponsive to the special needs these locations face.

Opportunities

1. Reinvigorating the Department and Its Mission

Consistent with the opportunities noted in Major Issues, focusing on relationships with the field would provide ODE with an opportunity to ‘Clarify the Mission of ODE’. Particular steps would include the following:

- Symbolic changes involving changing the motto of the Department’s and access to ODE offices;
- Recognizing the diverse needs of Ohio’s schools through establishing offices that focus on urban and rural schools;
- Elevating the public stature of the good work that is going on in Ohio through promoting the innovations that have gone on under the leadership of Ohio’s educators.

2. Changing the Culture at the Department

It is crucial that the culture that emanates from the Department is one of flexibility, innovation, and respect for the field. Currently this is not the case and if the Department expects to have a collaborative relationship with educators in the field a culture shift within the Department will have to occur. Such a shift is totally the responsibility of the Department and its leadership.

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G. Job Creation Opportunities

Too much is made of schools as being a source of economic turn around. Such an effect on the economy of school renewal would only be secondary; with the primary effect being upon attracting industry and employers due to quality of life, including quality schools. But as a direct generator of employment, the Department could use its resources in several ways consistent with early opportunities noted to create employment within Ohio's borders.

Opportunities

1. Early Childhood Education

If the Department were able to leverage the political capital and instigate an early childhood education initiative there is evidence that providing such services would produce somewhere in excess of 50,000 jobs in Ohio (including direct care and ancillary services).

2. Developing Research, Design, and Innovative Capacity

It has been noted above that the Department uses multiple vendors and consultants to complete its work. If instead that work had been directed by consultants and vendors within the state through a careful building of capacity, multiple jobs could have been created. For example, the current assessment system sends \$68 million per year to a testing firm located outside of Ohio. The development of such assessments in collaboration with our state universities could keep that money within the state as well as provide multiple research and development opportunities.

See Opportunity Number One, Budgetary Issues (page 12) for notes on developing educational support capacities in Ohio in multiple areas. Carrying out this recommendation would produce jobs within Ohio connected with the renewal of our public schools.

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Closing Comments
Questions for Incoming Agency Head to Consider

As stated in the introduction to this review, there is a great deal of hope, expectation, and energy focused on the new Strickland Administration in the area of education. The Governor-elect made education a central issue in his campaign and some of his greatest sources of support were public school educators and citizens concerned with the future of Ohio's public schools. Speaking for many educators, the leader of one urban teachers' union put it: "We viewed Ted's election as a life or death matter for our schools."

The reservoir of pent up energy amongst Ohio's educators and educational organizations is vast and ready to be tapped in the name of turning around Ohio's schools. The question will be whether or not the Ohio Department of Education can join with the Governor's office in leading such an effort. It will be an effort that will certainly build on the good work of the past decade, but will now require the Department to turn to doing things in a more collaborative, innovative, and flexible manner. The following questions are put forth in order to help ascertain whether or not the Department can make such a transition.

Question One: Can the Department of Education focus attention on issues of school funding and the funding formula in order to bring together the key stakeholders in public education around a solution to an issue that overshadows all discussions of Ohio's schools?

In the best possible of all scenarios the Department would link school funding to on-going school renewal in a way that Ohio's citizens would see increased dollars for schools resulting in continuously improving outcomes for children. The issue is whether or not the Department can lead this effort in a timely fashion so that Ohioans do not have to wait any longer for this issue to be addressed.

Pending solving all of Ohio's funding issues, the Department could develop a strategy around support for our most fiscally challenged urban and rural districts that connects resources, builds capacity, funds unfunded mandates, and unleashes local innovations. These could all be directed to taking the best of what is on the table in Ohio to insure that every student has access to high quality teachers, a challenging and engaging curriculum, and school environments that value every student.

Question Two: Can the Department develop a strategy to re-engage the education community in a thoughtful consideration of the next steps on 'standards based' reform that will not be more of the same but rather a 'break the mold' approach to teaching and learning?

Ohio was one of the early compliers with NCLB and has been given high ratings nationwide on its work to date on standards and assessment. But we should not rest on our laurels. Instead, ODE could engage the educational community and the state's many foundations in looking back at the standards to insure they are about learning how to

learn, in revisiting assessments so they get at the ‘whole child’, and in guiding reforms on NCLB that better reflect the needs of children in our state.

Question Three: Can ODE take the lead in elevating the status of our public school educators and public schools so that they are viewed with pride by the people of Ohio?

Educators are Ohio’s most valuable resource in meeting the needs of our students. In recent years this resource has come to think of itself as marginal to the discussions about school renewal, even though they are called upon to do the work. In concert with the bully-pulpit of the Governor, the Department could bring to the state’s attention the good work that has been done in Ohio’s schools and turn to Ohio’s schools, colleges, universities, and learning institutions to lead the next phases of school innovation and renewal. But it will take revisiting the relationship between ODE and the field and rebuilding a partnership that is fairly strained at this time.

Question Four: Can the Department develop and clarify a compelling vision of itself as a leader in policy analysis, a cultivator of replicable innovations state wide, and a developer of powerful local, state, and national partnerships on behalf of an equitable and adequate education for all of Ohio’s children?

“Turning around Ohio” will take more than good will; it will take leadership around a vision that builds from what is good in our schools in order to change what is not working. Ohio’s current system of educational reform has been referred to as an “incoherent rush to excellence.” What is now needed is focus and a commitment to the long term hard work that is needed if our schools in every community are to improve. Whether or not the Department has the capacity for such redirection of its mission may be central to any part it will play in partnership with the new administration and its efforts to ‘turn around Ohio.’

APPENDIX I

Agency Review Ohio Department of Education

Process Document Prepared by Michael Wood

George Wood with the assistance of Dan Hoffman and Michael Wood collected the data used in the Dept. of Education Agency Review. A list provided by the Governor's Transition team was used as the basis of who was involved in the review. Additional individuals who represented various constituencies and experiences in the field were contacted and asked to be involved in the effort. Input was gathered during a three-week period, using three different techniques.

All of these stakeholders were initially invited to contribute via an online survey that utilized the list of questions provided by the Transition Team. There were 92 respondents to the online survey. The secondary method was a series of small group meetings. Two meetings were held with the Ohio 8 Coalition, one with the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, one Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS), and one with the Campaign for Ohio's Future. There were also two group meetings composed mainly of teachers and administrators who wished to more actively be involved in the process.

Finally, Dr. Wood and Dr. Hoffman held roughly 20 one-on-one or small group meetings with various stakeholders who requested them. These meetings took up the greater amount of one week and were used to delve more deeply into concerns and topics that were not addressed in the original survey. At least an hour of time was offered to anyone who asked for it, and we believe this gave everyone adequate time and opportunity to address whatever concerns they might have had about the Ohio Department of Education.

What follows is an enumeration of the survey respondents. More detailed lists are also included for the one-on-one meetings and the group meetings.

Survey Responses Came From:

teachers/professors: 21
administrators: 25
union leaders: 2
agency directors: 30
parents/concerned citizens: 12
public officials: 2

Group meeting attendees included, but were not limited to (in chronological order):

Ohio 8

Rhonda Johnson, President Columbus Education Association

Will Bagnola, President Youngstown Education Association.,
Sue Taylor, President Cincinnati Federation of Teachers
Marva K. Jones, Interim Superintendent, Canton City Schools
William Wendling, president of Wendling Communications, executive director of the Ohio 8 Coalition,
Dr. Eugene Sanders, CEO and Superintendent, Cleveland City Schools,
Sam Dorto, President Canton Professional Educators
Dr. Sylevester Small, superintendent, Akron City Schools
Bill Siegfert, President Akron Education Association
John Foley, Superintendent, Toledo City Schools
Francine Lawrence, President Toledo Federation of Teachers
Sue Taylor, President Cincinnati Federation of Teachers
Joanne DeMarco, President Cleveland Teachers Union
Fred Fastenau, CAE, Assoc. Exec. Director, Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators

OHEA

Dennis Reardon, Executive Director, OHEA
Deidra Reese, Director, Governmental Services, OHEA
Karen Fulton, Director, Education Policy and Coalition Relations, OHEA
Melissa Clark, Lobbyist, OHEA
Russ Harris, Education Research Development Consultant, OHEA

Campaign for Ohio's Future

William Phillis, Executive Director, Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding and representatives from all of the participating organizations

CORAS

Dick Fisher, Executive Director, Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS)
Lori Snyder-Lowe, Superintendent, Morgan Local
Bob Caldwell, Superintendent, Wolf Creek Local
Dale Dickson, Superintendent, Perry-Hocking ESC
Phil Satterfield, Superintendent, Ross-Pike ESC
Tom Gibbs, Superintendent, Warren Local
Jerry Narcisi, Retired Superintendent, Shadyside Local

Administrator Associations

Dick Maxwell Executive Director, Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA)
Jerry Klinke, Assistant Director, BASA
Richard Lewis, CAE, Executive Director, Ohio School Boards Association,
Fredrick B. Pausch, Director of Legislative Services, Ohio School Boards Association,

Ohio Fair Schools Campaign

Debbie Phillips, Director, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign,
Scott Piepho, Regional Organizer, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign,

Steve Steel, Director of Field Organizing, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign,
Marina Hopkins, Regional Organizer, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign,
Amy Lipka, Acting Director, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign,

Southeastern Ohio Group

Max Evans, Professor (ret.), Ohio University
Cindy Hartman, Superintendent, Southern-Perry County School Dist.
Luther Haseley, Professor (ret.), Ohio University
Tom Davis, Professor, Ohio University
Joette Weber, Teacher, Chauncey Elementary School
Marcia Burchby, Teacher, Amesville Elementary School

Large Group 1

John Celebrezze, Administrator (ret.), Findlay Public Schools
Kathy DiCristofaro, Teacher, Youngstown Public Schools, Youngstown State University
Bart Anderson, Superintendent, Education Service Center of Franklin County
Phyllis Magold, Teacher (ret.) Westerville City Schools
Laquore Meadows, Program Coordinator, Ohio State University
Adam Miller, Attorney at Law, Roetzel & Andress
John Stanford, Special. Assistant to the Superintendent, Columbus Public Schools
Rosemary Tolliver, Director of Curriculum (ret.), Gallipolis City School Dist.
Theresa Bryant, Director of Technology, Reynoldsburg City Schools
Gene Harris, Superintendent, Columbus City Schools
Ann Johnson, Educational Archaeologist, Mac-A-Cheek Foundation
Bruce Keller, Superintendent, Vermilion Local Schools,
David Weber, Teacher (ret.),
Patricia Lynch, President, Dayton Education Association,

Large Group 2

Mark Abramson, Attorney at Law, Robison, Curphey & O'Connell,
Julie Baker, Assistant Superintendent, Franklin County Schools
Michael Barnes, Professional Specialist/Mathematics Teacher, Columbus Public
Schools/Evaluation Services
Damien Bawn, Superintendent, Danville Local School District
Thomas Conlan, Jr., TL Conlan Jr & Assoc
Lisa Hall, Life Skills Teacher, ScholARTS Preparatory and Career Center for Children
Paul Kulik, Associate Research Professor/ Associate Director SSCO, University of
Dayton-Columbus Center/School Study Council of Ohio
Wendy Leatherberry, President, Cleveland Heights Board of Education,
Bob Springer, Ret. CEO, Allstate Insurance, Marietta Ohio
Diane Suiter, Principal, Middletown City Schools,
Apryl Morin, Executive Assistant , Ohio Council of Community Schools
Ann Sheldon, Executive Director, Ohio Association for Gifted Children
Kevin Snarr, Director of Special Projects, East Clinton High School
Susan Taylor, President, Cincinnati Federation of Teachers

Deb Tully, Director of Professional Issues, Ohio Federation of Teachers
Nancy Verber, Volunteer, Strickland Campaign Policy Team
Steven Steel, Board of Education, Toledo Public Schools

Individual Meetings (in chronological order):

Fred Fastenau, Assoc., Exec, Director, Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
Adam Miller, Attorney at Law, Roetzel & Andress
Thomas Conlan, Jr., TL Conlan Jr & Assoc
Shirley Curtis, Principal, Forest Hills School Dist.
Mark Real, Director, Kids Count Ohio
Dan Pallente, Assistant Principal, Marlinton High School
Stanley Miller, Director, Cleveland NAACP
Nick York, Attorney at Law, Tucker Ellis and West, LLP
Rosemary Tolliver, Director of Curriculum (ret.), Gallipolis City School Dist.
Richard A. Stoff, President, Ohio Business Roundtable
Darold Johnson, Director of Legislation and Political Action, OFT, AFL-CIO
Jim Mahoney, Executive Director, Battelle for Kids
Marie Hanna, Assistant Principal, Connections Academy
Joseph Rugola, Executive Director, OAPSE-AFSCME
Patti Eschman, Sr. Vice President, Public Policy, Children's Hunger Alliance
Dianne A. Radigan, Chief Operating Officer, Children's Hunger Alliance
Pam Young, Director, Accreditation Office, University of Dayton School of Education and Allied Professions
Lisa Grey, Director of Policy and Communications, Ohio Business Roundtable
Pat McCune, National Charter Schools Administration