

Overview of Community Schools for 2007-2008

In Ohio, public charter schools are called community schools. Since the first law establishing such schools was passed by the General Assembly in 1997, Ohio has seen the continuing development of community schools as vehicles that offer choice for families and programming that may be different from that of the larger school district.

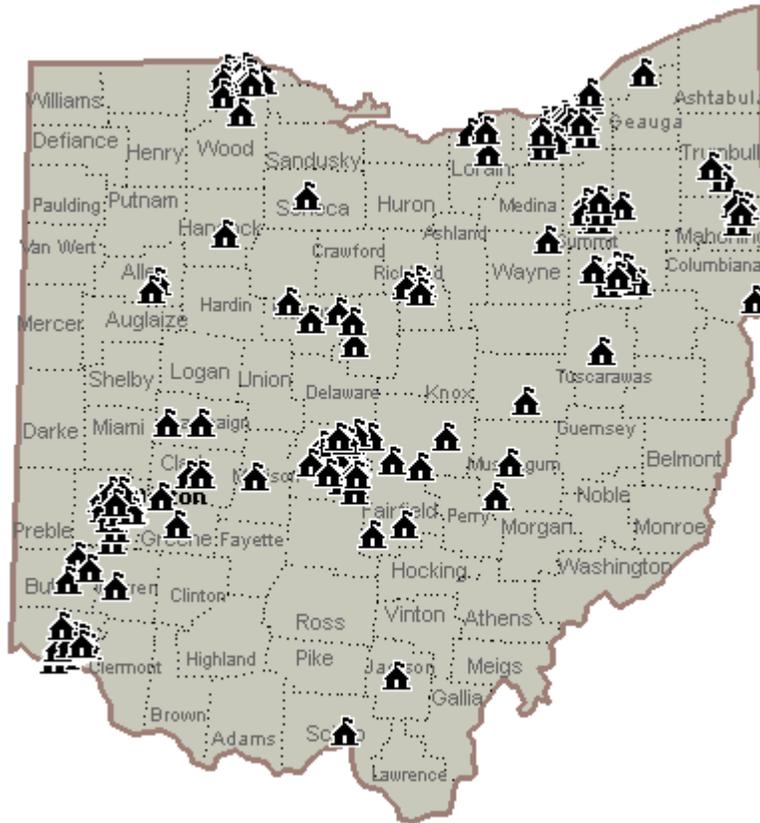
In 1998, the State Board served as an authorizer, or sponsor, of community schools while it also served as the regulatory agency overseeing their operation and legal compliance. That dual role ended in 2005, when legislation took effect that required schools previously sponsored by the State Board of Education to find a new sponsor that would authorize their continued existence. Currently, ODE's Office of Community Schools (OCS) approves and oversees organizations wishing to serve as new sponsors of Ohio Community Schools and provides oversight to sponsors which are required by law to enter into sponsorship agreements with ODE.

The evolution of the state's role – from an authorizer of community schools to that of the instrument applying monitoring and legal compliance measures to ensure school performance – was an important and necessary step. Now, as operational experience and research have shown, sponsors are the key instruments in the performance and success of community schools, and OCS has directed its efforts in expanding sponsor capacity to enable school success. As authorizers, the organizations serving as sponsors are the crucial vehicle for ensuring academic performance, financial reporting, quality control and technical assistance, as well as for communicating the role of community schools in Ohio. It remains the responsibility of the OCS to expand its work with sponsors so that community school authorizers, their schools, and the students and families that depend on them, will be the beneficiaries. To that end, technical assistance efforts directed at increasing the capacity of sponsors to support as well as monitor community schools under their authorization remain a priority for the OCS.

The work of sustaining high quality and high performing schools – whether public or private – is not an easy task. This annual report will demonstrate the progress made since the passage of the "pilot" community school legislation in June 1997.

Map of Community School Locations in Ohio

Figure 1 indicates the locations of the 326 community schools operating in Ohio during the 2007-2008 school year.



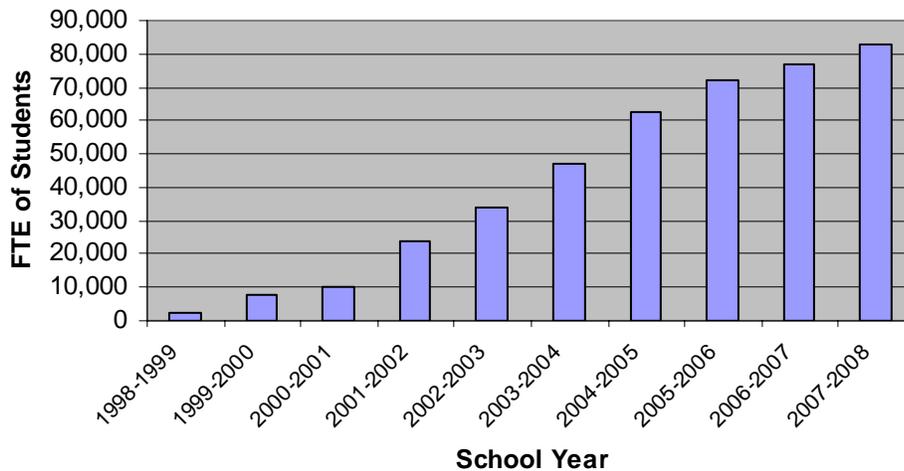
Community schools are public, nonprofit, nonsectarian schools that operate independently of any school district but under a contract with a sponsoring entity that is established in statute or approved by ODE. Community schools are public schools of choice and are state and federally funded. These schools are designed by statute to trade higher levels of accountability for greater flexibility in programs, and often serve a limited number of grades or target a specific student population. This flexibility provides community school teachers multiple paths to design unique curriculum. However, in designing these new curriculum and instruction models, the schools must still meet all state requirements for testing and performance.

There are two types of community schools. Conversion community schools, those in which part or all of an existing traditional public school is transformed into a community school, may be sponsored by any public school district in the state, with the exception of joint vocational school districts. New legislation approved by the 127th General Assembly now permits educational service centers to sponsor conversion community schools under certain conditions.

The second type, new start-up community schools, may be located only in "challenged school districts," presently defined as the "Ohio Eight" urban public school districts (Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown), and districts designated as being in academic emergency or academic watch.

This annual report on the condition of community schools is prepared in the 11th year since their establishment by the Ohio General Assembly, with the first community school "pilot" program in June 1997 and the first school opening in 1998. In June 2008, more than 82,000 Ohio students were enrolled in 326 schools operating during the 2007-2008 school year.

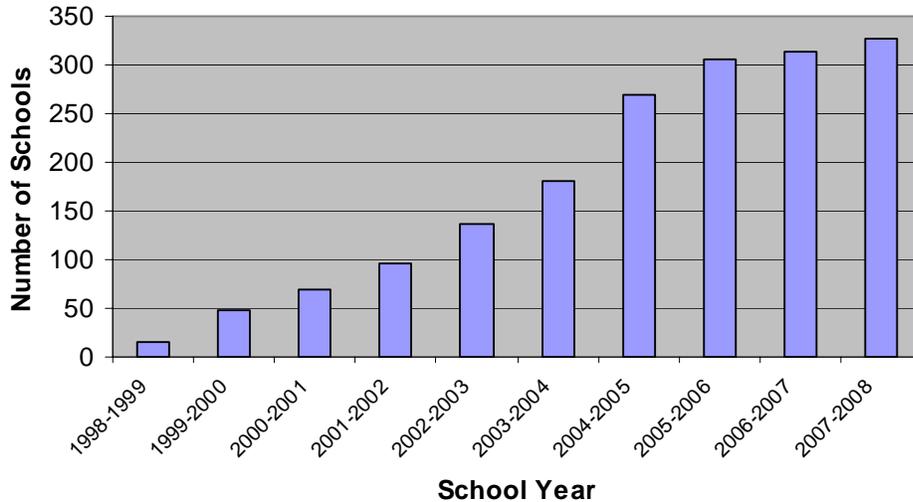
Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of Students by School Year



The element of choice provides parents and families the option of enrollment in a public school that may have unique characteristics compared to the school in a prescribed attendance area. Autonomy is an element that allows educators to work in a structure and environment that is more responsive than that of larger, more traditional schools. But it is the element of accountability that addresses the interests of key stakeholders, including policymakers, who a decade ago made a commitment to foster educational choice while ensuring that schools meet educational, financial, governance and assessment targets.

Among the elements that comprise the community school environment, the principle of accountability has been strengthened significantly in recent years. The new Sponsor Performance Review is one of the newest accountability tools and is designed to view sponsors as the agent for community school quality control. In the further development of sponsors as an instrument of school success, the Sponsor Performance Review is therefore the key to ensuring the accountability of sponsors for school quality and student achievement. The Sponsor Performance Review, coupled with the requirements of ORC 3314.35 for school closure as a consequence of poor performance, is detailed elsewhere in this report.

Number of Community Schools by School Year



Accountability and Community School Academic Programs

Accountability for community schools is set forth in state and federal law, as well as in each community school's contract with its sponsor. Community schools must define their curriculum and performance goals in their contract, employ highly qualified educators, and administer state proficiency and graduation tests.

While community schools are not held to the state's operating standards, students must participate in all state-required assessments, including the Ohio Graduation Test, and with the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, including adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the employment of highly qualified teachers. Moreover, community schools must close if they do not demonstrate increased academic performance under the new Value-added metrics or their state performance rating. There can be no stronger accountability instrument for community schools than school closure, and school administration, staff, governing boards, parents and sponsors are keenly aware of the importance of high performance and results under Ohio law.

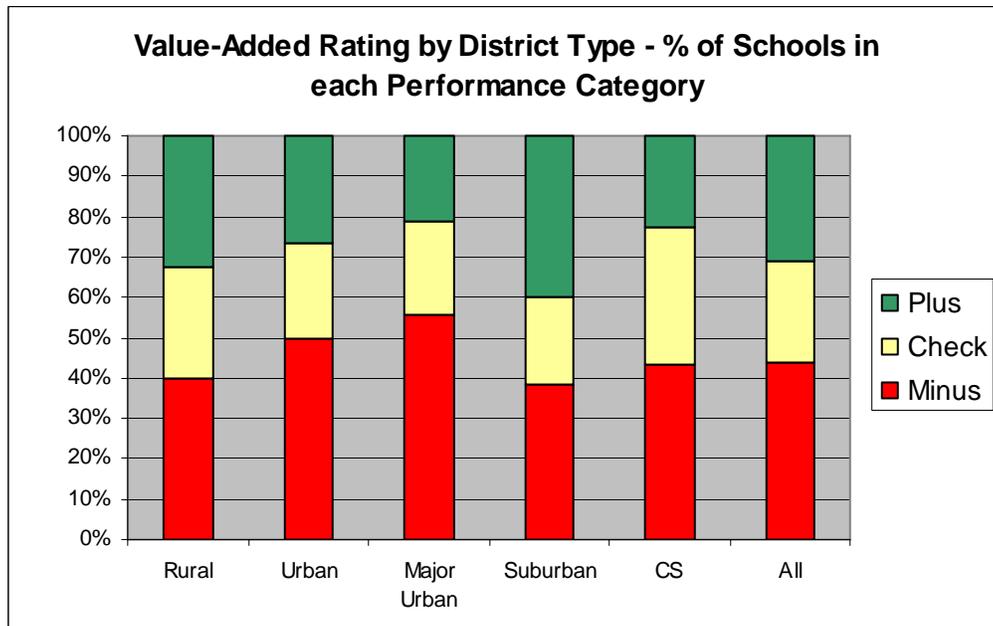
The Local Report Card, AYP, and Value-added requirements, coupled with the attending consequence for school closure, have raised the accountability bar and the consequences for low-performing community schools. An additional accountability element is found in the new Ohio Core requirements that affect Ohio high school students graduating after 2010. New requirements in math, such as the inclusion of Algebra II, and a more thoroughly defined elective program, including the choice of a combination of foreign language, fine arts, business, career-technical and other courses, will require changes in school staffing, including the composition of community school teachers.

Newer types of student performance data models are changing how schools are measured and thus viewed in the public eye. For example, Value-added analysis is a statistical method used to measure a school's impact on the rate of student progress from year to year. Value-added analysis has the potential to be one of the most important school improvements. Using

this growth metric, schools receive valuable diagnostic information that will help determine the impact of their curriculum and instructional practices on student achievement.

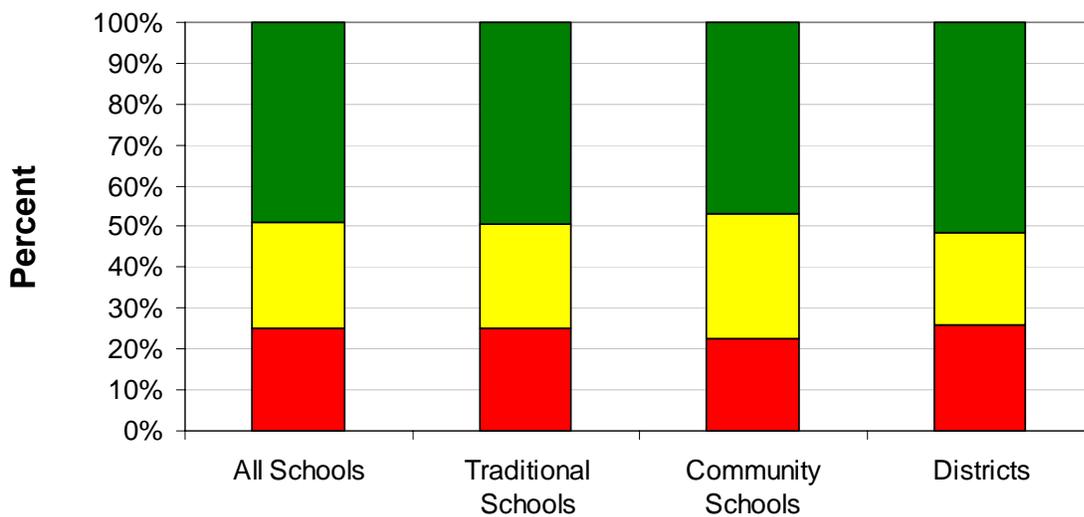
In fall 2007, ODE’s Office of Policy and Accountability initiated a review of recent Value-added data and found that there was no significant difference in the size of Value-added gains among traditional and community schools that received Value-added ratings.

The following tables have been updated using 2008 data to continue an examination of school performance by category and organizational structure. This type of reporting will contribute to a better understanding of how students learn in any type of school.



Relationship of Value-Added Gains to Organization Type

All Grade Composite



Accountability and Community School Sponsors

In Ohio, the sponsor is the agent or authorizer for the establishment of community schools. Community schools are created when individuals, acting as the founding coalition or governing authority, seek sponsorship from an authorized sponsoring organization. As authorizers of community schools, sponsors serve as the central quality-control agent in the development of this system of public charter schools.

Upon signing a community school contract, these individuals (the founding coalition) become the governing authority of the school. The community school contract specifies the academic, fiscal, governance and accountability plans the school's governing authority is responsible for carrying out. The sponsor and the governing authority are the only two parties to the contract. Each contract is reviewed by OCS to ensure that all required elements are included in the agreement. Contracts that do not contain all of the legally required elements are returned to the sponsor for modification or amendment.

In an accountability environment, the role of the sponsor in the ultimate success or failure of a community school has been recognized, particularly with the establishment of OCS's Sponsor Performance Review process. The review process is designed to measure sponsor capacity and compliance with their obligation to provide oversight, monitoring, and technical assistance to schools, along with intervention and corrective action when necessary. The Sponsor Performance Review is an effort to establish a high quality set of professional standards and a system of evaluation that lead to improved authorizer practices which support quality school outcomes.

The first phase of the Sponsor Performance Review began in September 2006 with a Pilot Cohort of 10 ODE approved sponsors and one volunteer participant, Lucas County Educational Service Center, sponsor of the largest number of community schools. Baseline data were collected and 92 schools visited as part of the performance review. The Sponsor Performance Review process initiated in 2006 is particularly noteworthy since Ohio is the only state among 41 jurisdictions that make provisions for public charter schools to require an evaluation of sponsor organizations.

Sponsor evaluation is enabled through ORC §3314.05 (B)(1), which, since April, 2003, requires first-time sponsors of new start-up community schools to be approved by ODE and to have entered into a written agreement with the department regarding how they will conduct their sponsor activities. On this basis, the Sponsor Performance Review Framework has been built as a means to assure compliance with the written agreement between the sponsor and ODE.

The following table details the 19 sponsors that have been approved to operate under an agreement with ODE, when the above referenced legislation went into effect. Also listed in the table are the other sponsors who were already sponsoring new start-up community schools prior to April 2003 and those that sponsor conversion community schools. This table reflects the number of schools each operated as of December 2008.

<i>Sponsors Approved by ODE (Under Agreement With ODE Since April 2003)</i>				<i>Sponsors Not Required to be Approved by ODE (Served as Authorizers Prior to April 2003)</i>	
<i>Nonprofit Sponsor</i>	<i># Start- Up Schools</i>	<i>ESCs/Districts</i>	<i># Start- Up Schools</i>	<i>Sponsors</i>	<i># Start- Up Schools</i>
1. Ashe Culture Center	12	1. Auglaize County ESC	2	1. Akron City School District	1
2. Buckeye Community Hope	29	2. Columbus City School District	1	2. Canton City School District	0
3. Ed. Resource Consultants	24	3. Delaware-Union ESC	4	3. Cincinnati City School District	1
4. Kids Count of Dayton	11	4. Franklin County ESC	2	4. Cleveland Municipal School District	2
5. Richland Academy	3	5. Lima City School District	1	5. Dayton Public School District	2
6. St. Aloysius	37	6. Mahoning County ESC	3	6. Lucas County ESC	71
7. Thomas B. Fordham	6	7. Mid-Ohio ESC	1	7. Ohio Council of Community Schools	49
		8. Montgomery County ESC	6	8. Reynoldsburg City School District	2
<i>State University</i>	<i># Start- Up Schools</i>	9. Portage County ESC	0	9. Toledo City School District	3
1. Bowling Green University	1	10. Tri-County ESC	0	10. Tri-Rivers Joint Vocational Center	1
<i>Nonprofit Sponsored StartUp Schools</i>	123	11. Youngstown City School District	1	<i>Non-ODE Approved Sponsored Start-Up Schools</i>	132
		<i>ESC/District Sponsored StartUp Schools</i>	21	<i>Non-ODE Approved Sponsored Conversion Schools</i>	47
19 ODE Approved Sponsors (17 active)				9 Non-ODE Approved Sponsors of Start-Up Schools 47 Non-ODE Approved Sponsors of Conversion Schools	
73 Active sponsors currently sponsor open schools (323) total operating community schools as of December 2008					

Quality Assurance through Increased Sponsor Capacity

During the last several years, ODE has responded to a series of legislative initiatives (detailed in the Legislative History section of this report) that address sponsor accountability while also improving the quality and capacity of sponsor organizations. These initiatives, some of which were contained in H.B. 119, included the aforementioned Sponsor Performance Review. Under new limits to the opening of new schools, sponsors may authorize and open new start-up schools under the Operator Provision if the operator manages schools in Ohio or another state that perform at a level rated equivalent to Continuous Improvement or better. As a result, quality is addressed by linking new school openings to successful performance by existing community school models.

ODE also recognizes that quality schools can be realized through various forms of technical assistance which support sponsors and increase their capacity to monitor and thus improve schools. A request for proposals (RFP) was sent to organizations to determine their ability and interest in providing training and support for Ohio community school sponsors, enhancing their capacity to monitor and further develop the schools they sponsor. In response to the RFP, which was supported through an appropriation in the current biennium, OCS identified the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) as the most qualified organization to provide needed training and support for Ohio community school sponsors.

The charge from ODE to NACSA was clear: build sponsor capacity. NACSA responded by designing a series of workshops that define the issues related to school authorization and clarify the thinking of sponsor organizations. As a result, a new sponsor professional organization, the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA), was strengthened in conjunction with the work initiated by NACSA in building sponsor capacity. During the 2007-2008 school year, NACSA worked closely with ODE in supporting the work of sponsors through direct technical assistance with them and through the co-sponsorship of conferences designed to improve sponsor and school performance.

OACSA determined that student achievement can be raised through improvements in sponsor practices. In April 2007, as part of its creation, OACSA approved these foundational statements to guide its work:

- Focus on academic, operational and fiscal quality
- Ensure that only qualified individuals and organizations operate Ohio community schools
- Establish and communicate clear performance standards and articulate expectations of schools in the school contract or charter
- Provide clear, concise and timely feedback to governing authorities and administrators regarding attainment of academic, organizational, regulatory and fiscal performance standards
- Deliver swift intervention in a school's operation when it fails to meet contracted performance standards
- Add value to Ohio's public education system (Note 4).

Quality Assurance through New School Planning and Design

Just as OACSA emerged to improve sponsor practices, schools themselves have responded to a perceived need to improve their own performance by enhancing the knowledge and skills of those who are based at the building level. Currently, there are two organizations that provide technical assistance and support for community schools.

The Ohio Alliance of Public Charter Schools, a professional organization that serves community school personnel, emerged to enhance the work of community school educators and provide a number of services to schools to assist in developing a focus on quality practices. During the 2007-2008 school year, the Ohio Alliance offered its members a series of workshops focusing on the many facets of school improvement. It is expected that the Alliance will expand its work in building school capacity during the next several years.

Another organization, the Ohio Coalition for Quality Education, has identified itself as an advocate for schools of choice and has developed a working relationship with legislators, ODE and members of the State Board of Education on behalf of Ohio community schools. Through engagement with legislative leaders and other community members, the Coalition serves as a forum for improving public awareness, and works to elevate the level of understanding about the purpose and function of community schools.

OCS will continue to work with both organizations, as it has with OACSA, to improve student achievement and school quality as well as sustaining a conversation about the essential elements that constitute effective community school practices and which engender student achievement, parent satisfaction and engagement with schools of choice.

OCS has been instrumental in providing for quality school design through its receipt of competitive grants from the U. S. Department of Education. These grants given by ODE as a three-year grantee of the Public Charter School Program (PCSP) have allowed school designers the opportunity to plan new schools and access the resources needed to open them.

Project objectives for Ohio's PCSP grants are to 1) fund up to 35 new community schools in each of the three years to promote public school choice; 2) increase the number of high-quality dropout recovery schools to allow access to those most at-risk of dropping out; 3) provide funding for the dissemination of validated educational best practices; 4) address Ohio Education Management System reporting requirements that support data-driven decisions that support academic achievement; and 5) build sponsor (authorizer) capacity to provide valid, reliable, data-driven technical assistance to enable high quality schools.

The receipt of PCSP grant funds has resulted in a rare opportunity to both increase sponsor capacity and influence the design of high quality schools. Moreover, the amount of the PCSP funds grant award to Ohio by U. S. Department of Education is second only to California, and OCS is pleased to have this support to positively influence the planning and development of public charter school programs.

Financial Stability of Community Schools

If a community school operates in a fragile financial condition, its academic program, engagement with stakeholders and viability are in question. As a response to public concern, H.B. 79 addressed community school financial issues, including sponsor accountability for schools that are unauditable. Moreover, OCS had long been proactive in its approach to financial reporting and the issues raised with substandard practices in such reporting. Due to such concerns, OCS took the initiative to withhold PCSP funds until deficiencies in financial reporting were corrected and before such administrative practices were required by legislation.

Under the provisions of Section 269.60 of the Biennial Budget Bill, community schools declared unauditable now have their federal startup funds withheld until an auditable condition is achieved. New requirements for financial monitoring include the obligation of the Auditor of State to provide written notification that a community school is unauditable to the school, its sponsor, and ODE, and to post the notification on the Auditor's Web site. Beginning June 30, 2007, Community schools declared unauditable have 90 days to bring records into an auditable condition or face withdrawal of all state and federal funding. As of Dec. 1, 2008, 14 community schools were listed as unauditable by the Auditor of State.

There is a consequence for sponsors having unauditable schools. A sponsor of an unauditable community school is prohibited from entering into contracts with additional community school governing boards until the Auditor successfully completes a financial audit of the school declared unauditable. In response to these new financial accountability requirements, OCS is engaged with the Auditor of State to ensure that school financial reporting is improved so that schools will not find themselves with financial reporting performance issues. School financial reporting improvements are being addressed through regional meetings across the state sponsored by the Auditor of State, and school fiscal officers and sponsors are the intended audience for these meetings. Staff from OCS also attended some of these regional trainings.

The remainder of this report presents the work as it has been defined in more than 10 years of legislation, as well as data that describe school academic and demographic data, enrollment, finance, and community school legal compliance.

Notes:

1. *Supporting Charter School Excellence Through Quality Authorizing*. U. S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2007. Available at http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/charter/authorizing/pub_pg13.html.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Principles & Standards for Quality School Authorizing*. National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2007. Available at <http://www.qualitycharters.org/i4a/pages/Index.cfm?pageID=3393>.
4. *Guiding Principles*. Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2007.

Ohio Community School Receives Coveted Blue Ribbon Honors for 2008

The Toledo School for the Arts has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of 320 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools for 2008. It is one of only 14 Ohio public schools to receive this rating for 2008, along with seven private schools in the state. In addition to its national honors, the school received an Excellent rating by the Ohio Department of Education, meeting 21 of 21 indicators of student achievement on the 2007-2008 Local Report Card. The school also earned an Excellent rating on both their 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 Local Report Cards.

The mission of Toledo School for the Arts (TSA) is to provide students with creative opportunities to achieve personal and academic success through arts-based learning. TSA prepares students to be life-long learners and productive members of society, with appreciation and competence in the arts. TSA serves 400 students in grades 6-12 and was acknowledged as one of America's Best High Schools by US News & World Report in 2008. On July 1, 2008, Bowling Green State University became the new sponsor for the school, succeeding Toledo Public Schools.

Two Early College High Schools Now Operational

The Charles School at Ohio Dominican University and the Dayton Early College Academy, new start-up community schools, opened for students in the 2007-2008 school year as early college high school designs delivered through a community school structure. Early college high schools typically feature a five-year program, where students can enter as eighth graders and move through the equivalent of three high school years in two. In their final year or two in high school, if they successfully meet entrance requirements of the cooperating higher education institutions, students can take high school and college courses simultaneously.

According to the Early College Initiative, an organization that promotes high school redesign efforts, there are only 160 early college high schools in existence in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Five of these schools, including the Charles School, are currently operational in Ohio.

The Charles School, which is affiliated with The Graham School in Columbus, offers a rigorous academic program combined with an experiential curriculum. Ohio Dominican University is the partner of the school and Delaware-Union Educational Service Center serves as the sponsor. Dayton Early College Academy, sponsored by Dayton Public Schools, is a collaboration among the school district, Sinclair Community College and the University of Dayton, which serves as the operator. Students who follow the Sinclair Community College course of study can receive an associate's degree while still in high school. Additional information about The Charles School can be found at <http://www.thecharlesschool.org/>, while information for Dayton Early College Academy can be obtained at <http://daytonearlycollege.org/>.