

2023-2024 Ohio Community Schools Annual Report



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Department of
Education &
Workforce

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2023-2024 Executive Summary

Ohio has a long history of providing a range of educational opportunities for students, and public community schools offer various instructional models and curricula that contribute to these educational options.

Designed to operate independently of a traditional school district, Ohio community schools are authorized by an approved community school sponsor. During the 2023-2024 school year, 19 sponsoring organizations authorized 336 community schools that enrolled nearly 117,000 students.

All community schools receive state-issued Ohio School Report Cards. Schools that primarily serve students enrolled in a dropout prevention and recovery program receive a specifically designed report card. In contrast, all other community schools receive the same report card as traditional, district-operated schools.

Key findings reflected in the report include:

- During the 2023-2024 school year, 98.75% of dropout prevention and recovery community schools met or exceeded overall standards versus 71% for the 2022-2023 school year.
- Community schools continue to demonstrate academic improvement, with 97.50% receiving progress ratings of Meets or Exceeds Standards.
- More than half (51%) of non-dropout prevention and recovery community schools met or exceeded the standard for the Gap Closing component.
- More than half (51%) of non-dropout prevention and recovery community schools received overall ratings of three stars (three stars is meeting state expectations) or better, versus 43.4% of schools during the 2022-2023 school year.

Annual evaluation of community school sponsors for the 2023-2024 school year found all sponsors rated as Effective or Exemplary.

Accountability continues to be a priority for the community school sector. After suspension of the closure requirement during the COVID pandemic, Ohio community schools are in the second year of tracking the community schools at risk of automatic closure due to poor academic performance. Based on the 2023-2024 report card, only nine schools were identified as “at risk” for closure, with five schools receiving a second “strike.” Lastly, the Ohio Auditor of State found that all community schools were auditable.

Seventy-eight percent of community school operators received ratings of three stars or better, the equivalent of a grade of “C” or better, whereas only 56% were rated three stars or better during the 2022-2023 school year.

Introduction

Each year, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce’s Office of Community Schools releases a report on the state’s public community schools, also called “charter schools” in other states. As required by state law, the Department provides this annual report to the Governor, Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, President of the Ohio Senate, and the respective Chairpersons of the House and Senate committees principally responsible for primary and secondary education. This report addresses the performance of Ohio’s community schools in five key areas:

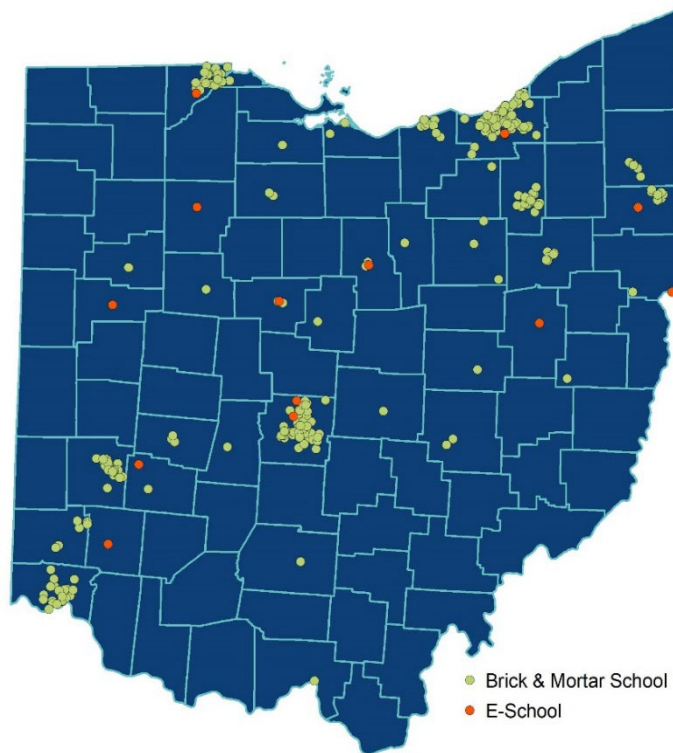
1. Effectiveness of academic programs
2. School operations
3. Performance of sponsors
4. Legal compliance
5. Financial condition

Unlike traditional public schools, community schools operate independently of school districts. Instead, community schools operate under the authorization of sponsoring organizations. Restricted by law to educationally oriented organizations, a community school sponsor approves a school’s education plan and sets clear academic, fiscal, and operational performance expectations. The Department supports the community school sector by providing technical assistance to community schools and sponsors and administering a comprehensive sponsor evaluation and improvement system.

Ohio’s community schools offer additional choices for families seeking nontraditional, K-12 public educational settings for their children. Community schools are public, nonprofit, and nonsectarian schools that receive state and federal funds but no revenue from local property taxes.

Community schools receive Ohio School Report Cards issued by the Department, are subject to annual financial audits completed by the Auditor of State or a private accounting firm, and comply with open meetings and public records statutes. Unlike traditional public schools, a community school can be closed by its sponsor for failure to meet the expectations outlined in its contract or for poor academic performance as defined in state law.

Ohio’s community schools offer a variety of instructional delivery models and specialized school programs, primarily serving at-risk students. Types of community schools include programs for students who have or are at risk of dropping out of school; programs serving students with special needs; language immersion; expeditionary; visual and performing arts; science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM); workforce readiness; and general education. In addition, Ohio community schools include online schools, site-based schools (also referred to as “brick-and-mortar” schools), and schools offering blended learning models.



Community School Structure and Governance

Oversight of Community School Sponsors

The Department oversees and evaluates community school sponsors and provides technical assistance to sponsors through its Office of Community Schools. Ohio law directs the Department to evaluate each community school sponsor on three components:

- Academic performance of students in the sponsor’s schools
- Compliance with state and federal laws
- Quality of practices

The comprehensive sponsor evaluation system results in component and overall ratings for each sponsor. Currently, all 19 community school sponsors have overall ratings of Effective or Exemplary. Details of the evaluation system are available on the [Community School Sponsor Evaluation Tools webpage](#), and sponsors’ ratings for the 2023-2024 school year are available on the [Overall Sponsor Ratings webpage](#).

Ohio law requires each community school sponsor, with limited statutory exceptions, to operate under a written agreement with the Department. The sponsor’s prior-year evaluation results heavily influence the Department’s agreement with the sponsor. Each agreement stipulates the portion of the state where a sponsor may oversee community schools, the duration of the agreement with the Department, and whether a sponsor may add community schools to its portfolio.

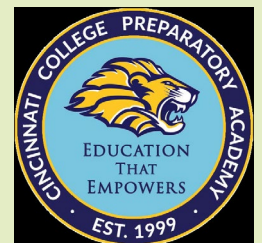
Forming a Community School

Opening a community school in Ohio requires involvement from several entities. The process begins when one or more individuals develop a concept and plan for a community school. The individuals involved in the planning process are referred to as developers. Each group of developers must find a sponsor that approves the school’s comprehensive plan and agrees to authorize the community school. Only approved sponsors with Effective or Exemplary evaluation ratings can authorize new schools.

SPOTLIGHT:

Cincinnati College Preparatory Academy

Cincinnati College Preparatory Academy is the largest K-12 charter school in Southwest Ohio, proudly serving the Cincinnati area for more than 26 years. Known for fostering a culture of academic excellence and holistic student development, the school maintains a high graduation rate and consistent, remarkable achievements, including an ongoing college acceptance rate of 100% for graduating seniors. The academy was recently awarded the prestigious Quality Community School Support Grant, highlighting the school’s focus on closing achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged students.



At the heart of the school’s success is the importance placed on school culture, guided by the "CCPA Way" — a set of core values rooted in care, collaboration, positivity, and accountability. These values shape academic and extracurricular programs, inspiring students to become responsible, engaged, and empathetic members of the community.

Alumni include engineers, teachers, and electricians, showcasing graduates’ diverse pathways. This year, the academy celebrated a historic milestone – the 2024 valedictorian earned the academy’s first Ivy League acceptance and a full scholarship to Harvard University.

If a sponsor approves, the developer enters a contract with the sponsor under [Ohio law](#) that identifies expectations for the community school. When entering the contract with a sponsor, representatives of the community school form a governing authority, which acts similarly to a local board of education of a traditional school district.

Before 2022, startup community schools, which are schools not sponsored by a school district, educational service center, or joint vocational school district, could only open in “challenged” school districts. Today, community schools may open and operate in any school district in the state.

A community school governing authority may contract with a nonprofit or for-profit organization, known as a community school operator, to handle some of the daily operations of the school. Community school operators may offer a range of services, including one or two selected administrative activities, such as curriculum or data collection and reporting, or a more comprehensive “turnkey” option.

Types of Community Schools

Ohio classifies each community school in three ways — instructional delivery, curriculum, and governance structure. Each community school is:

1. Either a site-based school (this includes a school utilizing a blended learning model) or online, and
2. Either a general education school, a school serving primarily students with special needs, or a school primarily enrolling students in a dropout prevention and recovery program, and
3. Either a startup school or a conversion school, as defined in state law. Startup community schools are new schools. Conversion schools are “converted” in facilities owned or controlled by educational service centers or school districts. Unlike startup schools, conversion schools always have been permitted to operate anywhere in the state.

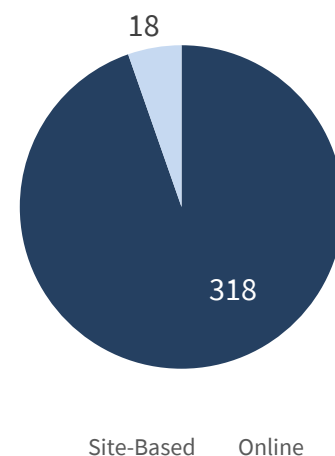
Instructional Delivery

In a site-based community school, sometimes called a brick-and-mortar school, students receive instruction from a teacher working in the school building. A site-based community school also may use online learning programs; however, the students must complete the required number of hours in the school building receiving instruction.

A blended learning model allows students to receive instruction online *and* in the school. A community school seeking to use a blended learning model must receive approval from its sponsor and file a declaration with the Department. The contract between the school’s governing authority and sponsor must comply with state statutory criteria for blended learning.

An online or e-school is a community school in which students work primarily online for their learning instruction and are not reliant on in-person classroom instruction.

**2023-2024 School Year
Number of Site-Based vs.
Online Community
Schools**



Curriculum and Specialized Programs

Many of Ohio's community schools offer a general education curriculum, but a growing number of community schools specialize in serving students with specific educational needs. Ohio law recognizes two types of community school designations based on the characteristics of the students served. These designations apply to schools that primarily serve either students with individualized education programs (IEPs) receiving special education services or students at risk of dropping out of school or who previously dropped out of school in a dropout prevention and recovery program. During the 2023-2024 school year, 77 community schools received the dropout prevention and recovery designation, and 30 community schools primarily served students with disabilities.

To be designated as a special education school, more than half of a community school's enrolled students must have active IEPs.

Though these schools may fall under the same designation, they can be very different. Some of these schools serve only students with certain diagnoses, such as students with specific learning disabilities or students on the autism spectrum. Like all public schools in Ohio, community schools primarily serving students with IEPs receive Ohio School Report Cards. However, a community school primarily serving students with disabilities is exempt from Ohio's automatic [closure law](#).

Schools with the dropout prevention and recovery designation play an essential and growing part in Ohio's community school sector. A community school may apply to receive designation as a dropout prevention and recovery school if it meets either of these criteria:

1. Operates a drug recovery program in cooperation with a court or
2. Operates a dropout prevention and recovery program and enrolls more than 50% of its students in that program, as verified by the Department.

In addition to Ohio's high school end-of-course tests and other state assessments, a dropout prevention and recovery program must administer a nationally normed test in reading and mathematics.

Community schools with the dropout prevention and recovery designation receive state-issued Ohio School Report Cards and are subject to closure due to poor performance.

SPOTLIGHT:

Unity Academy

*Responding to a decade of parent requests for a high school, Unity Academy High School opened in fall 2022. In its second year of operation, **Unity Academy received an overall rating of 4.5 on its Ohio School Report Card, which included five stars in both Gap Closing and Progress.***

Students have the opportunity to participate in a college readiness program that includes a one-week summer camp on a college campus, with room and board included. This program offers deserving high school students an immersive experience, connecting them with professors, college students, and campus life at Purdue University and the University of Maryland.



Community School Academic Performance

Traditional School Report Card

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce uses data reported by districts and schools to analyze performance in several categories. The Department collects data that are compiled and organized into six components and reported on the Ohio School Report Cards. The components include:

Achievement

This component represents how well students performed on state tests overall.

Progress

This component looks at the academic growth all students are making based on their past performances.

Early Literacy

This component measures reading improvement and proficiency for students in kindergarten through third grade.

Gap Closing

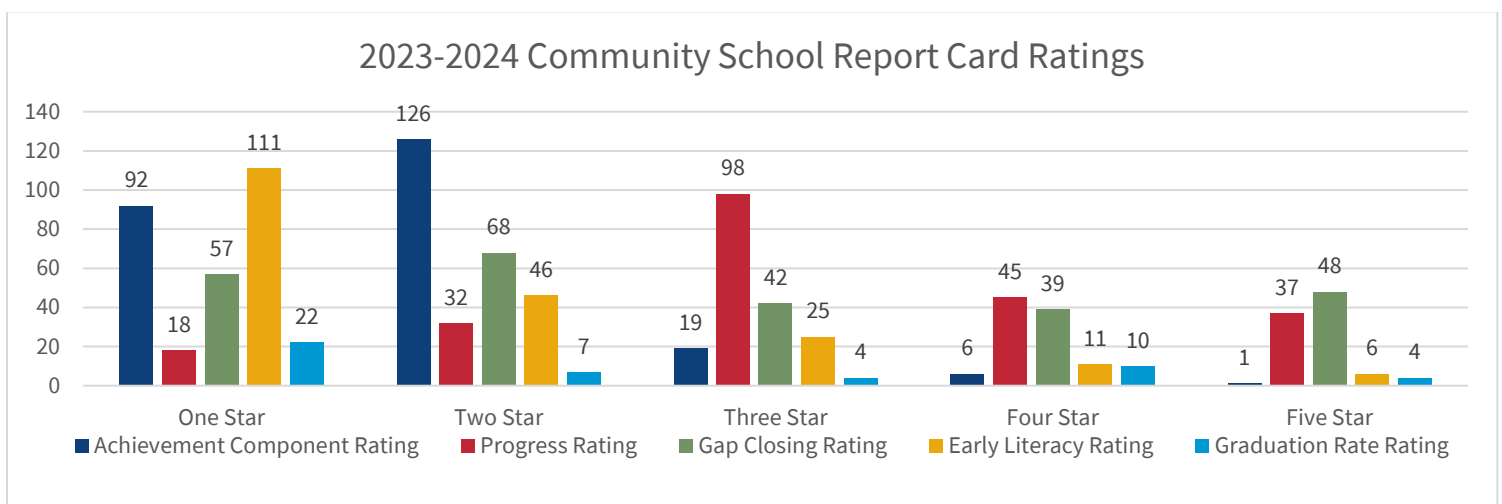
This component measures the reduction in educational gaps between student subgroups.

Graduation

This component looks at the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate and the five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.

The College, Career, Workforce, and Military Readiness Component will become part of the report card for the 2024-2025 school year. All report card components receive ratings on a scale of 1-5 stars based on performance. More detailed information on the traditional school and district report cards is available in the [Guide to Ohio School Report Cards](#).

Although changes to the report cards make comparisons difficult, there are positive trends when comparing pre-pandemic results from the 2018-2019 school year and the more recent 2023-2024 results:



- Community schools continue to demonstrate improvement, with 78% of non-dropout prevention and recovery community schools meeting or exceeding standards for student progress in 2023-2024. During the 2022-2023 school year, 70.59% of schools met or exceeded the standard for progress.
- Half of non-dropout prevention and recovery community schools met or exceeded the standard for the Gap Closing component.
- Just over half (50.39%) of non-dropout prevention and recovery community schools received overall ratings of three stars (three stars is meeting state expectations) or better versus 44.31% of schools during the 2022-2023 school year.

Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report Card

Community schools that serve a majority of their students through dropout prevention and recovery programs receive the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report Card. These schools receive ratings of Exceeds Standards, Meets Standards, or Does Not Meet Standards for each report card component as well as an overall rating. More detailed information is available in the [technical documentation for the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report Card](#).

Achievement Component

This rating reports the percentage of students who passed or met the cumulative performance score on all applicable tests required for high school graduation

Gap Closing Component

This rating shows how well schools are meeting the performance expectations for all populations of students in English language arts, math, graduation, and English language proficiency improvement.

Progress Component

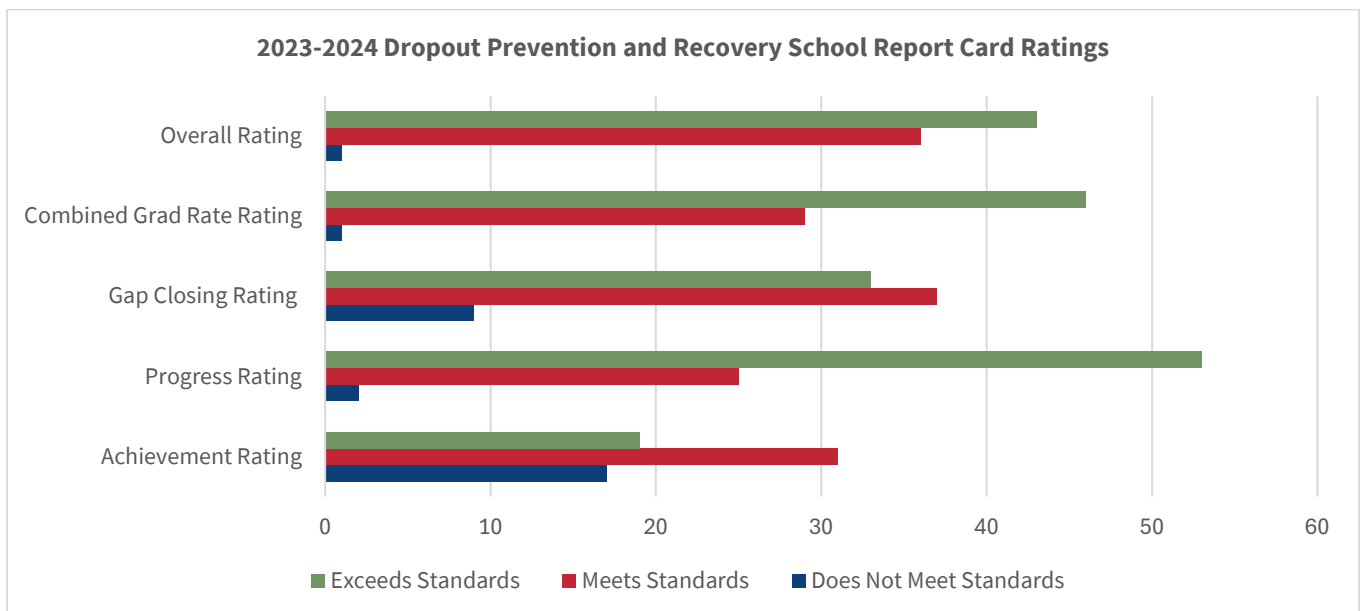
This rating is the school's academic growth for its students in math and reading. Progress looks at the growth all students are making.

Graduation

This rating reports the number of students graduating from the school in four, five, six, seven, or eight years.

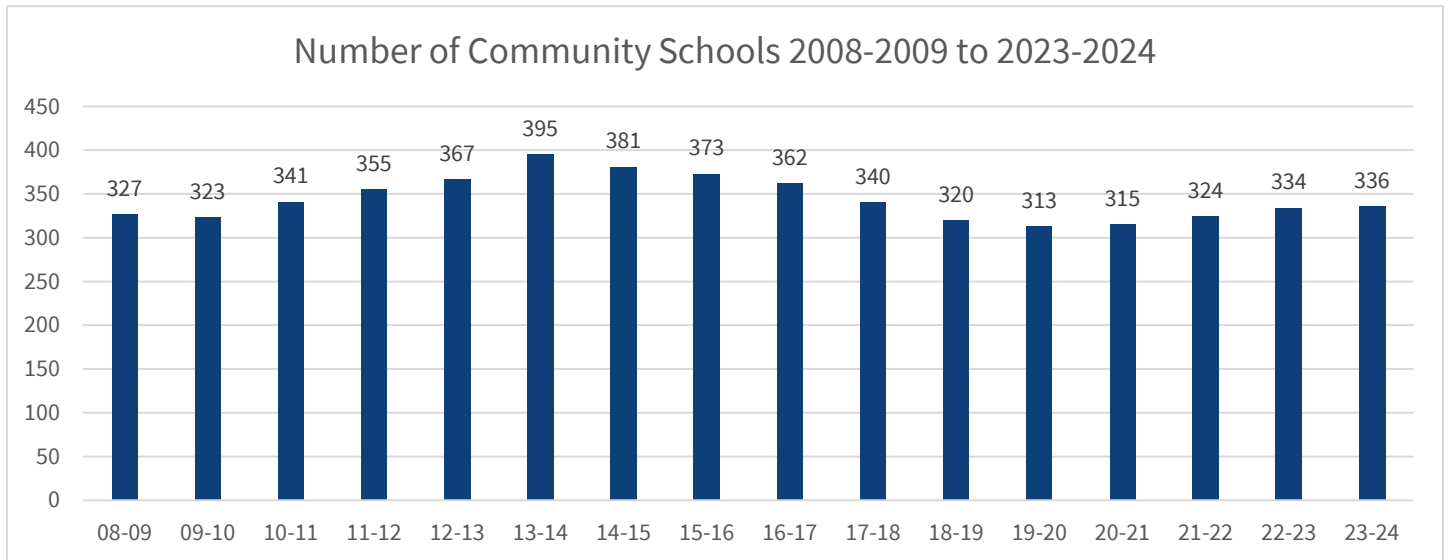
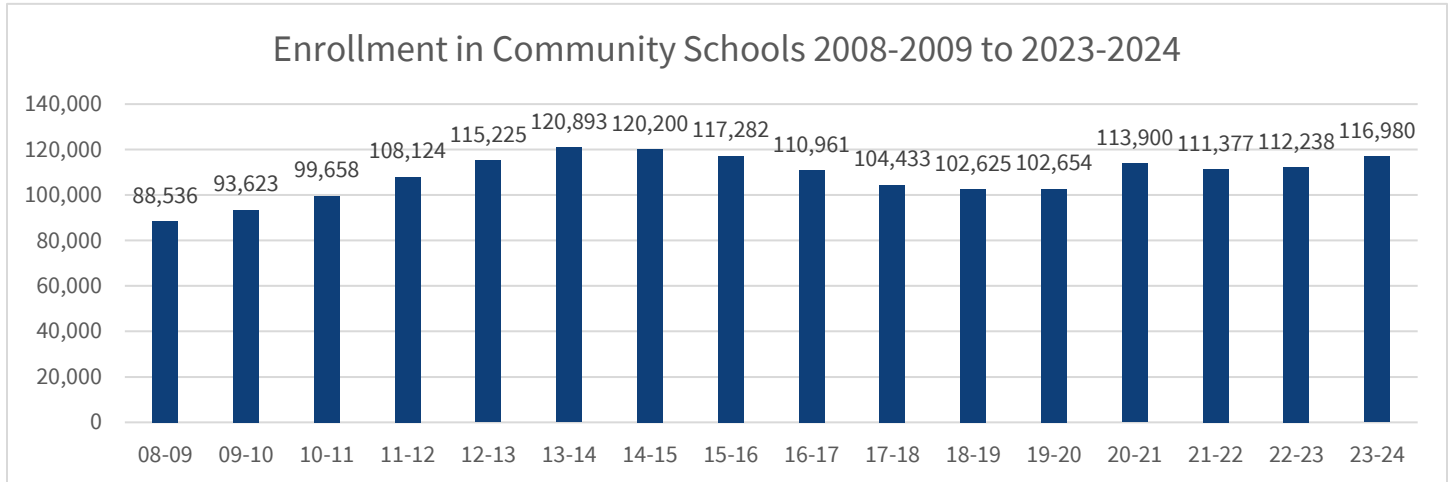
Schools receiving the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Report Card have seen significant improvement over the last several years despite challenges related to the COVID pandemic:

- During the 2023-2024 school year, 98.8% of dropout prevention and recovery community schools met or exceeded overall standards.
- Ninety-seven and a half percent of dropout prevention and recovery community schools received Progress ratings of Meets or Exceeds standards.



Community School Operations and Accountability

The 2023-2024 school year marked Ohio’s 26th year of community school operations. Beginning in 1998 with 15 community schools authorized by two sponsors, community school enrollment peaked in the 2013-2014 school year before dropping off. The trend reversed throughout the COVID pandemic, and more than 116,000 students were enrolled in Ohio community schools for the 2023-2024 school year.



SPOTLIGHT:

Dayton Leadership Academies

Dayton Leadership Academies (DLA), a K-8 community school, is celebrating 25 years of service to Dayton, Trotwood, and Jefferson Township. As a Leader in Me school, now in its fourth year, DLA fosters a culture of joy and leadership where students take charge through family conferences, Friday leadership clubs, and quarterly schoolwide LEAD Days featuring community service and student-hosted events.

DLA prioritizes mental wellness through prevention programs, earning the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Silver Award for 2023-2024, an improvement from the previous year's bronze award. DLA also received the FY24 Auditor of State Award, recognizing its clean audit and excellence, a distinction given to only 8% of nearly 6,000 government audits.

The school has shown steady academic growth over the past three years, qualifying for the Quality Community Schools Support grant to enhance student outcomes. This progress reflects the leadership of Executive Director Tess Mitchner-Asinjo, a dedicated school board, and strong family engagement.



Governing Authority Membership

Governing authority members play an important role in providing oversight of a community school. Functioning like a district board of education, governing authorities adopt the school budget, develop school policies and procedures, and may contract for services on behalf of the school. Ohio law bars any individual employed by a school district or educational service center from serving on the governing authority of a community school sponsored by that district or educational service center. The law also prohibits a community school governing authority member from being a member of a school district board of education and vice versa.

Automatic Closure

Ensuring school quality is a goal for the community school sector. In addition to sponsors closing schools due to failure to meet performance requirements included in the sponsor-school contract, Ohio has one of the most rigorous requirements in the nation for closing community schools based on poor performance. Community schools that fail to meet state performance requirements within five years may be subject to closure. A school's academic performance during its first two years of operation does not count toward automatic closure. However, after the initial two years of operation, schools that demonstrate three consecutive years of poor performance automatically are closed as an operation of law. Additional details about automatic closure are found in [Ohio law](#).

Changing Sponsors

To prevent poor-performing community schools from regularly switching sponsors, a practice known as “sponsor hopping,” Ohio law prohibits these schools from changing sponsors without the Department’s approval. A community school that received a rating of less than three stars on the Achievement Component and a rating of less than three stars for the Progress Component must receive approval from the Department before changing sponsors. A community school that operates a dropout prevention and recovery program and received a rating of Does Not Meet Standards for the annual student-growth measure and combined graduation rates also must obtain the Department’s approval before changing sponsors.

Operator Performance

Some community schools contract with a management organization or operator to help manage the school’s day-to-day operations. An operator works under an agreement with the school’s governing authority and acts similarly to the central office of a traditional school district.

A community school operator can be a for-profit or nonprofit organization, a school district, or an educational service center. The contract between a community school’s governing authority and its operator also details the school’s arrangement for specific services, including curriculum development, staffing, facilities management, technology, marketing, training and development, and financial services.

The Department also annually issues a performance report for each community school operator based on its schools’ performance the previous year. Ratings and performance details for community school operators are available on the Department’s [Community Schools webpage](#).

Community School Sponsor Performance

Any sponsor that receives an Ineffective overall rating cannot sponsor any new or additional community schools, and the sponsor is subject to a quality improvement plan. In addition, any sponsor that receives a Poor rating or three consecutive Ineffective ratings is subject to revocation of its sponsorship authority. An appeals process is available to sponsors subject to revocation of their sponsorship authority.

The sponsor evaluation system assists the Department in its oversight of sponsors and helps increase the quality of sponsor practices. The evaluation framework includes three equally weighted components:

- Academic performance of schools in a sponsor’s portfolio based on Ohio School Report Card measures
- The sponsor and schools’ compliance with laws and administrative rules
- The sponsor’s adherence to quality practices

With the help of independent, outside vendors, the Department calculates ratings individually for a sponsor’s academic performance, legal compliance, and quality practices components and then calculates an overall rating based on the rating of each evaluation component. All Ohio community school sponsors currently have ratings of Effective or Exemplary. Data and overall and component ratings for the 2023-2024 sponsor evaluation are available on the [Department’s website](#). The evaluation process has been suspended for the 2024-2025 school year based on provisions included in Ohio Senate Bill 168. The evaluation process will resume in the 2025-2026 school year.

Academic Component

The Academic Performance component of a sponsor’s evaluation combines academic performance data from all schools in the sponsor’s portfolio. The Academic Performance component uses data obtained from Ohio School Report Cards to ensure consistent and comparable results.

The Academic Performance component calculation excludes schools operating fewer than two full school years and community schools primarily serving students with disabilities. The performance of all other community schools, including e-schools and dropout prevention and recovery schools, is included when calculating the Academic Component rating.

Legal Compliance Component

Community school sponsors have primary responsibility for schools’ compliance with all laws and administrative rules. Each sponsor must certify that each of the schools it sponsors adheres to Ohio laws and administrative rules, with compliance subject to Department verification. To assist sponsors, the Department annually publishes a list of applicable laws and administrative rules with which schools must comply.

The Compliance component of the sponsor evaluation includes a review of the sponsor’s compliance with applicable laws and administrative rules, as well as the compliance of each school it sponsors.

The Department also reviews each sponsor’s adherence to the requirement to provide technical assistance to its sponsored schools. Ohio is the only state that reviews a sponsor’s technical support of its schools.

Quality Practices Review

The Department reviews each sponsor's practices against quality standards based on principles developed by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

The Quality Practice Review focuses on six critical areas of practice:

Organizational commitment and capacity:

- This standard evaluates sponsorship capacity, internal processes for improvement, sponsor resources, and the sponsor's roles and responsibilities.

Community school application process and decision-making:

- This standard evaluates the sponsor's application process, rigorous criteria for considering applications, application reviewers and their training, and the application decision-making process.

Performance contracting:

- This standard evaluates the sponsor's contracting processes, school performance standards, the community school accountability framework, terms for renewal and non-renewal, and terms and processes for amendments and modifications to the contract.

Oversight and evaluation of community schools:

- This standard evaluates the sponsor's oversight system, including financial and enrollment reviews, on-site reviews, the process for monitoring the community schools' academic performance, intervention guidance and action taken by the sponsor, and yearly reports on the community schools' performance.

Contract termination and renewal decision-making:

- This standard evaluates the sponsor's renewal application and renewal and non-renewal decisions, including notification, contract termination, and school closure processes.

Technical assistance and sponsor requirements in rule and law:

- This standard evaluates the technical assistance and legal updates a sponsor provides to its community schools, professional development for schools, and the relationships with the schools' governing authorities.

Ohio law includes a set of incentives for sponsors rated Exemplary, as well as a set of consequences for sponsors rated Ineffective and Poor. For example, a sponsor rated Exemplary for two consecutive years can take advantage of incentives, including no limit on the number of schools they can sponsor or where a community school can be located.

Financial Condition

Financial Audits

The Department works closely with the Ohio Auditor of State to ensure school financial accountability in community schools. The Ohio Auditor of State performs financial audits annually that review accounts, financial reports, and records to ensure compliance with state and federal laws, regulations, and accounting principles.

If an audit shows misuse, improper accounting for public funds collection, or public property misappropriation, the Ohio Attorney General and the Department take legal action to resolve the issues. The Auditor of State shares audits with school sponsors for their review and follow up if needed. The auditor gives a community school that has records that are insufficient for auditing 90 days to bring its records into an “auditable” condition. If the school does not do so, it may lose all state and federal funding. The Auditor of State notifies the sponsor in writing if any school it sponsors is found to have unauditible records and posts the notification on the Auditor of State’s website.

The sponsor of an unauditible community school can only enter contracts with additional community schools once the auditor completes a successful financial audit of the school.

Ohio law also requires a new community school to post a bond of \$50,000 or provide a written guarantee of payment up to \$50,000. This requirement ensures that funds are available for a final financial audit.

Copies of community school financial audits are published and available on the [Auditor of State’s website](#).

Sponsor’s Role in Financial Accountability

A sponsor monitors all aspects of a school’s fiscal performance. Ohio law calls for a community school sponsor to communicate with the Auditor of State and for the auditor to include the sponsor during any audit exit conference to discuss a community school’s financial audit or financial and enrollment records. In addition, sponsors annually verify the Auditor of State did not issue Findings for Recovery against a person who proposes to create a community school, serves on the governing authority, operates the school, or is an employee of the school. The Auditor of State verifies these during the regular audit of the school’s financial records.

The sponsor representative also meets with the school’s governing authority or fiscal officer at least monthly to review financial and enrollment records. The sponsor uses this data to review the school’s ongoing financial condition and inform contract renewal decisions. The sponsor’s financial review focuses on standards for sound financial operations and sustainability. These regular reviews allow sponsors to monitor a school’s short-term performance and long-term financial viability.

Financial oversight extends to reporting the details of operators’ expenditures. For example, when the cost of services provided by a community school operator or management company totals more than 20% of the annual gross revenues of a school, the operator must provide detailed accounting information, including the nature and costs of the services provided to the community school. This information becomes part of the community school’s annual financial audit.

Support for High-Performing Community Schools

Quality Community School Support Grant

The Quality Community School Support Grant provides additional funding to high-poverty community schools that meet performance standards established by the General Assembly. Community schools meeting eligibility criteria in Fiscal Year 2024 received \$3,000 for each pupil identified as economically disadvantaged and \$2,250 for all other enrolled students. Payments for each fiscal year are calculated using the final adjusted full-time equivalent number of students enrolled in the community school for the prior fiscal year. If the school is in its first year of operation, the payment is calculated using the adjusted full-time equivalent number of students enrolled in the school for the current fiscal year as of the payment date. The Department makes grant payments to each school meeting the grant criteria in January.

Community schools with sponsors rated Effective or Exemplary can meet eligibility criteria in one of three ways:

- New schools with a high-performing out-of-state operator that serves at least 50% economically disadvantaged students across all the operator’s schools may be eligible for the grant; or a new school affiliated with a higher education institution and is replicating a high-performing school operating in another state.
- New schools replicating existing high-performing community schools may be eligible for the grant.
- Existing community schools, with or without an operator, are eligible for the grant if the school’s Performance Index exceeds that of the district in which the community school is located for two consecutive years, the school’s Progress rating on the report card is four stars or better, and economically disadvantaged students comprise a majority of the school’s total enrollment.

Eighty-seven community schools shared \$871,000 in Fiscal Year 2024. Find more information about the grant on the [Quality Community School Support Fund webpage](#).

Legislative History of Community Schools

During each session since Ohio established community schools more than 25 years ago, the General Assembly has made legislative changes to the program. View the [complete list of community school legislation](#) enacted over this time. This includes legislative summaries that trace the changes by legislative session and bill number.