

Learn from the Past.

Prepare Our Children for the Future.



10 WAYS THAT GOVERNOR STRICKLAND AND STATE LEGISLATORS CAN BRING OHIO'S SCHOOLS INTO THE 21st CENTURY

Stark County's education partners have been guided by the vision of a new system of learning for more than a decade. Today, that vision and the contagiousness of excellence are driving our efforts to prepare every child for a successful and productive future.

Prepared by

Stark Education Partnership, Inc.
Stark County Educational Service Center
drawing on the success of Stark County's school reform partnerships

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The Stark County Educational Service Center and Stark Education Partnership acknowledge the generous contributions and unwavering support of these and other community partners. Everything that has been accomplished and the lessons highlighted in this report would not have been possible without the partnerships that have flourished in our communities.



Imagine a system of learning ...

Where all young children – who are born ready to learn – are ready for school;

Where every student is excited about learning and understands that a challenging education is relevant to his or her aspirations for the future;

Where every student masters core academic content and work-related skills, and is a confident, creative, critical-thinking problem solver;

Where learning is enhanced by technology and all teachers are prepared to integrate that technology into their classes;

Where the academic expectations for every high school graduate are aligned with college admission requirements as well as the needs and expectations of employers – and all students graduate prepared for college or work without remediation;

Where every student gets the support he or she needs to meet these expectations; and

Where families, communities and schools work together and share responsibility for getting the job done, and where leaders – both inside and beyond school buildings – are the purveyors of hope.

This imagined system of learning has guided Stark County's education partners for more than a decade.

Today, this vision and the contagiousness of excellence are driving their efforts to prepare every child for a successful and productive future.

A GLIMPSE OF TOMORROW



Stark County schools and their education partners share a vision of an education system that engages students in their learning by helping them see how important it is to make education a priority; demonstrating to them that a challenging education is, in fact, relevant to both their current lives and their aspirations for the future; seeking creative new ways to motivate them to take ownership of their learning; and lighting a fire that builds on their natural curiosity and their individual hopes and ambitions.

It is a vision that has focused the efforts of educators, families, business and civic leaders and communities on higher graduation rates, a reduced need for remediation, the personalization of learning, the mastery of core academic content and the acquisition of 21st-century skills, the development of a more skilled and talented workforce, and the building of a robust, prosperous economy.

These efforts have produced extraordinary results. Stark County students are achieving at higher and higher levels. They are going on to postsecondary education in growing numbers – and they are experiencing greater success.

Together, Stark County educators, families, and business and community leaders are proving the truth of Gary Hamel's reminder: ***"The gap between what can be imagined and what can be accomplished has never been smaller."***¹

¹ *The Wall Street Journal* recently ranked Gary Hamel as the world's most influential business thinker, and *Fortune* magazine has called him the "world's leading expert on business strategy."

THE NEWS IS GOOD

Stark Surpasses Ohio's Graduation Standard

- Twelve of Stark County's 17 school districts have graduation rates of better than 95%, well above the state standard of 90%.
- Graduation rates are up in Canton's urban high schools. In the past four years:
 - Canton City's graduation rate has jumped from 54% to nearly 73%.
 - McKinley High School's graduation rate has gone from 73% to over 82%.
 - Timken High School's graduation rate is 77% – up from 60%.
- More than 88% of Stark County's citizens age 25 and over have earned a high school diploma, which is above the state average of 87%.

Graduation rates are only part of the story. A significantly larger number of our students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. And significantly more students are participating in TECH PREP programs and are enrolled in postsecondary and/or dual credit courses while in high school.

RETHINKING EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT



Stark County was an early adopter of the notion that no one of us is as effective as all of us working collaboratively toward the same end. Since 2002, when it formed Ohio's first P-16 Compact, Stark County has remained convinced that there is great need to increase educational attainment locally and throughout Ohio.

From the beginning, our goal has been to be the most highly educated county in the nation. We believe that if we do this right by creating an educated workforce, we will significantly raise the economic health of Stark County through economic growth and prosperity. This view and the commitment that supports it explain in large part our success.

That success is rooted in many initiatives – some developed and carried out at the school or district level, while others have been the product of county-wide activities that have reached across district boundaries. It is reflected in the smaller learning initiatives across the county and in the Early College initiative. It is seen in the Stark County Educational Services Center's CARE TEAM initiative, the Bill Mease Center for Science and Math that serves as the hub for the Science and Mathematics on the Move (SAMM) program, and many more initiatives.

The **Stark County Educational Service Center** is playing a pivotal role in these and other advances in the area of education and workforce development. And these successes owe a great deal to the visionary leadership of the **Stark Education Partnership**.

MORE GOOD NEWS

Stark Surpasses Ohio's Graduation Standard

College No Longer Just a Dream for Stark County Citizens

- College and graduate school enrollment among all Stark County residents is on the rise with the county now tied with the state in the percentage of citizens with an Associate Degree (A.A.).
- With a gain of over 4% in the percentage of Stark County citizens with a bachelor's degree (B.A. or B.S.) since 2000, our county has pulled to within one percentage point of the state of Ohio on this important benchmark.
- Since 2000, Stark County has experienced a 22.2% growth in the percentage of its population with a B.A./B.S. degree or higher.
- Among 18- to 24-year-olds, more than 43% already have some college or an A.A. degree, which is 6% above the statewide average.

Stark County's success goes far beyond a litany of exemplary programs. It reflects a new understanding that the often turbulent and occasionally divisive changes triggered by the education reforms of the past 25 years have failed, in the end, to achieve the “breakthrough” or “transformational” results that reformers sought. More often than not, the effect of the seemingly endless barrage of reforms has been simply to cement the status quo.

Unfortunately, the status quo is no longer tenable or tolerable. This is because in today's world – more so than at any other time in human history – standing in place means being left behind. This is true for nations, states and citizens in equal measure. And nowhere is the status quo more dangerous than in our schools.

The 21st-century global economy values and rewards creative problem solving, technological leadership, knowledge creation and commercialization, and innovation. In such a world, opportunity both follows and attracts talent. And talent increasingly is defined as self-motivated and self-directed workers who are capable of both independent thought and collaboration, and who are both critical thinkers and creative problem solvers.

In order for our state and our citizens to survive – let alone thrive – in such a world, we have to truly, finally break away from the education status quo.

This is not meant to suggest that tougher standards, more relevant learning experiences, better prepared teachers, and a heightened emphasis on critical and creative thinkers, collaborators, problem solvers and innovators are unimportant.

Quite the contrary – they are essential. But they represent reform initiatives we have been advancing – doggedly and emphatically – for a quarter century or more. ***The reason these efforts have not yielded the results we desire is not because they are the wrong strategies – rather, it's because they are incomplete strategies.***

Somehow, somewhere along the way we've lost sight of the most critical variable of all in the education equation: ***the motivation of the student learner.***

We need to confront honestly and openly the reality that our students have far higher standards for what will interest and motivate them than students of past generations. It's simply a byproduct of the technology-saturated world in which we live. And, quite frankly, that fact raises the bar for how we must define and design learning experiences that are relevant, authentic and truly student-centered.

What does all this mean for our current education “reform” efforts? Does it mean we continue to add rigor to our academic standards? ***Of course.*** Does it mean we continue to invest in better teachers and school leaders? ***Absolutely.*** Does it mean we continue to broaden our understanding of the knowledge, skills and competencies our students need to acquire to be successful in college, careers and citizenship? ***Certainly.***

However, crafting reforms that are responsive to those three “drivers” of education reform will be insufficient if we fail to respond also to a fourth driver – that is, the desperate need to motivate, inspire and engage our young people so they are excited about learning and understand its value and relevance to what matters to them and to what they want to achieve in their lives.

This reality – this commitment to engage our students in their learning – is the nucleus of Stark County’s education reform agenda. That agenda recognizes that lighting a fire that builds on students’ natural curiosity, as well as their personal interests and individual hopes and ambitions, will not be possible unless we embrace new models for teaching and learning . . . new concepts of “school” and “school day” and “classroom” . . . and new views of what instruction looks like, and where and when it takes place.

We will not be successful unless we meet our young people on their own terms and provide them with learning experiences that seize and fire their imaginations and motivate them to want to learn, grow and succeed.

HERE’S EVEN BETTER NEWS

Earlier this year, *Forbes* magazine called Canton one of “America’s Fastest-Dying Cities.” According to the magazine, Canton is faced with a fleeing population, painful waves of unemployment and a barely growing economy.

Well, maybe it’s time for Forbes to take another look ... because the Canton-Massillon Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) isn’t acting like a dying area.

Look at the findings from the *Regional Dashboard of Economic Indicators 2008*, a study recently issued by the Fund for Our Economic Future. Prepared by the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University, the study examined the performance of the Canton, Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown metropolitan areas in comparison to a sample of 136 metropolitan areas with populations between 300,000 and 4.6 million.

Long-Term Productivity Growth, 1995-2005 and 1996-2006: Canton had the highest rank improvement over the two time periods. The study indicates that this is possibly attributable to Canton’s improved ranking in Technology Commercialization, a contributing factor to productivity growth.

Technology Commercialization: The study found that the Canton area improved significantly to be the only MSA in Northeast Ohio that improved its rank between 2000 and 2006. This indicator reflects the process of innovation commercialization, venture capital per employee and the number of patents per employee.

Short-Term Productivity Growth, 2002-2005 and 2003-2006: The Canton area grew the fastest (6.5 percent) among Northeast Ohio metropolitan areas and improved its ranking by 38 positions ... to be ranked at the top of the second quartile (36th) among all 136 metros.

Stark County is making progress. Strengths are beginning to emerge. While it may take a number of years to see significant changes in per capita income and job growth, the needle is beginning to move. And Stark County’s improved performance in the field of education is one of the factors contributing to the area’s economic recovery and productivity growth.

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Stark County's story confirms that every school cannot do everything – and that every school's challenges vary with the needs of its students. But Stark County's experience also tells us that every school is special – and that it is successful to the extent that it motivates all students to want to learn, grow and succeed.



TEN WAYS GOVERNOR STRICKLAND AND STATE LEGISLATORS CAN BRING OHIO'S SCHOOLS INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Much more work – and better results – will be needed before Stark County's future vision for its schools and communities is realized. And Stark County's education stakeholders are committed to completing this journey.

But at this critical juncture in the state of Ohio's efforts to improve the performance of its schools and the students they serve, it is important to take another look at Stark County's experiences – ***to think about "lessons" that can inform the state's education reform agenda and to identify opportunities to apply "proven practices" that can benefit schools and communities across the state.***

For this purpose, Stark County's education stakeholders urge Governor Strickland, state legislators and other state education policy leaders to take 10 actions that can have a significant impact on the performance of Ohio's schools. These 10 actions, based on our experience, will help prepare all Ohio students for tomorrow's challenges and opportunities by bringing Ohio's schools into the 21st century.

"Stark County's education reform partners have learned many lessons during their nearly 20-year effort to make all schools the best they can be. They have worked together – educators, parents, employers and civic leaders – knowing that none of them could get the job done alone.

"On issue after issue, the Stark County Educational Service Center (ESC) has defined the implementation of what it means to collaborate – from county-wide initiatives that have provided preschool services in every Stark County district to our SAMM Center that enhances students' mathematics and science education in every school and at every grade level.

"Anyone who thinks what we have done could have been accomplished without the ESC doesn't understand the Stark County story. Pull the ESC out and we'd have difficulty continuing our journey toward excellent schools."

Adrienne O'Neill, President
Stark Education Partnership, Inc.

1

START EARLY

Ensure that every child has the kind of early care and education experiences that make him or her ready to succeed in the classroom and throughout life.

Children are born ready to learn – our job is to make sure they are ready for school. This is the basis for the Stark County Public School Preschool Collaborative, a joint initiative of 11 school districts. Last year, the 15-year-old initiative offered early learning experiences for more than 550 children. It provided early interventions for young children, giving them high-quality subject matter learning experiences, as well as assistance in meeting their social, emotional and physical needs. By helping these children enter kindergarten with age-appropriate skills, the program is making it more likely that our young people will graduate from high school ready for postsecondary options and promising careers.

SPARK Ohio – a partnership of the Sisters of Charity of Canton Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation – is another part of the Stark County story. SPARK Ohio (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) helps children prepare for school by building language, reading and social skills – and by assisting in the transition from day care, preschool and home care settings to formal school. It works with schools, families, teachers, caregivers, health professionals, service agencies and child advocacy groups to support children’s transitions through and families’ engagement in schools. And the partnership’s newest initiative – “Linking Ready Kids to Ready Schools” – is focusing on the seven components of ready schools: leadership, transition, supportive environments, standards/instruction / assessment, diversity, home-school partnerships, and adult learning communities.

These Stark County initiatives have received national and statewide recognition for their effectiveness in engaging children and motivating them to learn, grow and succeed. They are proven models for policy makers and educators who understand that early experiences – starting at birth and coming through kindergarten – affect learning, as well as the social and emotional development that are critically important to children’s well being and future success.

2

ALIGN STANDARDS AND IMPROVE ASSESSMENTS

Sharpen Ohio’s academic standards to include student performances of 21st-century knowledge and skills, align standards with the expectations of the state’s higher education and business communities, and create an assessment system that guides and improves instruction and ensures that all students graduate ready for postsecondary options and promising careers.

Stark County schools are committed to high expectations for all students and are working diligently to help all students achieve them. Yet, the county’s education partners believe that

the state's academic content standards – which set the parameters for local instructional policies and practices – need to be revisited and revised. We encourage education policy leaders to streamline the state's academic standards; benchmark them against international standards; reshape them to include student performances of 21st-century skills, as well as higher-order thinking and learning skills; and ensure that they promote cross-disciplinary instruction.

Yet, changes in the state's academic standards will have only limited benefits if policy makers do not also revise the state's assessment system to ensure that it (1) accurately measures what students learn, and (2) informs, guides and enhances the quality of instruction. And here, state policymakers can learn from Stark County's experiences.

In 2005, some Stark County schools began to use ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment system (EPAS), which includes EXPLORE (8th and 9th grades), PLAN (10th grade) and the ACT (11th and 12th grades). This initiative was designed to increase the county's college going rate by demonstrating to students their ability to attend and succeed in college. While the evaluation of this new assessment system is still in progress, our teachers and their students are convinced that the educational benefits will be substantial. And there is growing evidence that a parallel effort in the 12th grade – the use of the 11th- and 12th- grade COMPASS assessment with instructional supports that teachers may use based on students' test results – is reducing the need for college-level mathematics remediation.

3

MAKE LITERACY PRIORITY NUMBER ONE

Create a culture that makes all teachers literacy instructors and provide them with the preparation and professional development to excel in this role.

In its final report to Governor Strickland and leaders in the Ohio General Assembly, the Public-Private Collaborative Commission recently recommended that the state expand literacy and language intervention initiatives – at all grade levels – for all students whose knowledge and skills (reading, writing and speaking) are below the proficient level. Commission members urged the state's leaders to create a culture that makes all teachers literacy instructors and provides all teachers with the professional development to acquire required instructional skills.

Stark County's experiences with school reform confirm the value of this recommendation – and our literacy intervention programs are paying big dividends. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Canton City Schools, one of Ohio's "Big Eight" urban districts, where partnerships with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation and a federal Small Learning Communities (SLC) grant have provided the resources to fuel ongoing faculty development geared towards changing the culture of teaching and learning by making all teachers literacy instructors.

At McKinley High School, ongoing professional development, driven by a faculty literacy team, has resulted in a “literacy across the curriculum” approach. Added to this has been an increased focus by the district and teachers to prepare students for the ACT and its associated components. And on the Timken Campus, Early College High School’s (ECHS) involvement with the Knowledgeworks Foundation has resulted in its staff receiving nationally recognized professional development and assistance in crafting a research-based literacy plan. Through analysis of MAP, COMPASS and Canton City Schools Common Assessment results, the ECHS data team has created a plan to address literacy across the curriculum.

Today, Canton has the highest ACT test-taking rate of any of the “Big Eight” school districts and, as reported by *Catalyst* magazine, the highest college persistence rate among the state’s largest urban school districts.

4

MAKE BETTER USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Support a “technology for all” policy that uses technology and its applications to improve teaching and learning, deliver assessments, identify student strengths, personalize learning and engage parents in the education of their children.

The state of Ohio must take a new look at its education technology infrastructure and at how it uses technology and its applications to improve teaching and learning. Stark County has a number of exemplary programs that can support and guide such efforts. For example, our schools and their education partners have created **digital academies** that collaboratively purchase electronic course content and deliver it to students using shared course management software. This blending of resources and tools allows students to learn at their own pace; and, by connecting teachers’ personal touch with virtual course technology, students have access to powerful yet personalized instructional approaches.

Similarly, while video conferencing is just now coming to the forefront in both our educational and business communities, Stark County schools have been using this technology for more than ten years. In the 1990s, a grant provided a video conferencing unit **for every district in the county**. Using these systems, students have been able to connect to remote classrooms and other institutions in Ohio and around the world. This is an example of 21st-century learning in a ‘flat’ world. And as this technology has evolved, the units have been replaced with newer systems that are better, cheaper and faster.

Stark County schools recognize that the world is “connected” and have made a determined effort to communicate with their constituents, using technology to its fullest extent. Parents now expect access to their children’s academic records, and Stark County schools deliver this information electronically in real time. Parents can view the grades and attendance

records of their children along with important information about discipline, fees and related items of interest. Parents can choose to set “triggers” that automatically generate messages. For example, if a student misses class, a message is sent to parents informing them of their child’s behavior.

These initiatives are seizing and firing students’ imaginations. They are powerful models from which Ohio’s education policy leaders – and schools and districts across the state – can learn important lessons. And they can be found in Stark County, which had the first K-12 Internet “gopher” in the world – and which was the second K-12 presence on the World Wide Web.

5 EXPAND STEM LEARNING

Invest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) learning using alternative models that make hands-on, problem-solving, project-based learning approaches available to all students in all schools.

If Ohio wants to remain competitive in the global economy, it must do a better job of preparing its students to participate in STEM careers – as scientists, mathematicians, engineers and technologists. This is the basis for the state’s newly-discovered priority on STEM learning. ***But in Stark County, science and mathematics education has been a priority for more than 15 years.***

With funding from National Science Foundation grants, Stark’s education partners launched the SEEDS program in 1992 to improve elementary science instruction. In 1995, science and mathematics lessons were first “delivered” to Stark students by an equipment-filled truck through the SAMM project that was the vision of Tim Timken, then CEO of the Timken Company. And in 1999, the Stark County ESC’s SATURN program expanded science instruction to area middle and high schools.

These innovative programs were the foundation for the Bill Mease Center for Science and Math that is the hub for the county-wide SAMM program. Today, SAMM is helping students enjoy and see the value of science and mathematics. It is raising students’ achievement levels by improving teaching quality and supporting exemplary, standards-based instructional materials. And here’s the key: The Center’s services are available to ALL students, not just those who are selected to participate in a STEM school or related program.

Stark County urges the state’s education policy leaders to expand support for STEM learning by making greater use of alternative program models that make hands-on, interdisciplinary, problem-solving learning available to ALL students in all schools. It is a proven way to excite young people and to show them the relevance that learning has for their lives.

6

REMOVE THE NONACADEMIC BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Create full-service schools and provide wraparound services that are critical to many children’s learning success, and knock down separate and often contradictory funding silos that make it difficult for schools and communities to foster students’ social, emotional, moral and academic development.

Stark County’s CARE Teams are changing the way schools and community agencies – both public and private – work together to meet children’s needs. Like similar initiatives in other communities, CARE Teams bring educators, health care and social services providers together to identify factors that are preventing children from succeeding in school, and then to work with children, families and a variety of community organizations to decrease child and family risk factors while strengthening their protective factors.

CARE Teams work to make every school a center for child development and family support – a place where children discover that people care about them, and where their basic needs for nutrition, shelter, health care and physical and emotional safety can be met. CARE Teams address the early onset of risk factors and non-academic barriers to learning; and they promote physical, emotional, behavioral and academic success. Their effectiveness – and most stakeholders agree that Stark’s CARE Teams are making a strong contribution to improved student outcomes across the county – is rooted in the intense relationship between schools and the community.

Yet, community-based efforts to promote the healthy development of all students and to get the conditions for school success right need support from the state. Most importantly, they need support to expand access to high-quality, out-of-school learning opportunities that address both academic needs and non-academic barriers to learning. They need help in crafting and implementing a comprehensive system of student supports. And school-community partnerships would benefit from the state’s commitment to identify ways to redeploy, blend and braid several federal funding streams (e.g., social security and child welfare; funding for schools with children on free and reduced lunch; special education; TANF funding; and relevant mental health, health and juvenile justice funding) to support dropout prevention, expand intervention efforts and accelerate learning for all students.

7

HELP STUDENTS GET A JUMP ON COLLEGE

Ensure that more students have meaningful opportunities to earn high-quality college credit while still in high school.

Stark County's experiences with Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), Early College High Schools, College Tech Prep and other dual-credit courses prove the value of helping students get a jump on college. Components forming the state's entire battery of early-college opportunities have been hard at work in Stark County to produce a new kind of promise – a Stark County Promise – that will ultimately be far more powerful than its famous Kalamazoo counterpart. Where the Stark approach is different from many others in Ohio is that these components are seen as a unified whole. Individually, and collectively, they produce powerful strategies to both increase college access and reduce the cost of college.

One such example is dual enrollment – or dual-credit courses as they are known locally. During the 2007-2008 academic year, more than 400 students were enrolled and received grades in this program. Not only were students enrolling in dual credit courses, they were achieving as both high school teachers and college professors learned new ways of collaborating. More than three out of every four students earned a grade of B, or above. Twenty-three dual courses were offered through the collaboration of seven colleges, universities and regional campuses. And it is estimated that students and families saved at least \$164,000 in tuition and fees.

Dual-credit programs, which motivate students to accelerate their learning, are continuing to expand in Stark County during the 2008-09 academic year. Eleven districts are now offering 58 courses, and an estimated 1,298 students will participate to earn 4,328 credit hours, representing a potential savings of over \$549,000.

It is critically important that the state continue to support and expand dual-credit and other programs that foster early college experiences, and that it create more powerful incentives for schools and districts to support them. State officials should look at Stark County's efforts to recruit and train qualified high-school faculty to become college adjuncts. In challenging financial times, the aspect of teaching one high-quality course to meet both high-school and college requirements will help the state lead the nation in education attainment in a cost-effective manner. The growth of dual credit as an instructional and college-access strategy will create a demand for high-quality instructors, and the program's credibility will be undermined if college courses are taught by under-skilled high school faculty. Skilled teachers, who can teach dual-credit courses, can be part of an integrated system that will also ultimately save the state, parents and students millions, while reducing time in college and raising our education levels.

What are dual-credit and the state's other early college options worth? Over 2,000 Stark students are now enrolled in Tech Prep alone and will bank at least 12 hours of college credit. Then, there is early college, AP and traditional PSEO. In Stark County, 4,227 students participated in such options during the 2007-08 academic year. The value of college credit earned, or banked, at the lowest state tuition rates was more than \$4.2 million. And for Stark County, the "promise" will continue to grow.

8

IMPROVE AND CONNECT SERVICE DELIVERY

Establish a coherent regional delivery system and align the state's education, workforce development and economic development initiatives.

Earlier this year, the State Advisory Committee on the Transfer of Adult Career-Technical Programs crafted a strategy for the successful transition of certain adult workforce development programs from the Ohio Department of Education to the Ohio Board of Regents – pursuant to House Bill 119 (2007). Stark County's education partners support efforts to remove the barriers to adult learning and to transform a postsecondary education system that was built largely for young, full-time, traditional students into one that helps millions of adult workers acquire the skills and credentials that will allow them to succeed economically.

Yet, we urge the state's leaders to ensure that this transfer of program authority does not jeopardize existing connections and collaborations between the joint vocational system and comprehensive school districts' career-technical education initiatives and the state's adult workforce training system. The elimination of past "silos" will have limited benefit if it results in the building of new barriers between adult workforce education and K-12 schools' career-technical education programs. Accessible, seamless career pathways are critically needed, which speaks to the importance of preserving and strengthening Ohio career-technical education partnerships.

Stark County's education partners also encourage the state's leaders to establish a **coherent regional delivery system** for economic development, workforce training and education services. To be sure, the Ohio Skills Bank and Ohio's emerging "Stackable Certificates" initiative will be helpful here, but many educators and school administrators continue to be confused by competing deployment structures and inconsistent regional boundaries.

9

PROMOTE INNOVATION

Give schools, districts and multi-district collaborative more flexibility in organizing instructional schedules, delivering educational services, awarding academic credit and administering human resources.

Stark County's commitment to innovation in education is reflected in a number of initiatives, from early learning and Science and Mathematics on the Move (SAMM) programs to Early College High Schools and the Ohio School Transformation Initiative. Convinced that our schools and the children they serve have benefitted from these innovations, we encourage Ohio's leaders to enact an **Innovation Schools Act**, similar to one recently adopted in Colorado, to remove the barriers to change and give schools and districts – and collaborations of districts – greater opportunities to adopt innovative policies and practices

in such areas as the delivery of instructional services, the organization and length of the school day or school year, the licensure and deployment of teachers, and the awarding of academic credit.

Such an act would authorize schools, districts and education collaboratives to prepare an innovation plan, consistent with parameters set by the Ohio Department of Education, seek public and/or private funding, and submit the plan to the State Board of Education for approval. To support this initiative, the state should establish an Office of Educational Entrepreneurship and Innovation within the Ohio Department of Education with responsibility for expanding the boundaries of public education by scaling up successful educational entrepreneurs, seeding transformational education innovation and building a strong culture to support these activities at the school and district level.

10 DEMAND COLLABORATION

Promote the development of local/regional P-16 councils and other local/regional collaboratives, and charge them with birth-to-career education planning and service delivery.

At the recent Ohio Dropout Summit (November 18, 2008), Professor Hal Lawson (The University of Albany, SUNY) told participants: “Collaboration proceeds from, and strengthens, interdependent relationships. Very simply, no one person, group, team, organization or system in a collaboration can achieve the outcomes it needs without the participation and contribution of the others. Entities in a true collaboration rarely start from this kind of interdependence. It develops over time, especially as trust builds and norms or reciprocity (mutual giving and receiving) develop.”

This **IS** the Stark County story and it needs to be Ohio’s story. It’s the story of authentic community engagement – a new culture of shared responsibility in which diverse interests contribute solutions through their input, ideas and belief that anything is possible and nothing is beyond reach. This new culture must be grounded in high expectations and rooted in an understanding that success belongs to schools, neighborhoods and communities. It must be sustained and accountable, just as it must be fueled by a collective capacity to get the job done.

But if this is all about community engagement, what are we asking the state of Ohio to do? Our answer is simple: Support and work closely with local and regional collaboratives; demand that communities build and use public-private partnerships (whether they are called P-16 councils or something else); provide incentives to postsecondary education institutions to mobilize resources and provide support to both fledgling and fully developed collaborative learning initiatives; and “model the way” by giving the Ohio Partnership for Continued Learning lead responsibility for regional coordination, capacity building and networking of Ohio’s P-16 community.

AND THE BEST NEWS IS YET TO COME

Stark County isn't done. Our journey toward 21st-century schools is not complete and there are more chapters to the Stark County story. Here are three of tomorrow's headlines.

College Opportunity Credits. Already a leader in dual-credit programs, Stark County is expanding opportunities for students to participate in a variety of early college experiences that allow them to earn either "transcribed" or accelerated college credit while still in high school. Its early college experiences are the Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), dual credit courses taught by high school teachers with adjunct status, Early College High School, Advanced Placement courses and testing, and College Tech Prep.

Collectively, these opportunities are known as **College Opportunity Credits**, which represent not only a powerful college access strategy, but also "scholarships up front" that save Stark students and their parents millions in college tuition each year. During the 2006-07 academic year, 2,818 Stark students earned 5,004 college opportunity credits (i.e., a three-hour college course or equivalent). This equates to \$3.3 million savings in college tuition, fees and book costs. During the 2007-08 academic year, the savings jumped to \$4.2 million as 4,227 students earned 6,797 college opportunity credits.

"Arts Explosion." Arts education supports the development of 21st-century learning skills such as creativity, problem solving, teamwork and innovative thinking. Students learn and thrive in an arts-rich school climate. That's why 10 of Stark County's 17 districts now offer Advanced Placement courses in Art History and Studio Arts. It's why we are continuing to offer instruction in visual arts and music in all grades (P-12) and in all districts. And we are searching for ways to infuse drama and dance into all schools' curriculum. Yet, true to Stark County's tradition, this is not simply a "school" program. With a culture of shared responsibility, the *"Arts in Stark"* initiative is supported by many enthusiastic community partners, including the Stark County Arts Council, Canton Museum of Art, Canton Symphony Orchestra, Voices of Canton, Players Guild, Canton Ballet and the Massillon Museum.

During the past four years, 40 grants have been awarded to teachers for programs and partnerships in drama, dance, music and art that enrich our students' academic and artistic growth. Our teachers recognize the benefits and take every opportunity to continue Stark County's "Arts Explosion." By **"growing the arts to create smarter kids, new jobs and healthier communities,"** they are building models that can be used by schools and districts throughout Ohio.

"One System" for Education and Care. Stark County's education partners are tightly intertwining our education and care systems to guarantee that every family has **front-door access** to all the supports that children need to thrive. With a "one system" approach, we are working to ensure that every child has from birth through the postsecondary years the support and assistance needed to develop the assets for a successful life and career, that the education and social service sectors work collaboratively to remove any nonacademic barriers to learning, and that the entire community cultivates an environment that allows families and individuals to flourish.

As part of this initiative, the Stark County Help Me Grow program is evolving to partner with the medical community – and together they are expanding services to families – prenatal to age three.

STARK COUNTY AND ITS EDUCATION PARTNERS

Located just an hour from Cleveland and minutes south of Akron, Stark County, Ohio hardly seems suited to be a bellwether for anything. Granted, Stark claims to be the birthplace of NFL football and Canton, its largest city (with 83,000 residents), houses the Professional Football Hall of Fame. There was, of course, a certain county prosecutor by the name of William McKinley who later went on to become President of the United States, but these claims to fame are hardly earth-shaking news items for the county's 378,000 inhabitants who go about their daily tasks about as mid-America as mid-America can be.

Like other urban and suburban areas across the nation, Stark County has experienced rising social and educational problems in recent years. A half-century ago, with its steel mills and manufacturing centers, a high school diploma was not essential. Yet, the 1980s and 1990s brought a different reality. Health care became the second-largest employer in the county and today education is third. Stark County is now home to major international businesses such as the Timken and Diebold companies and new emerging high tech enterprises like Rolls-Royce Fuel Cell Systems (US) Inc. and the Defense Metals Technology Center. And while a company such as Timken has offices and plants on five continents, its roots are in Stark County. Its corporate offices and world headquarters are here.

These companies have made the transition to high technology and a highly skilled workforce. They have tossed aside the malaise of the "rust-belt" and restructured their operations to compete in a global economy. The need for these companies is no longer just a trained local workforce – it is a need for economic stability and high quality of life in the communities where their employees are based.

This explains why Stark County has become a leader in education reform, both in Ohio and across the nation, with world-class innovations that are improving educational outcomes for all children in our area. Our success is rooted in an education community that has embraced changes needed to bring our schools into the 21st century – and in business and philanthropic communities that have mobilized for collective action and have helped create a culture of shared responsibility.

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Learn from the Past.

Prepare Our Children for the **Future.**

