

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **1. Lack of money is not the bigger problem facing education, superintendents say; it's how and on what the money is spent.**

- When it comes to doing what is best for their districts, 42 percent of district superintendents say they often feel like their hands are tied by the system, 34 percent that they work around the system to get things done, and only 18 percent that the system helps them do the things they think are needed.
- Fifty-two percent say the real problem with public education today is “how and where the money is spent,” compared with 37 percent who say it's that not enough money is spent on the schools. When asked to think about their own districts, the numbers reverse: 39 percent say the problem is “how and where” and 50 percent that's it is too little money.
- A majority (62 percent) would rather avoid “harmful cutbacks,” but a sizeable one in three (33 percent) say that, to them, financial hard times in their district are a chance to make necessary changes that would be tough to make in ordinary times.

### **2. Strengthening managerial authority over staff would be decisive to delivering gains in student achievement in their districts, even more decisive than increased funding, according to district superintendents.**

- When forced to choose, 50 percent of district superintendents think “significant expansion of management authority over staff” would be likelier to lead to improvement in student achievement, compared with 44 percent who give the nod to the more obvious “significant increases in school funding.”
- By an overwhelming 72 percent to 14 percent margin, district superintendents say greater managerial authority would result in measurable

improvement in student achievement, not just better management of resources. And superintendents are so confident they can deliver better student achievement that 78 percent favor linking superintendents' own pay to improved student outcomes – in exchange for that greater authority over staff.

- Fifty-seven percent believe that evaluating schools and districts based on how well students do on standardized tests and publicizing the results is mostly a good thing “because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed.”

### **3. In the view of district superintendents, Ohio's collective bargaining system needs fundamental transformation. Much as they may dislike state mandates, they favor new legislation to correct this problem.**

- About two-thirds (65 percent) of district superintendents say the collective bargaining process needs fundamental overhaul, and another 32 percent would press for some modification. Only two percent say it should be left alone.
- More than eight in ten (84 percent) believe that “while a district's leadership is on its own” during negotiations, local union chapters “can count on statewide or even national support.”
- District superintendents point to school boards as part of the problem: 76 percent believe that boards are “often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord.” But 92 percent believe that if state law were to strengthen management authority over staff, it's likely that their boards would press for contract changes during future rounds of collective bargaining.
- Fifty-five percent of district superintendents acknowledge that there have been labor issues

where “the leadership of my district – including myself – should have done more to hold the line.”

- Fully eight in ten (81 percent) say “I may dislike mandates, but some of the problems facing Ohio’s school districts require state legislation.”

#### **4. State laws governing staffing and pay are a big part of the problem and need to change.**

- Fully 93 percent view state law that “permits district-labor negotiations over a variety of workforce issues that really should be off the table” as a serious obstacle to improving public education.
- Almost nine in ten (89 percent) say the same about state law “requiring that teacher pay be based upon longevity and university credits instead of demonstrated skill and performance.”
- Asked to rank five elements of Ohio state law according to what they’d most like to see repealed, the two items that rise to the top are to get rid of the provision that mandates automatic step increases in teacher salaries (73 percent) and the requirement of the last-in, first-out approach to layoffs (66 percent).
- One priority emerges when superintendents are asked to rank six hypothetical changes to laws relating to school staffing and pay: 82 percent point to making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers – even if they are tenured.
- Superintendents believe Ohio’s way of licensing teachers fails to assure good teaching. Just five percent believe “that going through the licensure process in Ohio guarantees that a teacher is well-prepared to succeed in the classroom.”

**5. Ohio’s district superintendents think two promising ways to save districts money are to give superintendents greater control over combined state revenue streams and to mandate a statewide health insurance plan for the K-12 system. On the other hand, merging actual**

**districts and/or back-office operations are not viewed as particularly promising.**

- District superintendents strongly support two of six proposals that superintendents say, if implemented, would bring districts across the state considerable cost savings.
  - Combining state revenue streams while giving districts more flexibility over how the money is spent – 82 percent
  - Creating a state-mandated health insurance plan that would serve all of Ohio’s K-12 system – 74 percent
  - Relying a lot more on technological innovations such as online instruction – 54 percent
  - Outsourcing or merging back-office operations such as accounting and payroll – 44 percent
  - Merging school districts – 31 percent
  - Giving districts a lot more freedom to convert traditional schools to charter or community schools – 23 percent

**6. District superintendents in Ohio share many of the same points of view as other public school leaders, namely regional ESC superintendents and charter school leaders. But on several survey items, the groups significantly differ.**

- Ohio’s regional ESC superintendents differ from district superintendents in that:
  - They are more likely to think that the real problem facing public education today is misuse of resources rather than lack of funding (76 percent vs. 52 percent).
  - They are more likely to view school boards as at least somewhat of an obstacle to progress: 92 percent believe that school boards are often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord, compared with 76 percent of district superintendents.

- They are stronger supporters of publicizing student test scores as a way to hold schools and districts accountable (72 percent vs. 57 percent).
  - ESC superintendents are almost twice as likely as local ones to think that outsourcing or merging back-office operations would result in substantial cost savings (80 percent vs. 44 percent).
  - Ohio’s charter school leaders differ from district superintendents in that:
    - They are more likely to think that the real problem in education today is how and where the money is spent (71 percent vs. 52 percent).
    - They are far more likely to choose “significant increases in school funding” as a better route to improved student achievement than “significant expansion of management authority over staff” (73 percent vs. 44 percent).
- 7. On some measures, the views of district superintendents vary depending on the type of school district they are in.**
- Superintendents from historically high-need districts are more likely to point the finger at the “how and where” money is spent, as opposed to the “how much” money is spent:
    - Superintendents from urban districts (55 percent)
    - Superintendents from districts where a majority of students are economically disadvantaged (48 percent)
  - Superintendents from districts with low (Continuing Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency) state academic ratings (56 percent)
  - Suburban superintendents stand out when it comes to the belief that school boards are “often reluctant to stand firm during collective bargaining because they want to avoid political battles and discord”:
    - 89 percent of suburban
    - 71 percent of urban
    - 73 percent of rural
  - Superintendents from rural districts stand out in that they are more likely to disagree about the cost savings that would come from merging full districts or even just administrative tasks:
    - Percent who disagree that merging school districts would bring significant cost savings to Ohio’s school districts:
      - 75 percent of rural
      - 50 percent of suburban
      - 52 percent of urban
    - Percent who disagree that outsourcing or merging back-office operations would bring significant cost savings to Ohio’s school districts:
      - 63 percent of rural
      - 30 percent of suburban
      - 41 percent of urban