



Testimony for the Senate Education Committee

December 4, 2012

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The Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Sawyer, and members of the Senate Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today. Thank you for your leadership at this time when so much in public education is changing and evolving; hopefully for the better.

I am vice president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Based in Washington DC, Dayton and Columbus, the Institute is a nonprofit organization that works to improve the nation's schools through quality research, analysis, and commentary, as well as on-the-ground action and advocacy here in our home state of Ohio. We also sponsor 11 charter schools across the state.

I support the education reform goals and policies in HB555 because they focus squarely on improving Ohio's K-12 education accountability system. Twenty years of standards based reform in America has shown us that rigorous academic standards and aligned accountability systems for schools and educators alike are important for school improvement efforts.

The states where students have made the most-significant academic achievement gains over the past decade (for example, Massachusetts and Florida) have had high academic standards, have aligned assessments to those standards with stiff cut scores and have transparent systems for sharing school and student results through district and school "report cards."

But, Ohio's academic standards and accountability system is undergoing a substantial and needed upgrade, and this upgrade is going to take years to fully implement. As such, it will demand the support and patience of lawmakers like yourselves over many years. This is a long-term project.

Recall that Ohio is one of 45 states and the District of Columbia that has made a serious commitment to elevating student expectations by embracing not only the Common Core Academic Standards in English language arts and

mathematics but also by committing itself to working with over 20 other states through the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium in implementing next-generation assessments in both core subjects by 2015. This is a heavy lift for the Buckeye State, its schools, its educators and its children.

Under the more rigorous Common Core standards, Ohio will see a decline in test scores across the board. Kentucky, for example, is the first state in the nation to explicitly tie its achievement tests to the Common Core standards and in 2012 it saw the share of its students scoring “proficient” or better in reading and math drop by roughly a third in both elementary and middle schools were the tests were given. Ohio is sure to see similar dips (see attached for Ohio expectations under PARCC).

Despite the obvious challenges, our state has made an audacious commitment to delivering significantly higher levels of academic performance for all its children. This is absolutely the right course of action, but there is much necessary work to accomplish in coming months and years. This includes developing new curriculum, revamping the state’s accountability system to align with new assessments, and ensuring that professional development and teacher preparation programs are aligned to the new system. Taken as a whole, this amounts to an entire system reboot.

As I see it, HB555 is a bridge to the state’s future accountability system. It is not the final product but an important advance to a more rigorous system better attuned to the academic and career needs of our students. HB555 makes some important advances. These include:

- Replacing the currently nebulous school and district ratings (e.g. Continuous Improvement) with readily understood A-F grades. It, smartly, phases this change in over several years, which should give schools and districts the time they need to adjust to the change, and explain what they mean to their constituents.
- Adopting the ACT or the SAT as a standardized college ready assessment for high school graduates. The current Ohio Graduation Test is largely meaningless to employers and higher education and it is set at or below a ninth-grade achievement level in both math and reading. Good riddance OGT.
- Holding all charter schools accountable for their performance and closing those that simply cannot deliver. As there are now more than 30,000 students in the state’s myriad drop-out and prevention recovery programs it is past time that they be held accountable for their performance, and I would encourage you to try and assign an overall rating to these schools by 2013-14 rather than 2014-15.

- Holding charter school authorizers accountable for the performance of their schools and providing them with ratings of “exemplary,” “effective,” or “ineffective.” All charter sponsors, including Fordham, need to be held accountable for the performance of their schools over time.

This is all for the good. But, there are a few components of HB555 I would encourage you modify. While the goal of college and career readiness is a worthy target for all students it is both difficult to grade across 600+ school districts and harder yet to achieve. Therefore, I support efforts to report on future school report card items such as “percentage of students determined not to be college-ready,” “advanced placement participation rates and test scores,” and “dual-enrollment program participation rates.”

Having these indicators as information points for schools is valuable, but trying to give these metrics and weights for an overall report card grade is fraught with peril. A rural high school, for example, with a graduating class of 100 or 150 students will be hard pressed to provide opportunities for advanced placement courses, that suburban districts already widely provide. Rather than provide a standardized grade on such indicators you may wish to simply have this information reported.

Alternatively, you could provide bonus points for schools and districts that improve on these metrics but it isn't right to punish schools that simply can't afford to provide things like AP or IB courses or dual enrollment credits. Reporting and grading ACT or SAT participation and achievement rates will have a profound impact on schools and students. It will make clear who is and who isn't college and career ready. However, requiring and grading additional college and career ready metrics at this point is redundant, costly and hard to implement across the state's myriad high schools.

HB555 is not perfect and I hope you and your Senate counterparts will improve it. But it moves Ohio forward in a way that should positively impact student achievement. Getting the accountability mix just right will take time, and it will surely require modifications along the way in coming years. But, this bill is a necessary first-step and worth supporting.

Thank you Madame Chairwoman, ranking member Sawyer and members of the committee. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Projection of proficiency rates under the PARCC exams

December 2012

Research conducted by Aaron Churchill, Ohio research and data analyst

In 2014-15, Ohio will implement the PARCC assessments for grade levels 3-12. These exams will replace the Ohio Achievement Assessments (grades 3-8) and the Ohio Graduation Test (grades 10-12). The PARCC assessments will be aligned to the Common Core, rigorous academic standards in math and English language arts that aim to ready students for college and career when they complete their K-12 educational experience.

With the Common Core standards and the PARCC exams looming, we consider in this report how these new standards and exams may affect Ohio's pass (or "proficiency") rate. To be considered "proficient," a student has to achieve a minimum test score (the "cut score") on a standardized exam. In Ohio, the cut score of what is deemed "proficient" on its standardized exam has not changed within the past decade. The number of questions a student has to get correct for proficiency is low in Ohio, ranging from one-third to one-half of the questions answered correctly; for example, in 2012, a fourth grader had to answer twenty-three out of forty-nine questions correctly on the reading exam for proficiency.¹

The cut score for "proficiency" will change under the PARCC exams. After the first year of PARCC testing (spring 2015), the PARCC governing board will determine a uniform cut score of proficiency for all its member states—and that cut score will most likely be higher than Ohio's current cut score.

Therefore, when the PARCC exams arrive, we expect that the percentage of Buckeye State students who score proficient or above will fall significantly in the short-term. We project a decline of somewhere between **20 to 50** percentage points in the statewide proficiency rate. For individual school districts, the drop is similar, across districts of different sizes, wealth, and demographic characteristics. Our projection is based on the percentage of 2011-12 students who scored advanced plus accelerated on the OAA and OGT exams. These are the two achievement bands above proficient. So, in short, we expect that only those who achieve **above** proficient now (i.e., in the advanced and accelerated performance bands) will test proficient or above under the PARCC exams. This methodology has been used by the Ohio Department of Education.²

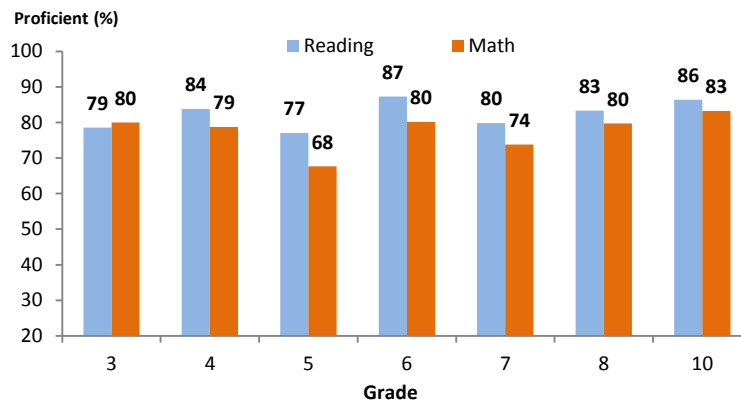
¹ The raw score—the number of correct answers—for proficiency varies by grade, subject, and year. However, the scaled score—an adjustment made to account for differences in the difficulty of questions on different test forms—has not changed by grade, subject, and year since the early 2001.

² The Ohio Department of Education compared international assessments (PISA and TIMSS exams) with Ohio's current standardized exams. In its comparison, ODE found that the percentage of students who tested "proficient" on the international exams roughly approximated the percentage of "advanced" plus "accelerated" on the OAA. ODE, therefore, is using the current percentage of students testing at "advanced" plus "accelerated" to forecast "proficient" or above on the PARCC assessments in 2014-15. ODE also notes the correlation between NAEP proficiency and OAA "advanced" plus "accelerated." See slide 29 in former State Superintendent Stan Heffner's, PowerPoint presentation from Fordham's February 15, 2012 event, "Embracing the Common Core": <http://www.edexcellence.net/events/embracing-the-common->

Figure 1 shows the percentage of Ohio students who tested proficient or above (1A) and the percentage of students who tested advanced and accelerated (1B) on the 2011-12 Ohio standardized exams, in math and reading, for grades 3-8 and grade 10. Table 1 shows the change in the differences in the percentages of proficient and above versus the percentage of advanced and accelerated. The change is stark—anywhere between 20 and 50 percentage points, depending on the grade and subject.

Figure 1: Change in statewide proficiency rates under the assumption that 2011-12 OAA/OGT advanced and accelerated students will test proficient or above in 2014-15. **Source:** Ohio Department of Education, [Statistical Summaries and Item Analysis Reports](#), 2011-12.

(A) Percent of students, *proficient* or above by grade and subject, 2011-12



(B) Percent of students, *accelerated* or above, by grade and subject, 2011-12

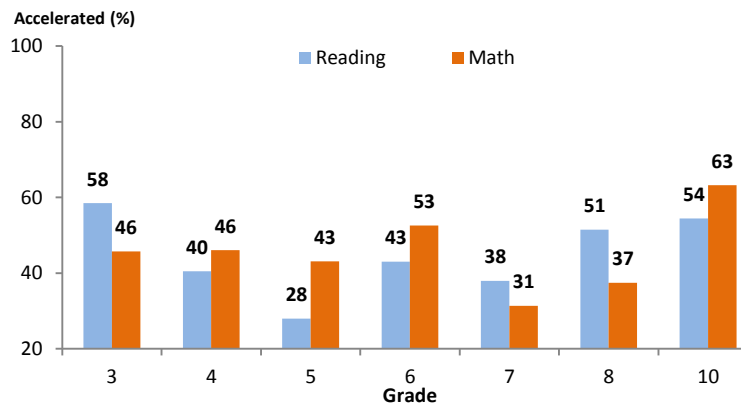


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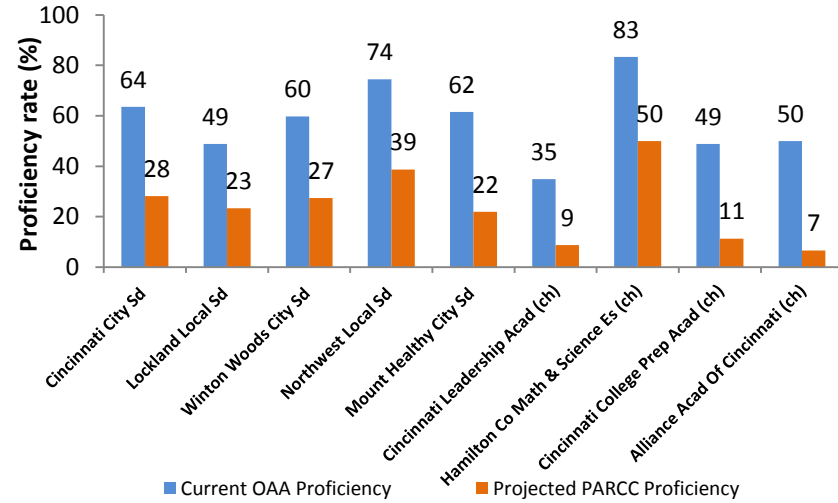
Grade	Math			Reading		
	Proficient and Above	Accelerated and Above	Change	Proficient and Above	Accelerated and Above	Change
3	80	46	-34	79	58	-21
4	79	46	-33	84	40	-44
5	68	43	-25	77	28	-49
6	80	53	-27	87	43	-44
7	74	31	-43	80	38	-42
8	80	37	-43	83	51	-32
10	83	63	-20	86	54	-32

The following charts show the proficiency rate declines for a few selected school districts (traditional and charter) that are located in four of the state’s major metropolitan areas. We use fourth and eighth grade math and reading proficiency rates, reported in the Ohio Department of Education’s June 2012 unverified, unofficial data set.³ (**Important note:** The October 2012 preliminary data set, released by ODE in spreadsheet form, did not include the percentage of students scoring in each performance level. However, the June 2012 data set does report by performance band.) Again, the sharp fall in proficiency rates, observable statewide, is also observed for school districts—both inner-city and suburban schools (see figures 2 through 5).

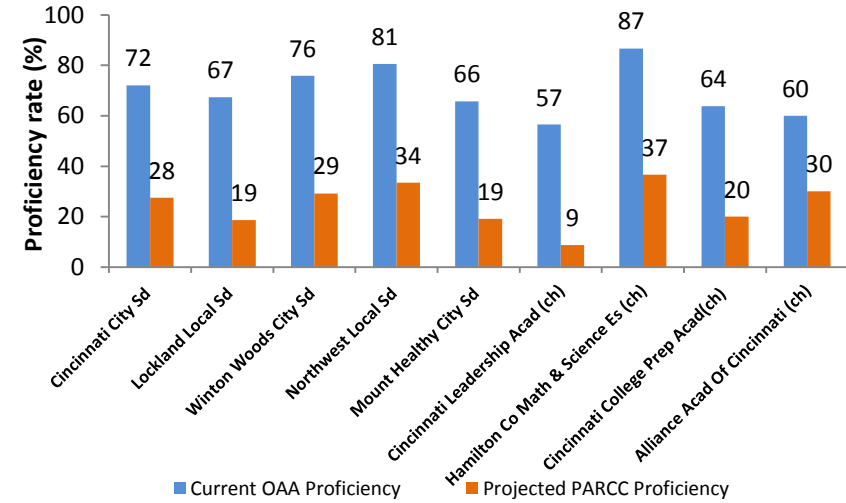
³ Ohio Department of Education, Test Results, June 2012,
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEPrimary.aspx?page=2&TopicRelationID=1142>.

Cincinnati area school districts

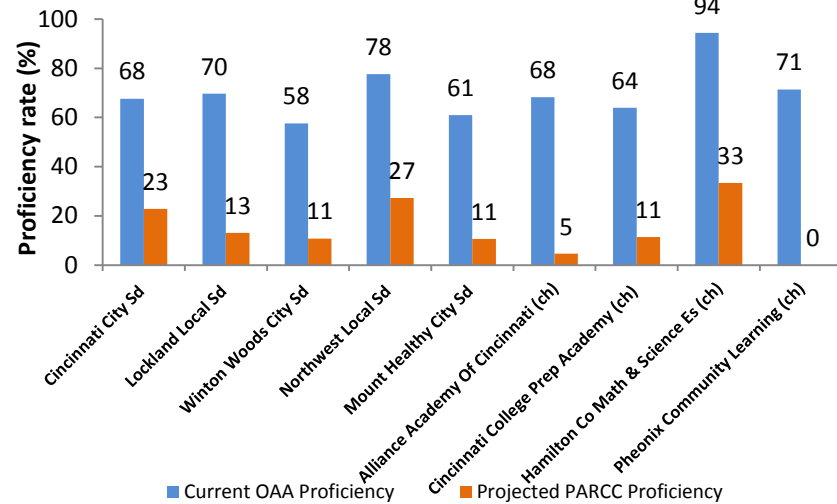
4th grade math



4th grade reading



8th grade math



8th grade reading

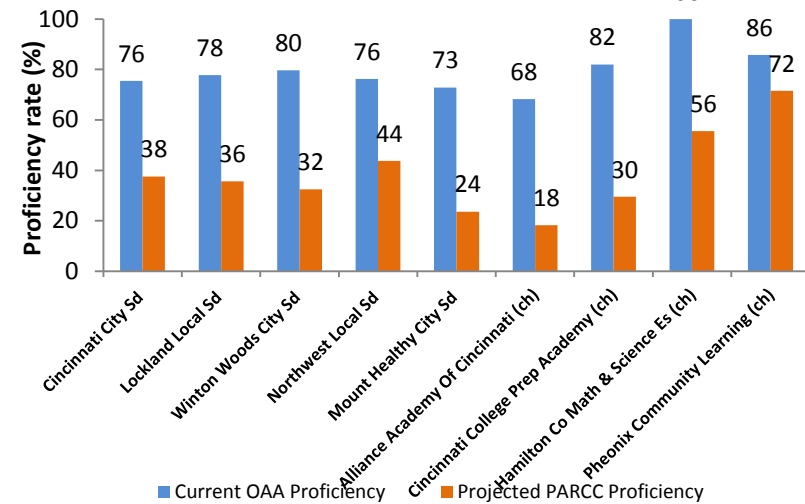


Figure 2. OAA proficiency rates versus projected PARCC proficiency rates, fourth and eighth grade math and reading, for select Hamilton County traditional districts and charter schools (ch). 2011-12 OAA and PARCC proficiency rates are from June 2012 ODE unofficial, unverified data set. PARCC proficiency rates are based on 2011-12 OAA advanced and accelerated rates.

Cleveland area school districts

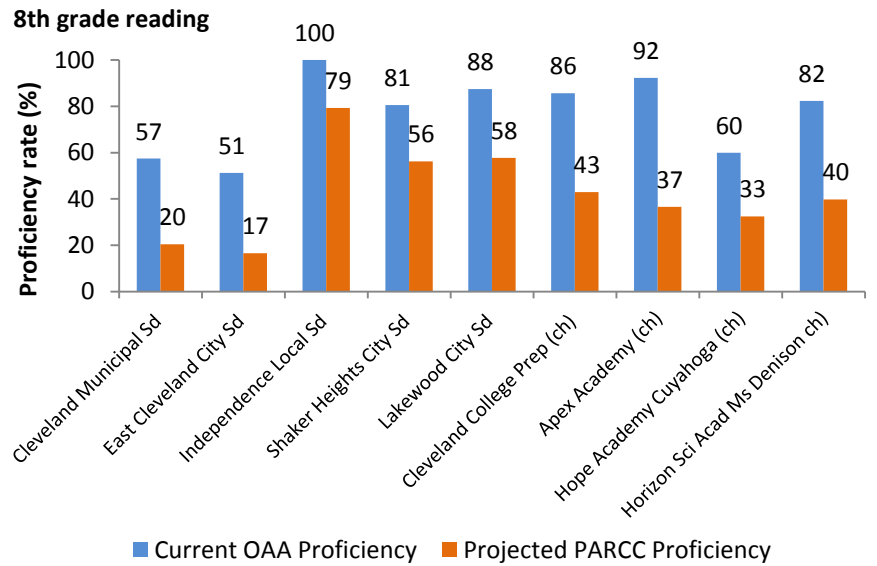
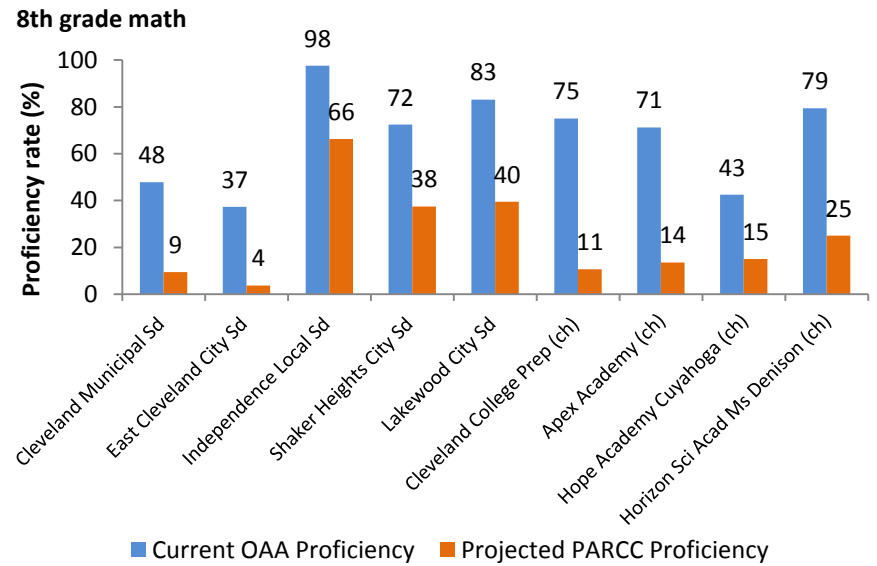
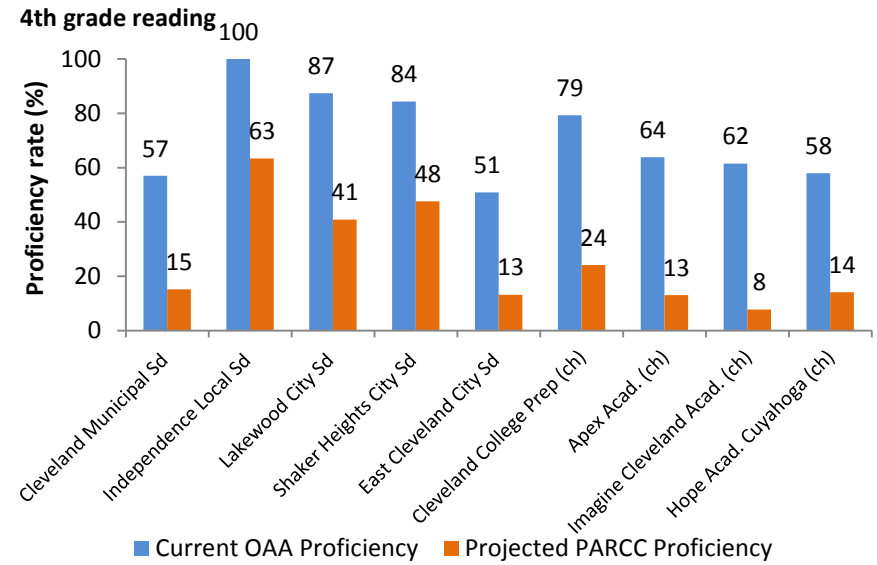
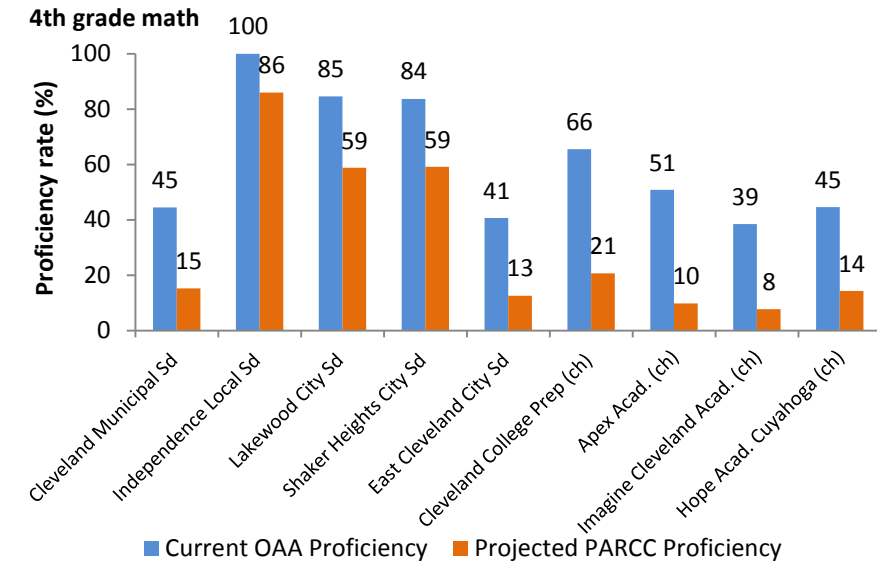
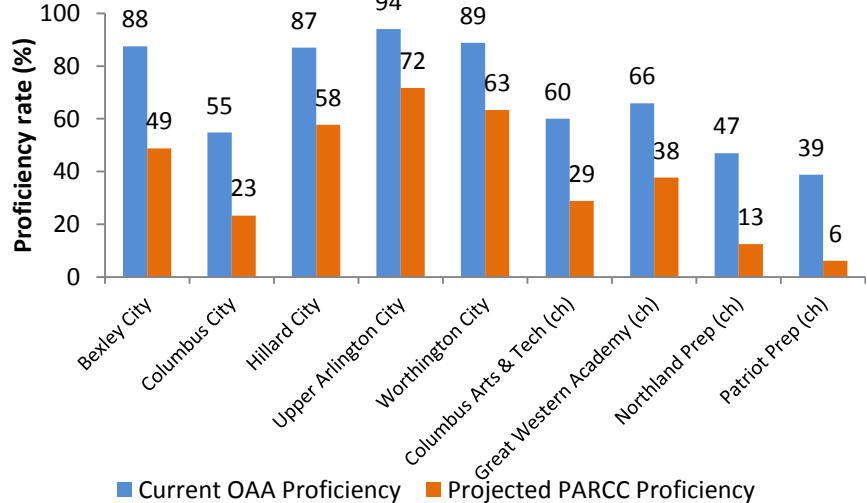


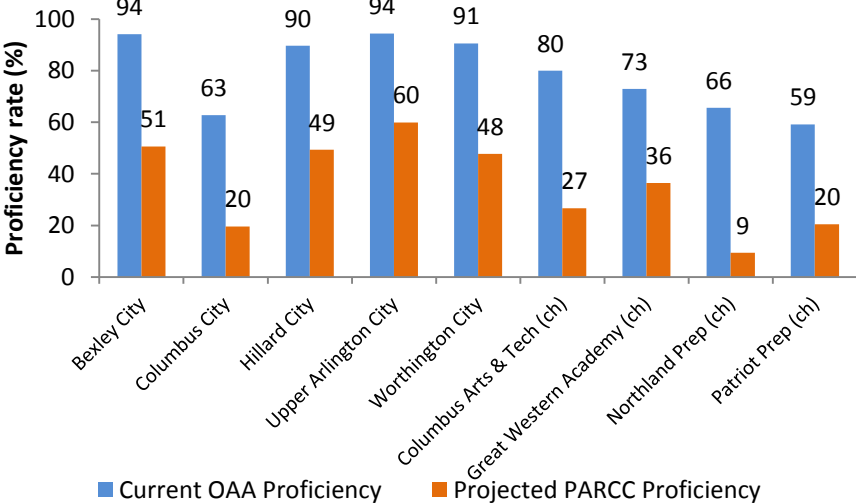
Figure 3. OAA proficiency rates versus projected PARCC proficiency rates, fourth and eighth grade math and reading, for select Cuyahoga County traditional districts and charter schools (ch). 2011-12 OAA and PARCC proficiency rates are from June 2012 ODE unofficial, unverified data set. PARCC proficiency rates are based on 2011-12 OAA advanced and accelerated rates.

Columbus area school districts

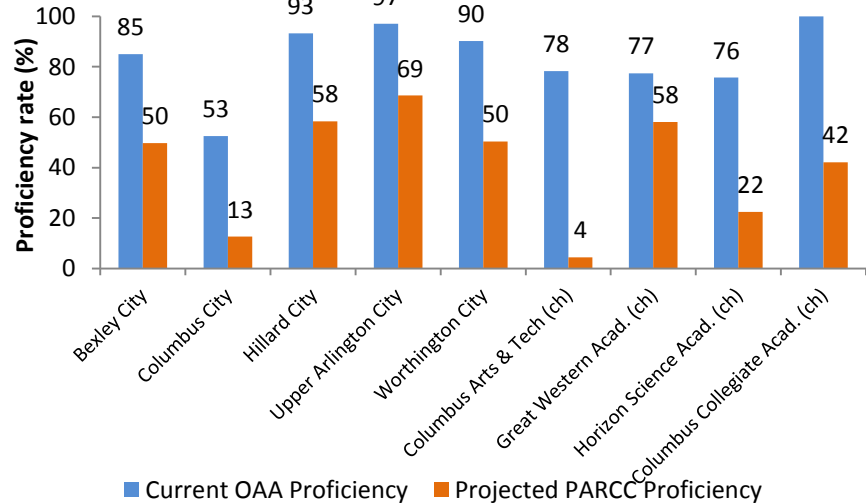
Fourth grade math



Fourth grade reading



Eighth grade math



Eighth grade reading

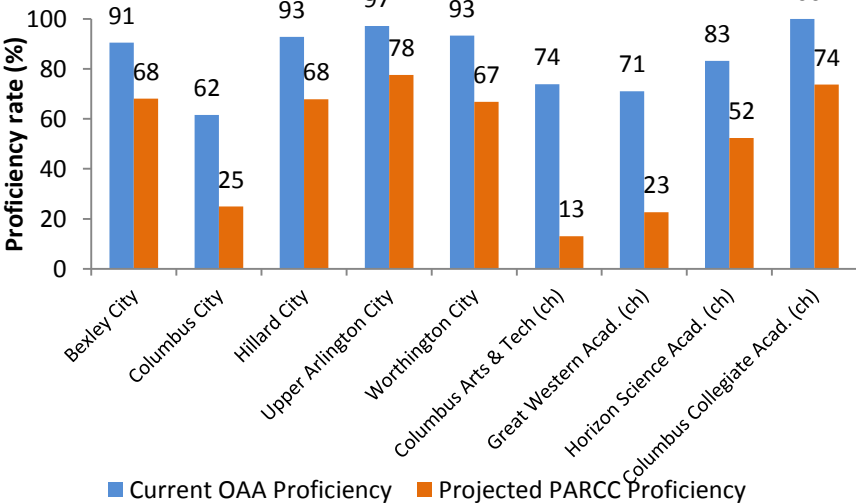
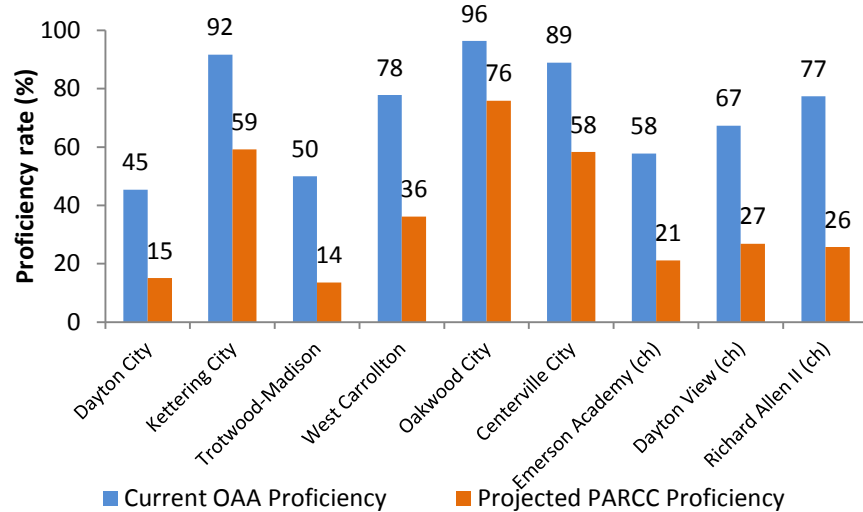


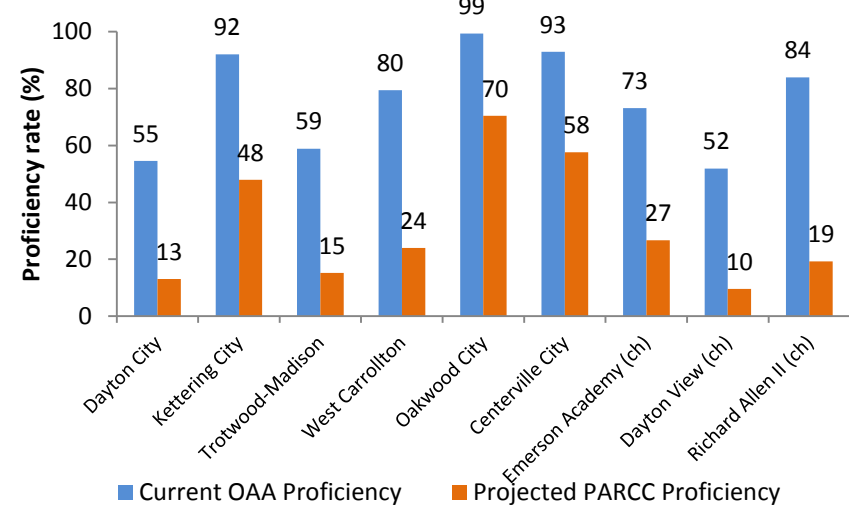
Figure 4. OAA proficiency rates versus projected PARCC proficiency rates, fourth and eighth grade math and reading, for select Franklin County traditional districts and charter schools (ch). 2011-12 OAA and PARCC proficiency rates are from June 2012 ODE unofficial, unverified data set. PARCC proficiency rates are based on 2011-12 OAA advanced and accelerated rates.

Dayton area school districts

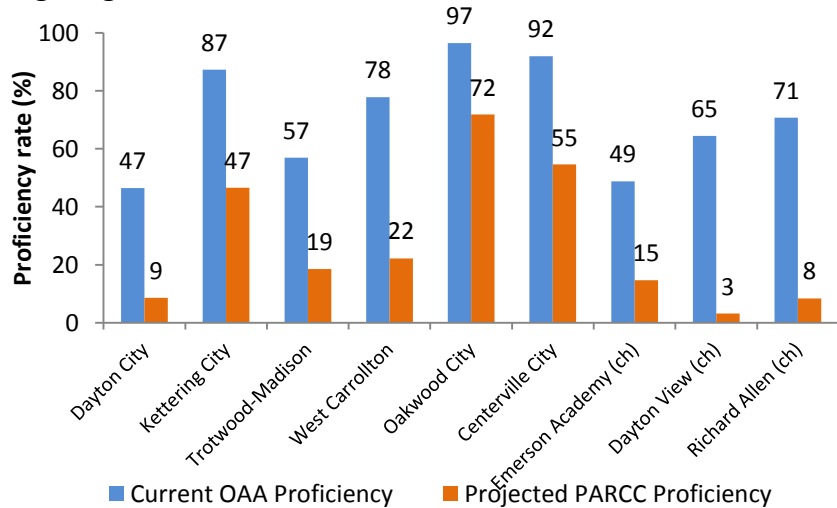
Fourth grade math



Fourth grade reading



Eighth grade math



Eighth grade reading

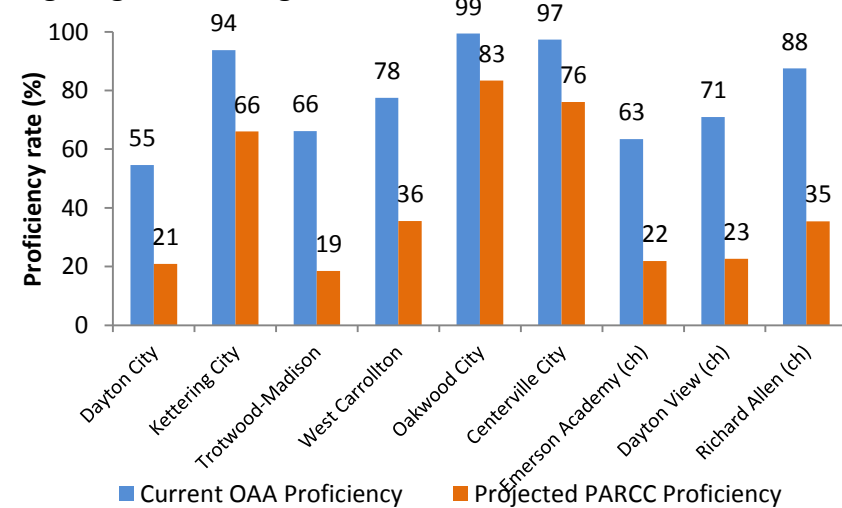


Figure 5. OAA proficiency rates versus projected PARCC proficiency rates, fourth and eighth grade math and reading, for select Montgomery County traditional districts and charter schools (ch). 2011-12 OAA proficiency rates and PARCC proficiency rates are from June 2011-12 ODE unofficial, unverified data set; PARCC proficiency rates are based on 2011-12 OAA advanced and accelerated rates