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**African-American Students in OHSTI Schools Close Achievement Gap Since Historic Reform Efforts Began More Than Six Years Ago**

Gov. Strickland Praises Results, Encourages Ohio School Districts to Focus Existing Resources on Improving School Performance with Strategies that Work  
Overall Graduation Rates Have Increased Amid Dramatic Rise in Poverty in Areas Where Schools are Located

CINCINNATI – (Sept. 11, 2009) – Nearly eight out of 10 African-American students in Ohio high schools that are part of a historic high school reform effort that began in 2002 are graduating. That’s a 29 percent increase from 2002 to 2008, surpassing the state’s graduation rate for African-American students during the same period, according to a Cleveland State University analysis of data from the Ohio Department of Education.

What’s more, the overall graduation rate of 78.4 percent for Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) member-schools rose 32 percent from 2002 to 2008. At the same time, the state’s overall graduation rate rose 2.3 percent. Such dramatic reductions in the achievement gap between African-American students and their peers come against the backdrop of increasing poverty in the communities where schools are located. The population of students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals at these schools more than tripled.

This represents the kind of progress reformers had in mind in 2002 when KnowledgeWorks, working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ohio Department of Education and others, created the OHSTI reform model in response to the state’s poor graduation rate. At the time, four out of 10 OHSTI students dropped out of school. The Foundation implemented its program in some of Ohio’s most at-risk high schools with rising minority populations, shrinking family incomes and decreases in family education. About \$100 million has been invested in the program, including more than \$13 million from the ODE.

Gov. Ted Strickland said he sees promise in the progress made by OHSTI schools.

“We are pleased that the investment we made in the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative is paying off in success for African-American students,” Strickland said. “OHSTI schools are doing what we are asking all schools and districts to do – direct existing resources to those activities that research indicates will improve student achievement. I look forward to more achievements in the future.”

Chad Wick, President and CEO of KnowledgeWorks, said: “All the research tells us that students who drop out of school see their income levels dramatically shrink over time. In today’s complex global economy it’s more important than ever for our young people to stay in school, pursue higher education, and become productive citizens. The success of OHSTI schools is a

testament to the belief that all of our young people can do well if offered the right environment, instruction, tools and confidence in their abilities.”

The school data came from the [Ohio Department of Education’s](#) recent report card, which assessed the performance of the state’s schools and school districts for the 2008 school year. CSU researchers analyzed data from more than 20 OHSTI-affiliated schools throughout the state, from Canton to Cleveland Heights and from Columbus to Toledo

Detailed highlights of their findings include:

- In 2008, current OHSTI sites had an African-American graduation rate of 77 percent, a 29 percent increase over 2002, when just 59.7 percent of African-American students graduated from high school. In contrast, the state graduated 64.3 percent of its African-American students in 2008 -- a 3.7 percent decrease in the same time period.
- There has been a 19-point increase in the overall graduation rate – 32 percent -- from 2002-2008. During that same time, the state graduation rate increased 1.9 percentage points, or 2.29 percent.
- This increase in performance at OHSTI sites happened at a time when the communities in which OHSTI schools are located moved from 17 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals to 72 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Building from the successes of OHSTI, KnowledgeWorks Foundation recently created EdWorks, a not-for-profit subsidiary currently working with school districts across the nation to replicate the results achieved in Ohio.

EdWorks Executive Director Harold Brown said he is pleased with the performance of OHSTI schools – particularly the performance of African-American students – and is looking for continued improvement in Ohio and throughout the United States.

“It’s exciting to see the kind of improvement our OHSTI schools have made over the past few years,” Brown said. “Our model of personalizing the educational experience, while providing rigorous curriculum and instruction, supportive school climate and culture, aligned assessments, and comprehensive student support clearly works, and we look forward to expanding the concept. Any student who does not graduate – whether he or she is in Toledo or Tennessee -- represents a failure of our education system. We can’t continue to let that happen.”

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*KnowledgeWorks Foundation ([www.kwfdn.org](http://www.kwfdn.org)) strives to be the leader in developing and implementing innovative and effective approaches to high school education in Ohio and around the United States. Our work primarily focuses on redesigning urban high schools, developing STEM and Early College high schools, and supporting student-centered approaches to delivering real learning and results in our schools.*