



A NEW KIND OF POLICY THINK TANK.

**Testimony of Stephen Dyer  
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Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee. I come before you not to really advocate for or against various provisions under consideration here. I tend to like the idea of democratic control of institutions rather than less accountable, appointed control. So I am more concerned over what I'm hearing you guys want to do to HB 154 than I am with its House-passed provisions.

However, I think what's been missing in this whole Academic Distress Commission debate is some perspective. A step back, if you will, to ask the simple question: What are you doing?

In preparation for this hearing, I looked back at 13 years of Performance Index Score data. Why PI scores? Because it's about the only measure that's stayed pretty constant since the 2005-2006 school year. And because it's an accumulation of proficiency test scores that serves as a nice stand in for the test-based accountability system we have in place today. Because let's face it, ladies and gentlemen, the current state report card is based almost solely on these test scores; different calculations and reads of those test scores, but test scores nonetheless.

I did a pretty simple analysis: Let's see where these districts rank statewide on Performance Index and where they rank statewide on Median Income. Then let's see how strongly correlated those test scores are.

Well, it's hard to imagine a stronger correlation if you actually *tried* to make one between wealth and test scores.

There are multiple ways of expressing correlational strength. Generally, the closer to 1, the stronger the correlation. The closer to 0, the less strong the correlation. I found one disciplinary breakdown of correlational strength to help you visualize this relationship at DePaul University.

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>r meaningful if</b>	<b>R<sub>2</sub> meaningful if</b>
Chemistry	$r < -0.9$ or $0.9 < r$	$0.8 < R^2$
Biology	$r < -0.7$ or $0.7 < r$	$0.5 < R^2$
Social Sciences	$r < -0.6$ or $0.6 < r$	$0.35 < R^2$

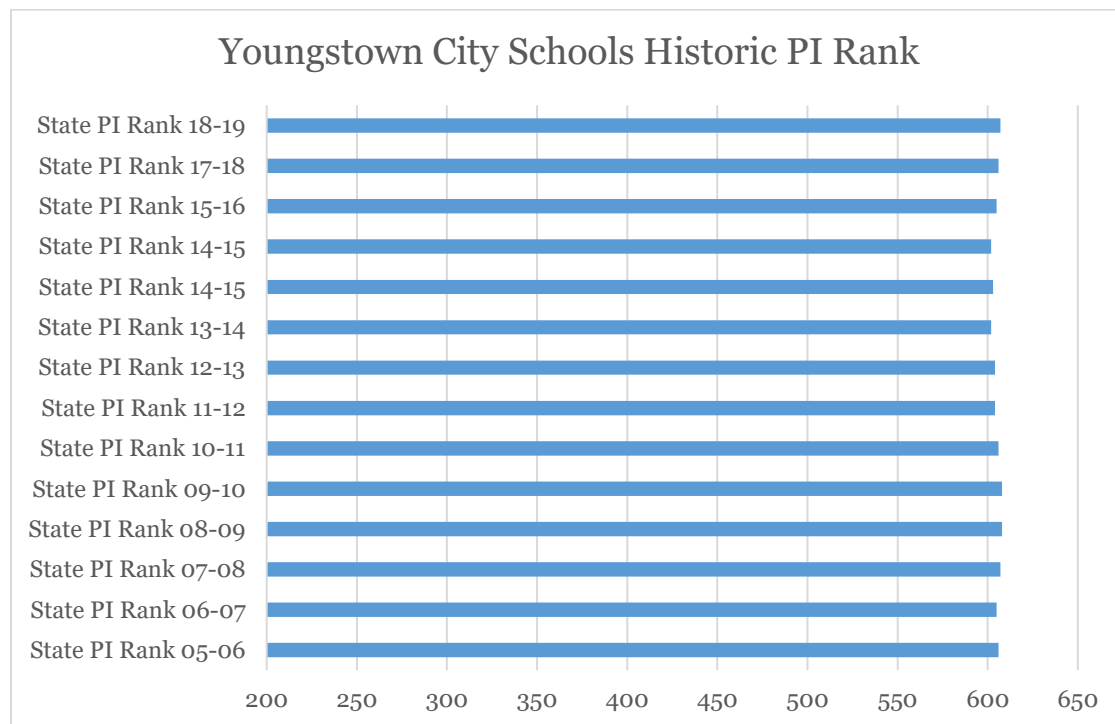
So generally speaking, if your R<sup>2</sup> value is greater than .8, you've got enough of a correlation in chemistry to say, for example, whether a chemical is causing cancer cell death or something.

Well, the  $R^2$  correlation between state rankings on income and test scores was .864 in the 07-08 school year and .847 in the 15-16 school year (both of these years were the earliest and latest I could find both PI and income datasets). Why this discussion over  $R^2$ ?

Because what this means is districts that do well on the testing regime are rich and those that don't are poor. This Report Card does not measure academic success. It measures poverty. Pure and simple.

One more piece of evidence. In the 2005-2006 school year, the Big 8 urban school districts' average state rank on PI was 597 (out of 608). The average in the 18-19 school year was 595. The same districts rank the same year after year.

Here are the statewide rankings for Youngstown since 2005-2006 on Performance Index:



Folks, no change in governance will alter the economic realities that Youngstown's exodus of industrial strength has caused the Mahoning Valley. And we certainly aren't measuring what's going on inside the Youngstown classrooms.

If you want to see the district's scores improve, bring back the steel and auto jobs that allowed by wife's family to live the comfortable middle class life my grandfather enjoyed when he worked for 40 years at Firestone.

Test scores are, simply put, an unfair and horribly incomplete way to measure educational success. We all know what the most important thing a student can learn in school is ... the love of learning. Yet that most important element of a child's educational experience is nowhere near the current report card measures. Nor is creativity – the element of our educational system that China, Finland and others try to integrate into their educational systems.

Yet knowing all this, still, this legislature is considering ways to come in and have the state dictate how communities best serve their kids. Imagine, if you will, the state claiming it knew better than *your* communities? How would you feel? Especially when you knew that the state tests are stacked against you and your kids?

The Land Ordinance of 1785 set aside the heart of every township for a “public school.” In many ways, the idea that each community would form around a public school was *the* American Revolution. Please, don’t take Jefferson’s vision for locally controlled public education and replace it with a dictatorial system of mandates based on test scores that are nearly perfectly correlated with income.

If you want to support these schools, here’s an idea: Fund them.

State data indicates that Per Equivalent Pupil funding in the state’s wealthiest districts far outstrips that for the poorest. If Orange spends \$20,000 plus per equivalent pupil to achieve their high scores in one of the wealthiest communities in the state, how do you expect Youngstown to achieve anywhere near that when they have \$12,600 to spend? Lorain spends less than ½ of what Orange does per equivalent pupil at \$9,489 – there are 46 Charter Schools that spend more per equivalent pupil than Lorain.

Bexley spends more per equivalent pupil than East Cleveland.

Rather than knocking these districts, they should be commended for the positive outcomes they’ve been able to achieve despite their unrelenting challenges and their relatively meager financial resources to overcome those challenges.

Their residents certainly don’t deserve to have anything dictated by the state, which has failed to fully fund its constitutionally required thorough and efficient system of public schools. If you’re going to expect these districts to improve, especially give the tremendous demographic hurdles the districts have to overcome and the strong correlation between wealth and test performance, you’re going to have to pony up.

In short, think twice before deciding to judge a district based on how kids do on tests they take on 5-10 days of a 180-day year given those tests’ strong correlation to income. Especially given this state’s historic unwillingness to adequately fund those same schools that some are so quick to chastise.

I’m more than happy to answer any questions you may have.