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Ratings disingenuous until system is fixed

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It is laudable that state Superintendent Stan W. Heffner wishes to raise the low standards in the state's accountability system, but it will take more than a new assessment system to bring some semblance of reality to Ohio's district-rating system ("State school chief wants to raise bar," *Dispatch* article, Wednesday).

Based on an analysis of Ohio's excellent districts outlined in the report "Grading on a Curve: The Illusion of Excellence in Ohio's Schools," 109 excellent districts had ACT scores below the state average of 21.8; 136 districts had a college-remediation rate that was higher than the state average of 41 percent; 67 districts had no students take Advanced Placement examinations; and 220 districts rated excellent serve fewer than 20 percent of their identified gifted students, with 85 of the highly rated districts reporting no gifted services at all.

I agree with Heffner's statement that the "entire (state) system is focused on minimum competence, and there is no reward for going beyond that. There is no incentive to excel."

But beyond looking at new standards and assessments, what is the plan to ensure that there is an incentive to excel? And why is the state continuing to hand out excellent ratings to school districts based on minimum competency levels while the system is being fixed?

It does a disservice to students, policymakers and the public to perpetuate the myth that the majority of Ohio's districts are excellent when even the state superintendent admits it is not true.

While 43 percent of students scored at advanced and accelerated levels (not "proficient," as stated in the article) on Ohio's fourth-grade reading assessment, only 9 percent scored "advanced" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress assessments.

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