

Akron Beacon Journal

EDUCATION

These Summit County schools, including charters, made state lists for low performance

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Published 6:01 a.m. ET Aug. 7, 2023

A handful of schools in Summit County are facing scrutiny from the state due to students' low test scores and other accountability measures.

Three districts in the county — Akron Public Schools, Cuyahoga Falls City Schools and Barberton City Schools, plus a half-dozen charter schools — have at least one school facing oversight from the state and will be required to produce plans for improvement. Those schools will also receive extra funding.

Some of the schools were flagged for oversight because of the entire building's test scores being low and students not showing much progress. Others had subgroups of students, like students with disabilities or a racial minority group, who performed poorly.

The designations, as the state calls them, are a year behind, reflecting scores from the 2021-22 school year.

Some schools on the lists, including half of those flagged in Akron's school district, were rolled over from the 2019 lists, and may have improved enough that they would no longer be flagged based on the most recent year's scores.

Here's what's important to know.

Why does the state give schools designations?

The state is required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act to identify schools that need to improve. The state has to get approval from the U.S. Department of Education for how it will identify, offer support and hold accountable schools that are struggling.

Bryan Hoynacke, the state's associate director of the Office of School and District Improvement, said that process was delayed significantly by the pandemic. The designations are usually given in the fall, but the federal government took about an extra eight months to approve Ohio's plan, finally solidifying it in June, which is why the 2022 lists are coming out now.

Schools that are identified have to tell the state how they plan to improve. But the designations also come with additional funding to help with improvements, like extra training for teachers or more tutors.

What are the designations, and what do they mean?

To comply with the law, every three years, the Ohio Department of Education releases three lists, each with new names starting this year:

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools: A new name for what were formerly called "Priority Schools," this designation takes into account every student's scores. While the list correlates roughly with the bottom 5% of schools in the state based on test scores, the formula is now more holistic and schools can balance out low test scores by showing improvement. Factors like absenteeism also carry weight. CSI schools tend to be ones that are low performing and not showing much growth.

High schools can also earn a CSI designation just by having a graduation rate below 67%. An elementary school that only serves grades K-2 can make the CSI list for poor rates of chronic absenteeism, because students in those grades don't take state tests.

Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) Schools: Formerly known as "Warning Schools," these are buildings that have subgroups of students performing poorly compared to students in that subgroup across the state.

Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) Schools: Formerly known as "Focus Schools," these buildings also struggle with subgroups, but are just above the ATSI category.

How do schools come off the lists?

While the CSI and ATSI lists are released every three years, schools can earn their way off in between if they show two years of consecutive improvement. For CSI schools, that means two years in a row of being out of the bottom 5%, or in the case of high schools with low graduation rates, raising them over 67% for two consecutive years.

Because there was no testing due to COVID-19 in 2019-20 school year, and then state tests did not count in 2020-21 because so many schools were still in remote learning, schools that were on the 2019 list have mostly had only had one year to show improvement, the 2021-22 school year, ahead of the 2022 list.

The state still included those schools on the 2022 list, noting them as "carried" from the 2019 list, but they could come off as soon as this fall, once 2022-23 data is available. Hoynacke said they will be able to say in December which buildings are officially off the lists.

The TSI list is run annually, so schools are either on it or they aren't each year.

Which Summit County schools earned state designations?

Akron Public Schools had 11 schools that were flagged, including nine for overall low performance or a poor graduation rate. But of those, five have already showed improvement and may soon be removed from the list.

New to the list is David Hill Community Learning Center, an elementary school that tested in the bottom 5% in the state in the 2021-22 school year and is now considered a CSI school.

Also new to the list is Garfield high school, which is on the CSI list under its previous name of Kenmore-Garfield. The school was previously a priority school because of its graduation rate, but it is now on same list for being in the bottom 5%.

East, Buchtel and North high schools are also carried over from the previous list for graduation rate, but each showed one of the two required years of improvement and could be removed from oversight as soon as this fall.

Helen Arnold and Innes, an elementary and middle school, were each on the 2019 list for being in the bottom 5% academically and have been rolled over to the 2022 CSI list, but both improved and were not in the bottom 5% in 2021-22. If the most recent school year sustained that improvement, they should also come off the CSI list this fall.

The district had two Additional Targeted Support and Improvement schools, the I Promise School and Leggett Community Learning Center. I Promise was flagged for its subgroup performance with Black students and students with disabilities, which each make up significant portions of the school. Black students were 57% of the school's population of 522 students in 2021-22, and 30% of the students had a disability.

Leggett received the designation because of the subgroup of students with disabilities, who in 2021-22 made up about 19% of the population.

Six Summit County charter schools also earned low-performance designations from the state, although one, Imagine Leadership Academy, has also shown improvement and may be removed from state oversight.

Three buildings in Cuyahoga Falls City Schools and one in Barberton City Schools were identified for having subgroups of students who are low-performing.

In Cuyahoga Falls, one of the flagged schools, the Cuyahoga Falls City School District Virtual Learning Option, was created for the pandemic years but is no longer enrolling students.

Cuyahoga Falls High School earned its designation for low performance by Asian and Pacific Islander students, and Bolich Middle School made the list for low performance by multi-racial students.

Barberton had one ATSI school, Barberton Elementary West, which made the list for the performance of students with disabilities.

What are the school districts saying about their designations?

Akron's Executive Director of School Improvement Keith Leichthy-Clifford said the district was already aware of the areas of struggle for these schools ahead of the state assigning them designations. The work to improve in those areas has been ongoing, he said.

"No matter where you are, there's room for growth," Leichthy-Clifford said.

David Hill will have a new leader this year, but Leichthy-Clifford noted the school's preliminary test results from the most recent school year were an improvement, so hopefully that will count as the school's first positive year toward shaking its designation.

Leichthy-Clifford said the district is reviewing the reasons why students didn't perform well at Garfield, landing the school on the list for the first time.

In Cuyahoga Falls, spokeswoman Christine Stewart said the district has seen an influx of students who are immigrants or learning English as a second or even third language, as Akron's North Hill population of refugees and other immigrants and their families have spread throughout the county.

Stewart said the district is excited for the diversity, having served primarily white students, but is still adjusting to meet those students' needs.

"We are actively trying to identify how we can best serve those families," she said.

Cuyahoga Falls is in the process of hiring a family liaison for the Nepalese community, she said, and is adopting a communication app with a translation function to use with all parents.

Barberton's superintendent did not return an email seeking comment.

Summit County's Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Schools (formerly known as 'Priority Schools')

Akron Public Schools:

Helen Arnold Community Learning Center, bottom 5%, carried over from 2019

East Community Learning Center, graduation rate, carried over from 2019

APS Online, graduation rate, new to the list

North High School, graduation rate, carried over from 2019

Kenmore/Garfield High School, graduation rate, carried over from 2019 but new to bottom 5%

David Hill Community Learning Center, bottom 5%, new to the list

Innes Community Learning Center, bottom 5%, carried over from 2019

Akron Alternative Academy, reissued to the list for graduation rate and new to the bottom 5%

Buchtel Community Learning Center, graduation rate, carried over from 2019

Charter schools:

Akron Career Tech High School, chronic absenteeism

Cascade Career Prep High School (Dropout Recovery School), graduation rate carried from 2019 and new to the bottom 5%

Imagine Leadership Academy, bottom 5%, carried from 2019

Schnee Learning Center (Dropout Recovery School), renewed to the list for graduation rate

Steel Academy, bottom 5%, graduation rate

Towpath Trail High School (Dropout Recovery School), reissued to the list for graduation rate