



Innovation Ohio questions test score discrepancies at charter school group

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Innovation Ohio, a progressive think tank headquartered in Columbus, has released a study that indicates a large discrepancy between two sets of academic performance scores at the Horizon Science Academy Columbus.

The Innovation Ohio finding follows on the heels of recent news stories in which former students and parents allege that test and attendance scores were tampered with at the Horizon Academy in Dayton.

As a result of those stories, Innovation Ohio looked at the four Horizon schools in Ohio that operate up to Grade 12 and compared the scores those students received on the state Performance Index with the scores those same students received on the ACT college entrance exam.

Performance Index tests are administered by the schools themselves, while ACT tests are administered by an independent testing company. For most schools and school districts — including three of the four Horizon schools — ACT and state Performance Index scores are closely correlated.

That is not the case at Horizon Columbus, however.

According to the latest State Report Card data, Horizon Columbus students scored 98.6 on the state Performance Index, slightly below the state public school district average of 98.9.

But on the ACT test, Horizon Columbus students had an average score of just 17, which put them in the 28th percentile of all students taking the ACT.

In other words, 72 percent of all ACT test-takers scored higher than Horizon Columbus students — and just 16 of Ohio's 612 school districts had ACT scores that were the same or worse. Yet, Horizon Columbus students somehow managed to achieve a higher Performance Index score than 269 Ohio school districts.

The extent of the discrepancy at Horizon Columbus is dramatic, Innovation Ohio said.

In the 60 Ohio school districts that scored, like Horizon Columbus, between 98 and 99 on the Performance Index, the average ACT score was 21.1 — and none of those 60 districts had average ACT scores below 19, let alone the 17 scored by Horizon Columbus students. Columbus City schools, for example, also had an average ACT score of 17. But their Performance Index score, at the height of the data manipulation scandal, was 79.2 — far below Horizon Columbus' score of 98.6.

Innovation Ohio Communications Director Dale Butland said: "The report raises the possibility that the cheating and data manipulation alleged in Dayton may have occurred at Horizon's Columbus campus too. While a discrepancy between ACT and Performance Index scores doesn't prove the existence of cheating, it's hard to fathom how the same students at a single school could have such wildly varying test performance scores."

What makes it even more suspicious is that one test — the ACT — is independently administered, while state Performance Index tests are administered by schools themselves."

Ohio Auditor of State Dave Yost had said he would restrict his investigation to the Horizon school in Dayton.

However, after Innovation Ohio called on the auditor to expand that investigation to include Horizon Columbus, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported that Yost's special audit of a chain of 19 charter schools is expected to cover new allegations about the Horizon test scores.

"The Ohio Department of Education will have a look as well," the *Dispatch* said.

"When it came to exposing data manipulation in Columbus city schools, Mr. Yost was a tiger," Butland said. If similar wrongdoing has occurred at charter schools like Horizon Columbus, we hope he will not be a pussy cat."

According to the *Dispatch*, "the Chicago-based Concept Schools which operate the schools have repeatedly denied any wrongdoing."

Meanwhile, in his daily news update, Bill Phills of the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy in School Funding, said Monday, Aug. 4: "The Gulen Horizon Science Academy operators are a brassy band. Salim Ucan, vice president of Concept Schools, had a letter to the editor published in *The Dispatch* on July 29 on the heels of an FBI raid on the company offices.

"Ucan stated, in reference to the allegations, 'These claims do not represent or reflect the high standards we hold.'

"Mr. Ucan does not even attempt to refute the allegations," Phillis said. Possibly, they do not need to respond to the specific allegations. The Gulenists excel in political activism. They provide free trips to Turkey, lavish campaign contributions and other perks to elected officials at all levels of government. These perks are provided to influence federal and state policy regarding their charter schools."

"It is time that the sponsors of the Horizon Science Academy charter schools in Ohio-Buckeye Community Hope Foundation and the ESC of Lake Erie West-come out of the shadows and intensely monitor these schools. State officials have tended to downplay the irregularities in the charter school industry; hence, the sponsors must monitor the charter schools they authorize and make public the results."

For more on the Gulen movement, see: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/rosiegray/secretive-turkish-movement-buys-us-influence> or <http://innovationohio.org/2014/07/29/io-raises-concern-about-cheating-at-columbus-horizon-school/>

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