



More on the Horizon

Test Score Disparities Raise More Questions about Embattled Horizon Academies

Innovation Ohio watched recent shocking revelations about misdeeds at Dayton's Horizon Science Academy with disgust. In response to the allegations of test manipulation and tampering made during a State Board of Education hearing earlier this month, IO examined publicly available testing data for signs of irregularities. Specifically, we compare how Horizon Academy students did on state tests, administered by school officials with ACT college entrance exams, administered by an independent company. The results raise troubling questions for Horizon's Columbus High School.

In the last two weeks, former teachers and students of Dayton's Horizon Science Academy have alleged that school administrators may have tampered with tests before they were scored, a violation of state policy.¹ If test manipulation occurred, it is expected that the school's scores on the state's Performance Index would be higher as a result. In order to determine whether the scores were artificially high, we looked to compare them with another indicator: the independently-administered ACT college entrance exams, the scores of which are publicly available. Students at four Horizon schools in Ohio take the ACT.

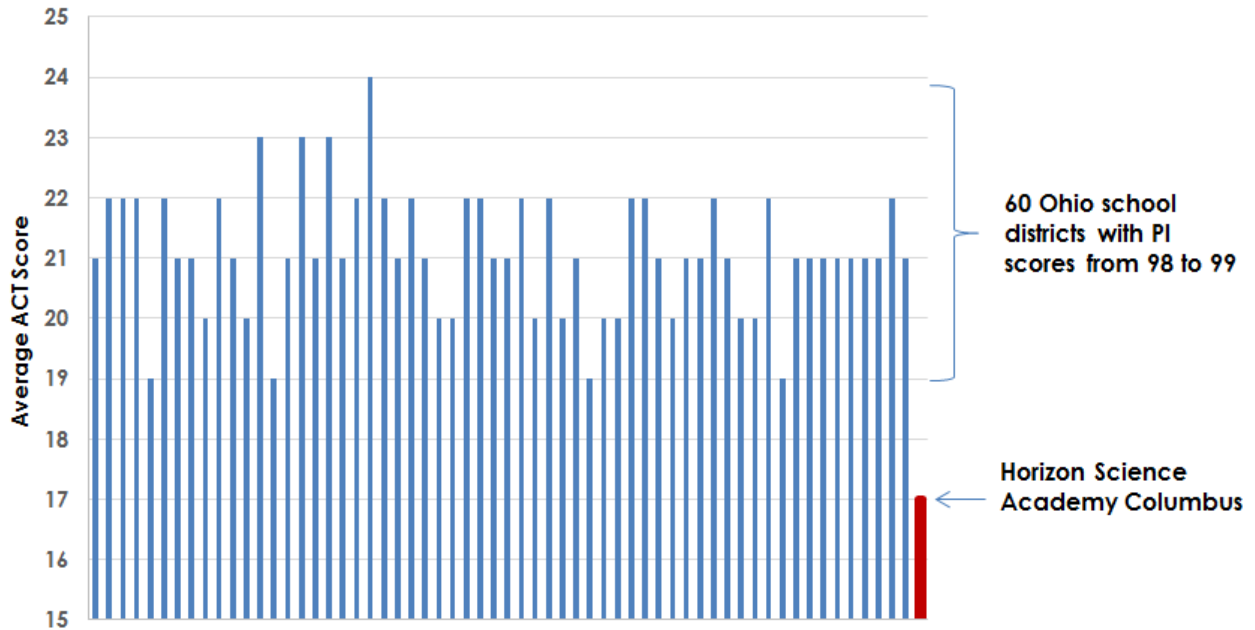
According to the latest State Report Card data, Horizon Science Academy Columbus [scored a 98.6 on the state's Performance Index](#) (PI),² placing it just below the state average score of 98.9 for all public school districts. The score was the highest of the four Horizon academies we reviewed. However, the average ACT score at Horizon Columbus was just 17, placing the students who took the test near the bottom in the 28th percentile.³

¹ Doug Livingston, "Former teachers at Turkish-run charter school allege test-cheating, discrimination, sexual activity," *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 15, 2015; Josh Sweigart, "Allegations mount at area charter," *Dayton Daily News*, July 27, 2015.

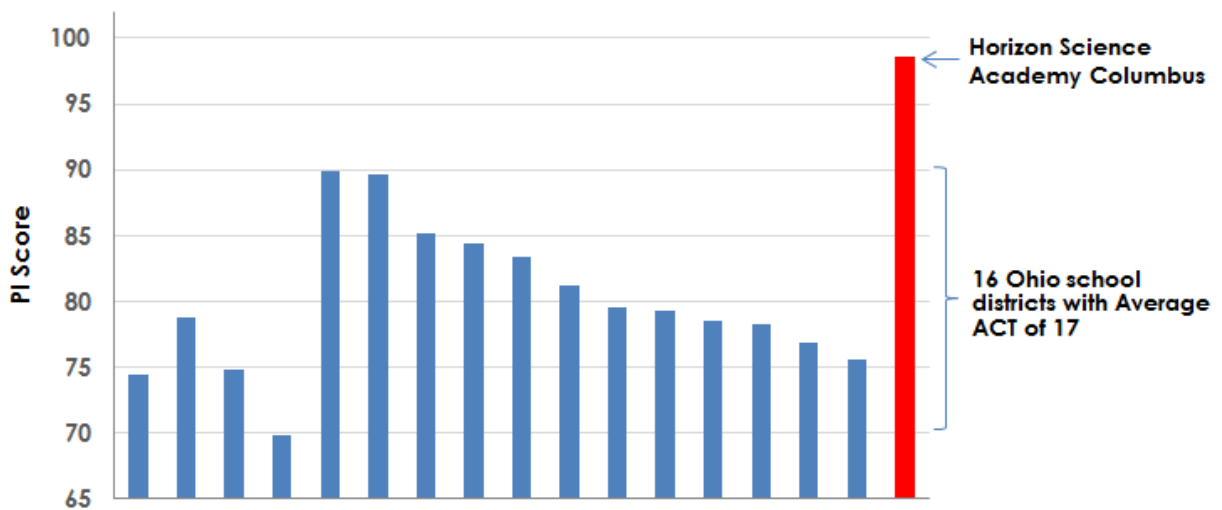
² The state's Performance Index Score is calculated by examining how many pupils took the Ohio Achievement Assessments and their scores, with those scoring higher receiving a greater weight than those scoring lower. The higher the index, the more scored better than average on the proficiency tests. The lower the score, the more underperformers contributed to the score.

³ TestMasters. Percentile rankings for ACT composite scores in 2009-2011. <http://www.testmasters.net/actabout/scoring-scale>.

By comparison, the 60 other Ohio school districts with PI scores between 98 and 99 – like Horizon Columbus’ – averaged 21.1 on the ACT, equivalent to the 55th percentile.⁴ The range of average ACT scores for all 60 districts with PI scores comparable to Horizon Columbus was from 19 (41st percentile) to 24 (74th percentile). The most frequent district ACT score for districts that scored between 98 and 99 – or similarly to Horizon Columbus – was 21.



To further cement the apparent disparity between Horizon Columbus’ solid PI score and low ACT scores, we note that only sixteen of Ohio’s 612 school districts scored as low as the school on the ACT, yet Horizon Columbus somehow posted a higher PI score than 269 Ohio school districts.



⁴ http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Download%20Data/2012-2013/District%20Data/1213_LRC_DISTRICT.xls

The disparity between Horizon Columbus' state scores and its ACT performance should raise red flags, especially in light of the accusations of test manipulation being made at the Dayton school. The data seem to indicate a serious disparity, especially considering that Horizon's Columbus school's average ACT score is a full two points lower than the lowest scoring school district with a similar PI score.

Horizon Columbus received more than \$3 million in state money last school year, nearly all of which came from Columbus City Schools.⁵ Columbus City Schools' average ACT score was the same as Horizon's – 17 – even though Columbus City's PI score of 79.2 (at the height of that district's cheating scandal) was significantly *lower* than Horizon's 98.6.

As noted above, IO looked at four Horizon Academies in Ohio, but only found a significant discrepancy between state tests and ACT scores at the Columbus location. This analysis in no way is meant to prove that test manipulation has – or has not – occurred. It is just one of many ways state regulators should check the validity of test results, pointing out red flags where further examination is needed.

IO urges the Ohio Department of Education and Auditor of State David Yost to expand their investigation of the Horizon Academies to include the Columbus High School. Ohio's children deserve the best educational opportunities possible. IO hopes they will be as vigilant in rooting out possible data manipulation at charters as they have been at Columbus City Schools.

⁵ <http://odevax.ode.state.oh.us/htbin/F2014-COMMUNITY-SETTLEMENT.COM?act=12-Jun-2014&district=irn&irn=133660&comrpt=y&summary=y>