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# Ohio students improve in math

**State report cards show reading scores stagnated**

**Cole Behrens and Maria DeVito**  
Columbus Dispatch  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Annual school district report card results show slight improvement for math scores across Ohio, while reading scores stagnated and absenteeism continues to plague many districts.

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) released its annual report cards on Sept. 15, giving the

public a look at the performance of the state’s public schools.

According to state-level data, the number of Ohio students proficient in math improved to 55.3% from 53.5% the previous year.

Chris Woolard, chief integration officer at ODEW, said that while it’s important to celebrate the upward trajectory of math scores, more work needs to be done.

“It’s something that we’re concerned with and we want to make sure that we’re supporting schools and students in this space,” Woolard said.

The percentage of Ohio students pro-

ficient in reading declined slightly, from 60.9% last year to 60.4% this year. Last year, the Ohio General Assembly mandated a phonics-based reading method called “the science of reading.” Woolard said that it may take a year for the results of the new curriculum to be seen in the data.

“It’s kind of in the early stages of that,” Woolard said of the new curriculum. “But it’s really important that this current school year, where everybody’s going to be fully implemented with the science of reading, and we want to make sure those numbers are increasing over time.”

ODEW collects information from the state’s more than 600 public school districts and sorts the data into six categories: achievement, progress, early literacy, gap closing, graduation rate, and readiness (college, career, workforce, military). Beginning in 2022, the state shifted away from an A-F letter grade system to new categories and calculations based on a star system.

This is also the first year that the state is reporting the district’s readiness category after introducing it several years ago.

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# Ohio AG Yost suing insurer for retired first responders



**Retired Ohio firefighter Jeff Burleson signed up for insurance from Texas-based Thin Blue Line. He said he now faces about \$350,000 in unpaid medical bills after the company failed to pay his claims.** DORAL CHENOWETH/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**Thin Blue Line accused of not paying out claims**

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A year ago, retired Euclid police officer Joe Baglione showed up for a doctor’s appointment only to be told that his insurance carrier, Thin Blue Line, hadn’t been paying claims so his coverage would no longer be accepted.

That prompted Baglione to make a series of calls to Thin Blue Line, whose agents told him that everything would be worked out. But again and again, Baglione said, those promises turned out to be “big lies.”

“I think whoever is behind this Thin Blue Line – this is criminal. They need to pay for what they did to members,” he said. “It’s the biggest scam I’ve ever experienced.”

Now, the insurance company is fac-



**Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost filed a lawsuit against insurer Thin Blue Line.** SAMANTHA MADAR/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

ing hundreds of complaints and a lawsuit from Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost.

Retired Beavercreek firefighter Jeff Burleson, who lives in Highland County, reported to Yost’s office that he had \$350,000 in claims that Thin Blue Line failed to pay.

“I was mad at first, thinking I’m go-

ing to have to pay \$300,000 to \$400,000,” he said. He wants the claims paid and then some.

“I’ll tell you what: I want my money back. I paid my premiums and I didn’t have insurance for the past year. I only had a piece of paper that said I did,” Burleson said.

Retired Truro Township Firefighter Kenny Horner of Pataskala estimates Thin Blue Line failed to pay about \$1,000 of his expenses. “I’m not into it deep like a lot of people are but it’s the principle. These people should go to jail,” he said.

**Thin Blue Line: What happened?**

Police and firefighters often retire in their mid-50s, several years before they’re eligible for health care coverage through Medicare at age 65. Thin Blue Line marketed coverage for pre-Medicare eligible first responders.

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# Partnership envisions bridge to education

**Columbus State, OSU unveil tuition-free plan**

**Cole Behrens**  
Columbus Dispatch  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new initiative between Ohio State University and Columbus State Community College aims to provide students with a tuition-free path to finish their bachelor’s degree.

OSU President Ted Carter and Columbus State President David Harrison unveiled the “Buckeye Bridge” program, which will allow low to middle-income Ohioans who earn an associate degree from Columbus State to qualify for the new program at Ohio State, where all tuition and mandatory fees will be covered.

The program will launch in 2026.

Carter said the program will help further the competitiveness of Ohioans in the workforce and build a “strong pipeline.”

“It’s an investment in Ohio talent and the future growth in competitiveness of our state and region,” Carter said. “Programs like Buckeye Bridge send a message to our young people that we want you here, and we’re working hard to reduce the barriers to a college education.”

Harrison said the program will have a “transformational impact” on central Ohio.

“It’s about creating a clear, predictable, guaranteed debt-free pathway to an OSU bachelor’s degree,” Harrison said. “At Columbus State, our focus is on talent development and economic prosperity — for our students and the region. Buckeye Bridge will have an impact on both.”

Imanie Williams, 25, a Columbus State student planning on attending OSU in 2026 to receive a bachelor’s degree, said the Buckeye Bridge program shows “that I can do it.” As the caretaker for her grandmother, she said that she is grateful for the support that will be offered.

“That takes a lot of my time, and I have my classes on top of that, I try to squeeze as much time as I can in for

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