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An Analysis of Ohio School Districts

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One of the profound dilemmas facing the world's nations is how best to run their educational systems in order to ensure students' success. As with most endeavors, the financial component of any solution is crucial, but the issue that arises concomitantly is how much money is the right amount to spend in order to optimize academic performance. To answer this question, data concerning five different Ohio school districts' spending habits on education and concerning the academic success of those districts was accrued online from the Ohio School Report Cards. The Ohio School Report Cards aim to present a clear picture of a school district's overall success in educating students and preparing them for their futures. Interpreting the quantitative data will lead to a deeper understanding of which school districts are currently succeeding, and how understanding the socioeconomic realities of a district's student body should be understood as integral to developing an effective curriculum.

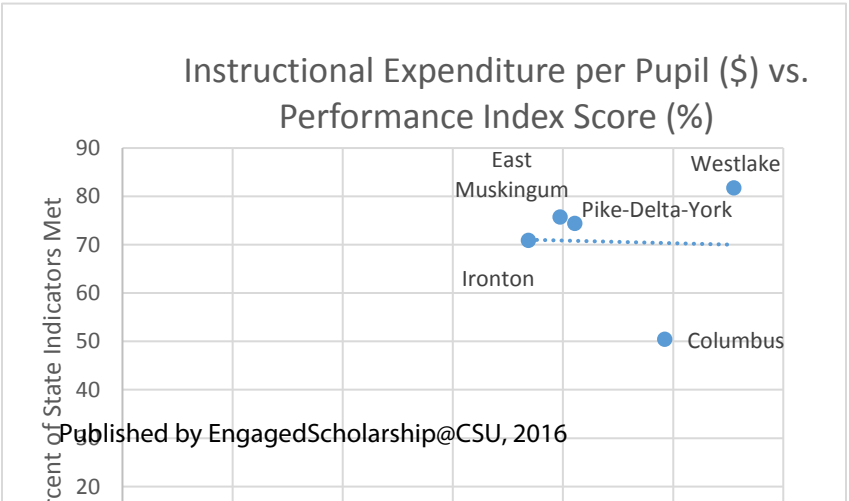
Four statistics from the Ohio School Report Cards were analyzed. First, state indicators were observed, which are the proportions of students who successfully passed state tests. Next was the performance index, which measures test performance of students. Money spent per student was also investigated, which is the percentage of state funds that are spent on academic instruction. Chronic absenteeism rate demonstrated the percentage of the district's student body that consistently missed school. Finally, the percentage of economically-disadvantaged students from the district who are enrolled in the school system was also used as a metric. The sample was chosen so that the representative districts would be diverse in their circumstances, particularly in terms of their student bodies' socioeconomic backgrounds. As such, the selected districts were Ironton City of Lawrence County, East Muskingum of Muskingum County, Columbus City of Franklin County, Westlake City of Cuyahoga County, and Pike-Delta-York of Fulton County.

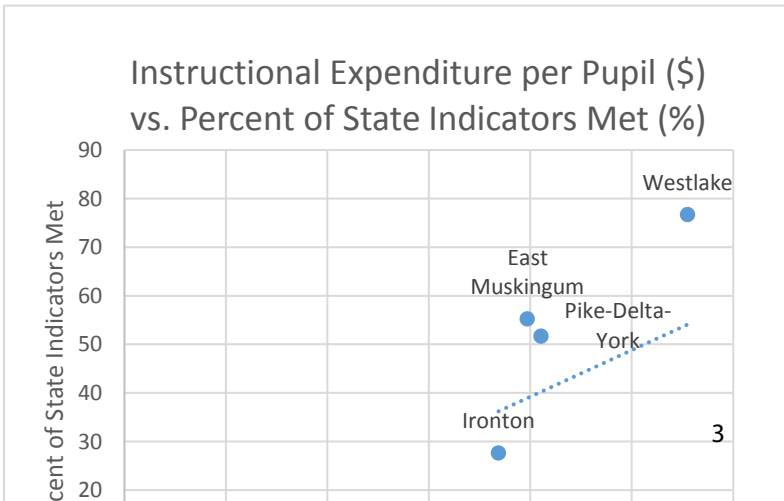
The necessary data was located and then tabulated in order to compare variables more efficiently. The produced table is as follows:

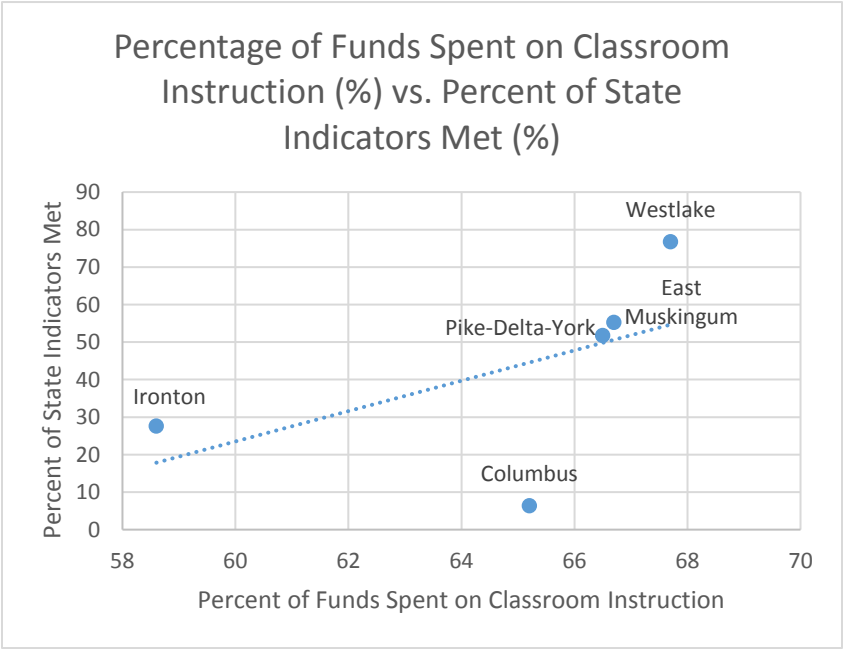
Ohio School District Spending and Success Data

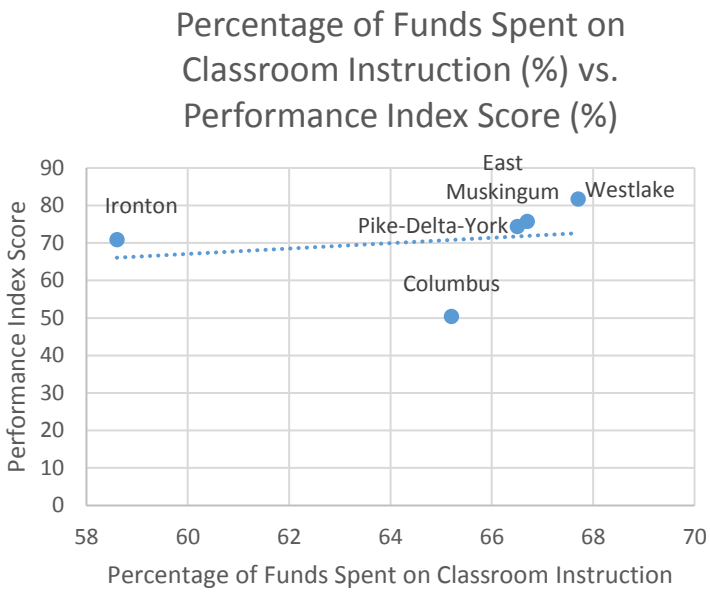
The table includes data from the previously listed school districts. The variable of assortment was chosen to be expenditures per pupil because this arrangement provides order and an absolute zero while also highlighting the preponderant topic of this study. Chronic absenteeism was also analyzed since frequency of missed class-time would seriously hinder a district's ability to have a positive effect on a student's academic success. Enrollment rates of economically-disadvantaged students was used to get a picture of the relative financial disparities between students within the five districts.

Name of District	Instructional Expenditures per Pupil in Dollars ($)	Percent of Funds Spent on Classroom Instruction (%)	Percent of State Indicators Met (%)	Performance Index Score (%)	Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%)	Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students Enrolled (%)
Ironton	7,373	58.6	27.6	70.9	12.2	97.7
East Muskingum	7,943	66.7	55.2	75.7	9.3	38.4
Pike-Delta-York	8,214	66.5	51.7	74.4	11.3	37.7
Columbus	9,845	65.2	6.3	50.4	38.1	100
Westlake	11,099	67.7	76.7	81.7	7.8	19.1









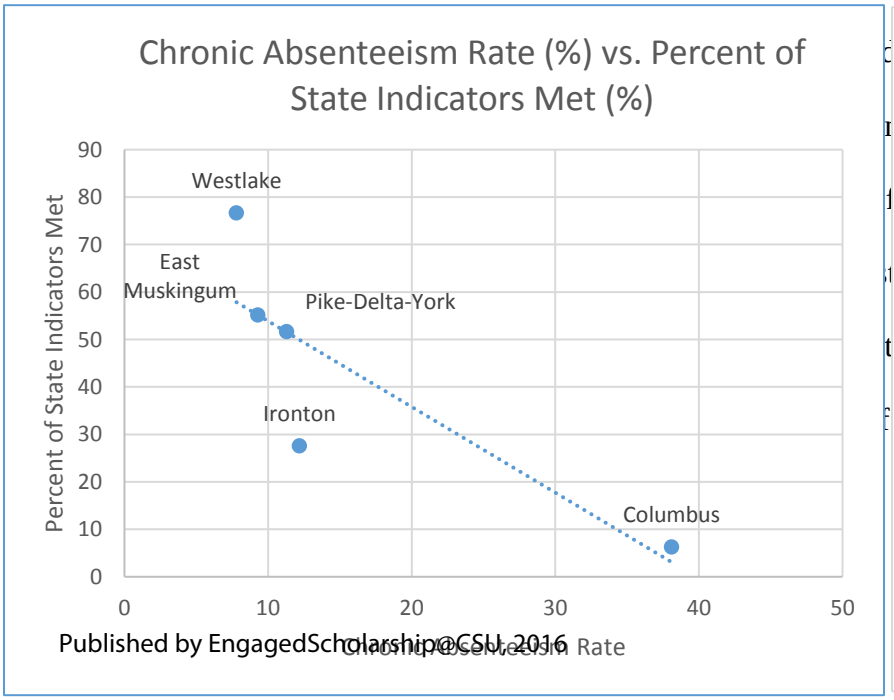
Upon analyzing the data, there is not a perfectly linear relationship between either of the expenditure variables and either of the academic success variables, meaning there is no undeniable pattern between variables. Westlake displayed the highest percentages of state indicators met and the highest performance index score, as well as the lowest chronic absenteeism rate. With this correlation in mind, as well as the fact that Westlake outspends all the other school districts in terms of expenditure per pupil and overall percentage of funds going towards classroom instruction, one might be led to believe that there is a direct and positive correlation between money spent and results achieved. However, the Columbus district

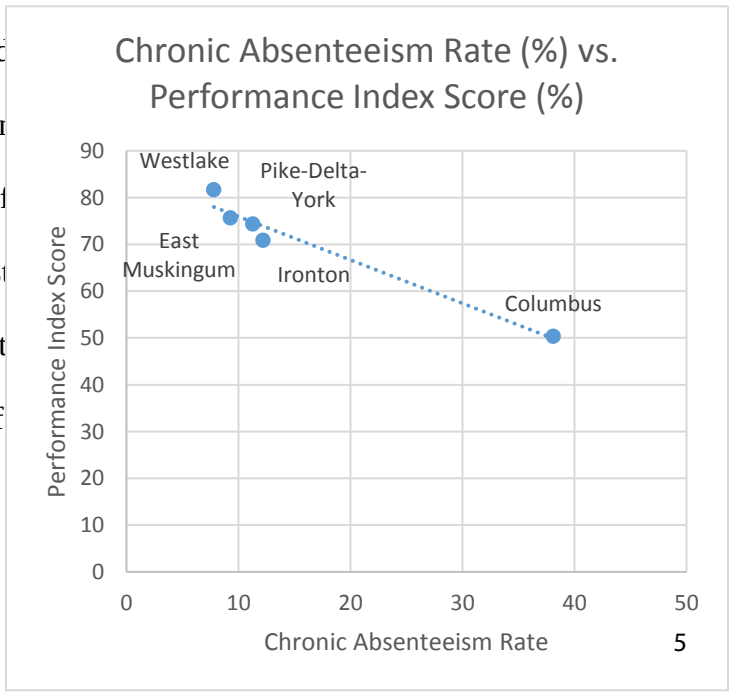
immediately calls that assertion into question. In terms of instructional expenditure, Columbus is the second-highest spender, but it has the worst performance index, the worst state indicators met percentage, and the highest chronic absenteeism rate.

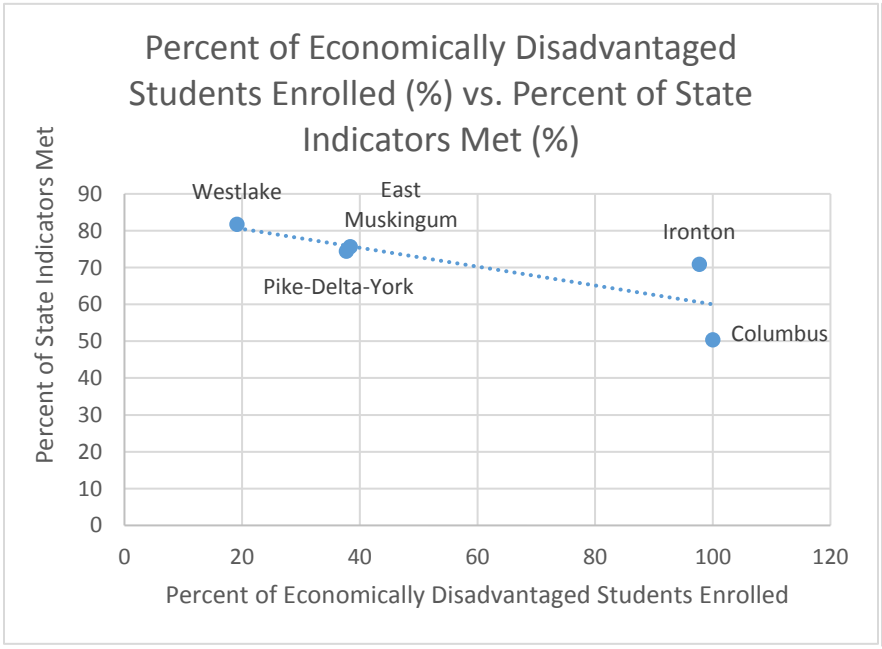
When looking at the instructional expenditure per pupil values in ascending order, there is no general pattern for either of the success metrics nor the absenteeism rate. However, the percentage of funds spent on classroom instruction had more of a direct, positive correlation with both success metrics, with the Columbus district's values being the noteworthy exception. Not only that, but as the percentage of funds spent on academics increased, the chronic absenteeism rate decreased, with Columbus, once again, being the only exception.

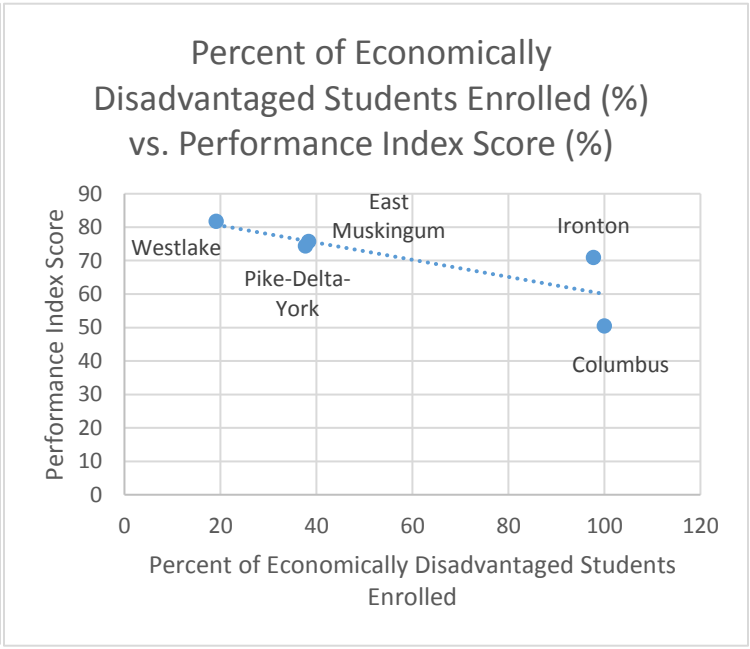
Though percentage of funds and academic success seem to have some direct relationship, instructional expenditure on students and academic success have no responsibly identifiable link. As such, the results of this study are unclear as to what effect money really has on academic success. As such, the rest of the analysis of this data will be written up as though the two variables were inversely related.

Though this study did not provide clear results for money's effect on academics, absenteeism rate is a different story. When interpreting the chronic absenteeism rate as the









Another possible influence on students' outcomes may be rooted in the average economic backgrounds of the student body. Columbus and Ironton had the lowest academic success metrics. However, they had the sample's highest enrollments of financially-disadvantaged students. Westlake, on the other hand, had the lowest enrollment percentage of economically-disadvantaged students and scored the highest of all the districts. As the enrollment of economically-disadvantaged students increased, academic success of the district decreased, with East Muskingum's data being the only slight exception to that general trend. From this insight, a

conclusion can be posited: disadvantaged students tend to bring the success metrics of their district down. This phenomenon may have to do with the reality of life for the lower economic classes, meaning that these individuals spend most of their time and resources trying to survive as opposed to trying to excel in academics.

Furthermore, as enrollment of disadvantaged students increases, chronic absenteeism increases as well, with East Muskingum being the only exception. This relationship furthers the idea that disadvantaged students may have a harder time in school and thus bring the district's average down since it is reasonable to surmise that disadvantaged students miss more classes. This line of reasoning is consonant with the idea that disadvantaged students would spend less time on schoolwork, even spending less time in classrooms, due to needing to spend more time helping their families survive. As such, it appears as though school districts with student bodies that are more homogenous in financial class, e.g. Westlake, tend to perform better in academic success metrics than do student bodies from more diverse backgrounds, such as Columbus.

Though all of these points prove correlation at best, and never necessarily causation, it seems clear that academics are more than just simple spending contests. The identities of the student bodies tend to play major roles in the district's success, such as which economic classes are represented and in what proportions those representations manifest. Also, student participation and presence in the classroom setting seem to be vital components of the educational system, as seen in chronic absenteeism's relationship with academic success. If there is one fact that this study demonstrated, it is that education is a very nuanced process and that the circumstances and differences of the students play a major role in their success. Rather than spending more money, school districts may find it beneficial to become more acclimated to the social climate of their district and strive to understand the differences of its constituents. Once an

understanding of the district has been achieved, brainstorming about how best to structure learning for those students can be done. Such enlightened curriculum-building will lead to improved results across Ohio's schools.

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