

**Testimony to the Ohio State Board of Education
Achievement Committee
9-10-13**

Angela Grimm

Madam President, Members of the Board, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Angela Grimm, and I am the President of Lakota LEADS, a parent group working to support Lakota's high ability students and their families. And I am also the Parent Division Chair for Ohio Association for Gifted Children. I wanted to talk to you today as families in Ohio like mine are increasingly concerned about the availability of gifted services in our state—and the accountability and consistency for what is being offered.

Let me first share with you my personal story. My daughter Emma entered Kindergarten reading at a 3rd grade level and while she had a teacher that tried her best to differentiate, I feared she wasn't being challenged. Unfortunately Lakota faced a failed levy and one of the first things to be cut because it was not federally or state-mandated was the gifted services Emma would receive in first grade.

Feeling desperate to provide more for our daughter, we explored grade acceleration. When we asked Emma what she thought about the idea. Her exact quote to my husband was, "Oh, good. I won't be bored any more." And this was in a classroom where the teacher tried to differentiate. The problem was it just wasn't enough.

Families shouldn't be forced into educational options out of desperation as we were. But families without the means,

families without the options and opportunities for private education or outside-the-classroom enrichment are left to rely on public education.

Yet, public education is currently only serving 20% of our identified gifted children in Ohio. And many more are not even identified because of the current accountability system. For those that are, we are often letting most of Ohio's best and brightest go on educational autopilot. How is this even possible?

I was part of the advisory group that worked on revising the standards for gifted services in Ohio. Unfortunately the draft you have in front of you does not even closely resemble what our group recommended—nor what is best for gifted learners in our state.

Professional development in Ohio on meeting gifted learner's needs is sorely lacking and the proposed draft does little to ensure that the professionals working with gifted learners have the appropriate training to understand the academic and social-emotional needs of the gifted. Let me give you an example of why required professional development is so crucial. I have a good friend who has been a regular-ed teacher in Ohio for over 20 years. She was told by her son's regular-ed teacher 3 years ago that he was failing and that she should have him evaluated for Oppositional Defiant Disorder—a pretty serious forecast for a 9-year old boy and his family. His OAA scores weren't even at the proficient mark and meetings on his behavior were commonplace. Fast-forward 3 years and her son was identified as gifted, topping out on his OAA and his InView scores for cognitive identification. With gifted services and differentiated instruction he is no longer bored and is re-engaged in learning. There are no behavioral concerns, and

he is a role model for his peers. So here were two regular educators who had years in the field-his Mom and his teacher-neither who knew enough about the needs of gifted learners to either 1. Spot a bored but very capable child or 2. Know that his behavior was a manifestation of his not getting his unique needs met—the very thing public education promises for all learners.

I am also concerned that the requirements for the gifted coordinator have disappeared. Truly what this draft now says is that the person in that role must only know how to interpret these gifted standards. They don't require an education degree, gifted licensure or any teaching experience. What does that leave? A big opening for districts to pawn off a job that is too important to dismiss. We don't allow our 3rd grade reading guarantee students to be taught by our janitors or special education students by the school secretary, yet the draft standards allow for anyone to guide gifted programming in Ohio. This seems absurd. Without having professional requirements for gifted coordinators in Ohio, gifted services will continue to erode.

I know that education is very focused on outcomes: what is the success or growth for all learners? But based on what I see in these standards, I don't see how we will measure this for gifted students across Ohio. We have no consistency in the inputs-i.e the services we are offering gifted learners. There is no mandate for services, but could we at least have some level of accountability for those services that are being provided? My fear is that districts will call minimum instruction with students a gifted service, but yet show no adequate growth for these learners. Then someone with data in hand will further cut gifted education, saying that services are not impacting growth therefore they must not be worth the money we are investing. Without accountability,

caseload sizes, class sizes and contact time, we will be left with the “fruit salad” of gifted education, trying to compare apples to oranges to bananas to grapes to cherries across Ohio and never being able to draw conclusions on what is working to make sure ALL gifted learners demonstrate adequate growth.

I think most of this has happened because of the commonly held philosophy and lack of understanding about gifted students. I think there has been a historic tendency to believe that some of our brightest students will be just fine if they are left to go on educational autopilot. There is a struggle that asking for more for these students is elitist. I think there is a misperception that parents of gifted students are pushy—that we can’t just sit back, relax and be content with what is being offered for our students. But it is these very students that are pushing us to advocate for them.

Research shows 88% of high school dropouts had passing grades, but dropped out due to boredom. Worst of all, it is believed that nearly 25% of high school dropouts come from the gifted population – an alarming statistic, which shows the magnitude and seriousness of the underachievement problem. Couple this with gifted students’ vulnerability to perfectionism, social isolation and sensory and emotional overexcitabilities, and there is a recipe for disaster, not success for these learners.

So now is the time to begin rebuilding what Ohio has lost for gifted learners. I had more services 30 years ago than my child does today. I urge you to ensure that Ohio’s gifted learners are supported with appropriate accountability language to ensure districts do what is right for ALL gifted students in Ohio. If we allow these standards to move forward as they are written, we will NOT be able to

accomplish what Ohio is striving to do: to be a leader. We are barely supporting our best and brightest right now. If districts are not required to put appropriate staffing in place, have apples to apples services and professional development for our educators, these learners like my Emma and so many others will not be able to rely on public education to help them realize their full potential.

Thank you again for this opportunity.