

President Kohler, Vice President McGuire, Superintendent DeMaria, and members of the Board:

My name is Alesha Haybin. I am honored to share with you this afternoon my thoughts and expertise in the area of gifted education. I am a career educator with twenty years of experience working with elementary through high school students. I have invested seventeen years in the field of gifted education teaching students, working with families, speaking to teachers, and now as a coordinator of gifted services at the Licking County Educational Service Center. In addition to my work in the classroom, I just wrapped up my term as President of the Gifted Coordinators of Central Ohio, and am on the Governing Board for the Ohio Association for Gifted Children.

I am here today to share with you the great concern I have with the Department of Education's updated Chart of Approved Assessments as it pertains to gifted identification and screening, and ultimately those students that should be identified as gifted, but will not be identified.

Gifted students are one of the most unique populations represented in the schools. This population often hides as a chameleon behind socio-economic limitations, inaccessibility to early literacy and language development, and a plethora of disabilities, not to mention common characteristics such as overexcitabilities and social and emotional intensities.

As educators we have a responsibility to address the unique characteristics of our students. One of the most basic, yet critical, ways to meet the needs of a student is to accurately assess and understand the student's ability to accomplish specific tasks. I am advocating, on behalf of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children, for specific issues with the Chart of Approved Assessments to be addressed because they are limiting the appropriate and accurate assessment of students for gifted identification.

First and foremost, there are not enough assessments included on this list to appropriately assess special populations and students with disabilities. The previous list had more than 50 tests and the new list has just over 20 instruments. The new application process for testing companies was cumbersome, confusing, and labor intensive, particularly for those companies that provided multiple testing instruments approved for previous lists. These companies had already gone through an extensive approval process but were mandated to re-apply, which was poorly communicated and buried in the application materials mid-way through the documents.

A prime example of these deficiencies can be found in the lack of instruments for twice exceptional learners and primary students. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the young child is in a critical stage of intellectual and social-emotional development that requires unique and targeted academic intervention in order to help the whole child reach their intellectual potential. Gifted services often become a gateway for these young children to fully realize their potential. However, districts are now severely limited in their ability to identify and support these developing learners.

Furthermore, for our twice exceptional students, the lack of appropriate testing instruments available to me as a gifted coordinator is alarming. I work in Licking County where a lot of socio-economic factors influence student disability rates and low levels of early literacy in our students. Non-verbal assessments help to counteract the gaps found in the reading skills and language development of children whose families have not been able to support their young children by reading to them or developing early literacy skills. The non-verbal assessment is a valuable tool to use if the student has a learning disability that hindered their language development or if the student comes from a home where English is a second language. We need non-verbal tests that can be administered in an individual and untimed setting, and individually administered achievement tests that are more appropriate for twice exceptional learners than the group-administered tests currently on the approved list. This allows us to evaluate the student's ability, without the distraction of underdeveloped language skills, while minimizing the impact of their disability on the testing results.

Ohio's law regarding the ethical use of tests requires me to select an instrument that is most appropriate for the population being tested. Selecting a testing instrument for potentially gifted students is very technical and a gifted coordinator or psychologist must weigh a great number of factors when selecting an appropriate assessment. In addition, many IEP or 504 accommodations will invalidate the group-administered tests provided on the Chart of Approved Assessments, which is why it is crucial to have an extensive list of instrument choices designed to meet the needs of a student with a disability or from special populations.

Additionally troubling is the Department's approval of a list that is lacking assessments for an area of gifted identification that is required by law. The new Chart of Approved Assessments does not include an instrument to evaluate students 14 years and older for identification in the area of dance under the visual and performing arts. When asked directly at a recent Regional Meeting hosted by the Department's Gifted Office, we were told that we would have to tell the parents to "wait" because the Department is still gathering individuals to develop an identification checklist. "Maybe in late fall, but likely not" they said. An email went out to recruit members from the Arts community to assist in developing this checklist just last week. Meanwhile, the approved assessments took effect on July 1st and we currently have active parent referrals for gifted identification in the area of dance, starting our 90-day window for assessment and identification, per State law. Yet, we do not have an identification instrument.

In addition to limited assessment choices, the Chart of Approved Assessments includes instruments that reflect technical error when applying the results toward gifted identification. One instrument lacks evidence to support its validity to identify gifted students, inappropriately applied identification criteria from IQ tests to five achievement tests, and an approved sub-score whose own testing company states in their technical manual that the test may not be appropriate for gifted identification. Furthermore, at a recent Regional meeting hosted by the Department, guidance was included in the presentation materials in regards to English Learners using a translator that would directly invalidate an assessment given.

Where is the solution in all of these issues? ODE needs to include individuals with expertise specific to gifted assessments on the review committee and they need to immediately address deficiencies in the Chart of Approved Assessments. As a result of not doing so, we have a list that is limiting the ability of Gifted Coordinators and Psychologists to identify primary students, students with a disability, and students from special populations, while also lacking assessments needed to identify students in an area required by law. All of these issues have been repeatedly brought before ODE, but the Department continues to deny our request to include someone with gifted assessment expertise on the review committee.

The gifted community, as always, is willing and able to provide assistance and input to the Department of Education. We are asking that we be allowed to do so and that these issues with the Chart of Approved Assessments be addressed so that we are better equipped to identify gifted students within the diverse populations represented throughout our school districts in the State of Ohio.