

Gongwer Coverage of State Board Meeting on Monday, Sept. 9, 2013

State Board Members See Problems With ODE's Proposed Gifted Standards

Members of the State Board of Education on Monday told agency staff they were not happy with the proposed overhaul of gifted regulations.

The comments came as the Department of Education is undergoing its regular five-year review of the operating standards for gifted education with the intention of adopting the new regulations in January.

The latest draft of the proposed changes was posted online Friday and the feedback to ODE and board members has been significant. About 30 comments have been submitted through the department website, and Board President [Debe Terhar](#) said she has received 47 emails. The draft will remain posted until Sept. 30.

Wendy Stoica, assistant director of Diverse Learners, said the four proposed revisions to the standards include: implementing two whole-grade screenings for identification; elimination of ratios for service providers with additional information on workload considerations; requiring gifted and general education service providers to periodically report student progress; and clarifying the requirements for gifted services provided in general education settings.

Board member [Ann Jacobs](#), of Lima said she has received a lot of negative emails that cite a lack of accountability and "dumbing down" of the standards in the proposal. Critics also have complained that the guidelines will not lead to providing necessary services.

Sue Zake, director of the Office of Exceptional Children at ODE, said the posted comments have also generally been negative. Commenters have suggested important components were eliminated from previously proposed standards, such as student-teacher ratios and training requirements.

Member [Deborah Cain](#), of Uniontown, said she feels strongly the proposed standards would shortchange students.

"I am looking at these standards not only as a state board member but as one who's been in the education field," she said. "As the draft stands now, I can't say that I would vote in favor of those right now. The accountability of our gifted young people, I think, is being lost. Training needs to be there. A gifted coordinator should be somebody who knows something about gifted education. It should not be somebody who has no knowledge of that field.

"The ratios, I think are important. A lot of people say you can put a lot of kids in a room and you've got some computers and you've got this and that, it shouldn't matter, but it does matter."

She also raised concerns about accountability for gifted dollars from the state. A parent should be able to identify how the money is being spent, Ms. Cain said, adding it is not appropriate to allow flexibility with gifted funds just as the state does not provide flexibility with spending special education dollars.

"If you don't have guidelines, if you don't have parameters, you might be shortchanging some people, not on purpose, but you may be," Ms. Cain said.

Ms. Terhar, of Cincinnati, echoed concerns about accountability for state money, saying she'd like to know what every district is doing to provide gifted services.

"If the state is providing money to them for gifted services, are they in fact using that money for their gifted children," she said.

"Gifted children are just that, they have certain gifts that bring them to a very high level of instruction. It takes special things to be able to provide adequate instruction for those kids so that they can progress.... These kids are the

ones who are going to end up being in those top level positions, whether it be in government, whether it be in industry."

She questioned how ODE's proposal can be tweaked "to make sure we're doing the right thing."

Board Vice President [Tom Gunlock](#), a Kasich appointee, said he supports moving into an output-based system but still has concerns with the proposal.

"In my opinion we do a lousy job with our gifted students, and I think it shows in the report card," he said.

Mr. Gunlock referenced the recent report cards for districts and schools that included scores for how schools did with academic growth for gifted students. A or B grades went to:

- 14% of rural, high poverty districts.
- 20% of both rural, average poverty districts.
- 20% of small town, low poverty districts.
- 19% of small town, high poverty districts.
- 31% of suburban, low poverty districts.
- 3% of suburban, very low poverty districts.
- 18% of urban, high poverty districts.
- 17% of very high poverty districts.

Mr. Gunlock also referenced that 51 districts did not receive report card grades for gifted students because they reported not serving enough to count.

"I don't believe for a second that 99% of those that are not servicing for whatever reason, they need to be investigated by the department as to why they're not servicing those students," he said.

The board vice president also said he believes in the need for qualified teachers for gifted students but does not necessarily think that gifted coordinators need special credentials.

Ms. Zake said the change between the earlier discussed standards and the draft presented Monday was the result of internal discussions. The change was also encouraged by the governor's veto of budget ([HB 59](#)) language that would have required money for gifted students be used only to support certain personnel related to the program. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, July 2, 2013](#))

"It went through internal review, plus the budget bill happened and the veto happened in the governor's office and so we moved more toward an output version as opposed to an input version, which is what it's always been," she said in an interview. "The (veto) interpretation is the funding is part of a pool rather than directed, and there continues to be some debate, obviously."

Kasich appointee [C. Todd Jones](#) said he understands the philosophical shift that underlies the change in the draft.

"It is my view that we need to move from the current regulations from an inputs-based model to an outputs-based model," he said. "I don't care if gifted services involve taking the kids to the local 7-Eleven if it turns out that these gifted students are having exceptional growth in the academic, social and other realms as students. I highly doubt that the 7-Eleven provides that kind of enrichment, but nonetheless, the point is I ultimately don't care what is leading to success; I care about the success."

"If we have this inputs-based regime in place and yet we have a full almost 10% of the districts in this state providing no services, it's an indication that that system doesn't work very effectively or that we simply lack the tools because I'm not convinced it's not for want of trying."

Mr. Jones said, however, he agrees that qualified teachers should be teaching gifted students but is not sure that applies to coordinators who act more in an administrative function.

The department engaged a gifted advisory group that has met five times since April to provide feedback and review various drafts of the proposed standards. Ms. Zake said that group did not endorse what staff presented Monday, having expressed issues with the qualifications of coordinators, gifted teachers and general education teachers, the amount of training required and student-teacher ratios.

"We're gathering the public comment, and we'll move forward in consideration of that," she said about next steps. Meetings are planned with the advisory group, she added. "We need them at the table."