



May 24, 2012

## OAGC Response to Education Management Groups Objections to Gifted Amendments in SB316

On May 23, 2012, OSBA, BASA, and OASBO provided a letter to both the Ohio House and Ohio Senate Education Committees objecting to gifted provisions included in the Ohio House Education committee omnibus amendment. These provisions included the repeal of the language that allowed administrators to serve as gifted coordinators, the establishment of regional gifted schools, and removing the prohibition of STEM schools and programs to be operated specifically for gifted populations. Unfortunately, some of the information in the education management memo is not factual. Other objections raised are confusing given prior association agreement not to object to one of the provisions proposed.

### 1. Facts about the Repeal of the Administrator as Gifted Coordinator Language in SB316

The Ohio Education Management Associations have issued the following statement regarding this provision in SB316:

House Bill 153 authorized school districts to utilize principals or other qualified persons to serve as a gifted coordinator for the school district. While this arrangement may not be the ideal solution when sufficient resources are available, recent budget cuts have made it necessary for school districts to make the most effective use of limited staff resources. Removing the HB 153 provision represents an unfunded mandate that will force school districts to spend additional dollars they do not have.

We already have in current law, maintenance of effort requirements that mean school districts can spend no less on gifted programs than their state dollars for gifted education from fiscal year 2009. With no increase in state funding since that time, any additional requirements will cause an increased expenditure of local tax dollars, or cuts to other programs affecting more students. We do not believe this is the intent of the committee.

OAGC Response: Unfortunately, the information provided regarding the repeal of the amendment is incorrect. As districts are not required to have a gifted coordinator, there is ***no unfunded mandate and no additional requirement imposed on school districts. It will not force districts to spend any additional dollars.*** OAGC sought the repeal of the language in HB153 because it was causing confusion in the districts. In fact, it is clear from the education management statement above that they do not understand that principals are not automatically qualified to serve as a gifted coordinator. ODE has always allowed administrators with ***the proper licensure and the demonstrated capacity to serve in the role*** to also serve as a gifted coordinator. The provision inserted in HB153 caused many districts to allow any administrator regardless of credentials and capacity to serve in this role. Many of these individuals have made inappropriate educational decisions for this population due to their lack of training. The repeal of the amendment merely restores the ability of ODE to ensure that administrators serving as gifted coordinators are actually qualified and capable of filling the role. If this amendment does not stand, gifted students in some districts will be harmed by the poor choices made by untrained district staff.

### 2. Gifted Regional Schools

The Ohio Education Management Associations have issued the following statement regarding this provision in SB316:

This provision requires the creation of 16 regional community schools across the state expressly for gifted students. The requirement represents a huge undertaking with many unexplored implications, both financial and academic. It stretches the imagination to consider how such a massive shift in education programs could be introduced and adopted in an omnibus amendment, without announcement or the opportunity for discussion and debate. While this idea may be worthy of consideration and debate, it is unreasonable to adopt the measure so swiftly.

OAGC Response: The idea of gifted regional schools was first discussed a year ago toward the end of HB153 discussions. We are frankly somewhat stunned that the education management groups are objecting to the amendment. OAGC representatives met with representatives of the education management association groups on June 8, 2011. They indicated that they would not object to an amendment to establish regional gifted schools though they believed that any community school that operates a regional gifted school should report to a sponsor that has an elected board. This is the standard position of the education associations. As the Ohio Department of Education will be releasing the Request for Proposal to establish the regional schools, there will be time and opportunity for stakeholders to provide substantial input into the concept. Gifted students will not be required to attend any regional school. Districts may work together or with other education entities to develop a plan. With huge cuts in district gifted programs, many gifted students have no opportunity to have their educational needs met. Regional gifted schools will allow diverse educational entities to partner to provide much needed services across the state.

### **3. Removal of the Prohibition on STEM schools for Gifted Students**

The education management associations believe that this provision needs further discussion and debate.

OAGC Response: There is actually very little to discuss and debate with regard to this provision. Many states including Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky have long established residential high schools for the gifted students in the STEM areas. These schools have nurtured and accelerated incredible STEM talent in their respective states. Not only does Ohio *not* have a residential STEM school for the gifted, Ohio Revised Code as currently written *prohibits* the establishment of such a school. While STEM opportunities should be available for all students, it makes little sense to actively prohibit the development of our most promising students. Ohio is behind many other states in developing gifted STEM talent. This provision does not establish a STEM school or program for gifted students. It merely allows for a school or program to be developed at some time in the future.

### **4. Third Grade Reading Guarantee**

The education management associations wish to hold gifted children back in their areas of strength rather than provide retained third-graders who are otherwise identified as gifted in fields other than reading with instruction that is commensurate with the student's achievement.

OAGC Response – To focus merely on a gifted student's weaknesses while ignoring their areas of strength is contrary to all research on best practice for this population. SB316 makes provisions for other special populations based on learning needs (e.g. students with disabilities and English Language Learners). It is inappropriate and contrary to best practice to hold back a gifted student in his field of strength to compensate solely on reading.

If you have any questions regarding these issues, please contact Ann Sheldon at [anngift@aol.com](mailto:anngift@aol.com) or 614-325-1185.