



Testimony on Senate Bill 3

February 25, 2015

Chairman Lehner, Ranking Member Sawyer:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 3 (SB3). My name is Ann Sheldon, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). While the intentions behind SB3 are commendable, there are several aspects of the bill that are problematic. These include testing limitations that could preclude adequate identification of gifted students, certain areas of exemption for high-performing districts, and, finally, the definition of a high-performing district itself.

Testing Limitations – The mandate that no student shall exceed 2% of their time per year in assessments could negatively affect the already inadequate identification of gifted students. While assessments for students with disabilities are exempt from the limitation in SB3, the bill has no similar exemption for the proper assessment of gifted students. There may well be an excessive amount of state level testing. However, this is in stark contrast to the lack of assessment for the identification of gifted students across the state of Ohio. The data regarding gifted identification tells a bleak story about the decline of systematic screening and assessment for this population. This is particularly true for students in grades K-3, minority students, economically disadvantaged students, and students in the area of visual and performing arts. Almost one-third of all districts identify fewer than 3% of their students as gifted in the K-3 grade band. Ten percent of Ohio's districts do not identify any gifted children in grades K-3. Worse, economically disadvantaged students are half as likely to be identified as gifted as their non-economically disadvantaged peers. If anything, more whole grade screenings should be implemented for the identification of gifted students in Ohio.

As superintendents have testified over the past few weeks, the backlash against excessive testing from both the educator and parent perspective is mostly aimed toward high-stakes state performance assessments – not assessments that give diagnostic information about individual students. Assessments geared toward understanding individual student learning needs were in place decades before state-wide assessments began. The use of assessments for the identification of special populations should not be compromised due to excessive testing for other purposes. OAGC requests that SB3 be amended to exclude any assessments used to determine individual student learning needs, including the identification of gifted students, from any testing limitation.

Areas of Exemptions for High-Performing Districts – While I will not speak to all of the areas of exemption in SB3, the gifted community is very concerned about the proposal to allow high-performing districts to allow any licensed teacher to teach any subject or grade level. Does this mean that elementary art teachers would be allowed to teach high-school Calculus? Could any teacher instruct gifted students or students with disabilities? To have no background in the subject, grade or specific student population seems like a recipe for disaster. And in fact, it is. For the past four years, even though it is not allowed in Ohio Revised Code, many administrators without gifted licensure have been serving as gifted coordinators. Most of these administrators have good intentions to act in the best interest of gifted children. But many, if not most, of these individuals simply do not know what they do not know. This experience has resulted in inappropriate testing and services to gifted students in too

many districts. It is little wonder that three-quarters of Ohio's districts did not meet the gifted performance indicator this past year. To expand this practice in other areas without any parameters is deeply troubling.

Definition of a High-Performing District – The SB3 definition of a high-performing district is one that receives a grade of “A” on performance indicators met, an 85% or higher rate on the performance index (or a grade of “B”), a 93% four-year graduation rate, and a 95% five-year graduation rate. The definition includes no growth measure, no sub-group performance measure, no 3rd grade reading proficiency measure (even while there are exemptions from reading teacher qualifications in the bill), and no college remediation-free rates. Given this criteria, **125** districts would be consider high-performing. Of those districts, **73** have a third-grade reading proficiency rate of less than 95% (the rate required for high-performing in the governor's budget proposal); **37** districts have grades of “D” or “F” either for the overall or a sub-group value-added measure, and **93** of those districts have ACT college remediation free rates of less than **50%**. It is also troubling that only one year's worth of data is used in the definition. Finally, it is unclear in SB3 whether districts defined as high-performing maintain the designation for one year at a time or once labeled as high-performing maintain the label in perpetuity.

A more rigorous set of criteria for a high-performing designation might be a minimum of two years of performance and would include the following measures:

- Performance index with a grade of “A”
- Grade indicators with a grade of “A”
- Overall value-added with a grade of “A”
- Value-added sub-group scores of at least a grade of “B” in each area
- 4 and 5 year graduation rates of 93% and 95% respectively
- 3rd grade reading proficiency scores at the 95% level
- College remediation free rates of at least 75%

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding SB3. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Please contact Ann Sheldon, OAGC Executive Director at anngift@aol.com or 614-325-1185 if you have any additional questions.