



Testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 3

February 27, 2015

Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Substitute 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 at least two aspects of the bill that are problematic. These include certain areas of exemption for high-performing districts, and the definition of a high-performing district itself.

Testing Limitations – OAGC greatly appreciates that the Ohio Senate included an exemption for assessments used to determine individual student learning needs, including the identification of gifted students, from any testing limitations. 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.

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 hire any individual with or without a license to teach any subject with local board approval. While districts are supposed to determine that the individuals are qualified if they do not have a teaching credential, there is no guarantee that local boards of education will even know if an individual is qualified or not. To have no license to teach a specific student population seems like a recipe for disaster. And in fact, it is. For the past five or six years, even though it is technically not allowed under 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 in the 2013-2014 school year. To expand this practice in other areas without any quality parameters is deeply troubling.

Definition of a High-Performing District – OAGC is also troubled by the SB3 definition of a high-performing district which 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 in 2013-2014 would have been considered high-performing. Of those districts, **73** had a third-grade reading proficiency rate of less than **95%** (the rate required for high-performing proposed by in the governor's original budget proposal); **37** districts had grades of "D" or "F" either for the overall or a sub-group value-added measure, and **93** of those districts had 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%

I should note that these recommendations are all based on report card data up until the 2013-2014 school year. We still have no idea of the district results for many of the report card measures for 2014-2015. Given the multiple changes in state assessments and the still unknown changes that will be required under the new federal ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), it is premature to be setting benchmarks for what high-performing really means.

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.