



September 15, 2015

President Gunlock, Members of the Board:

My name is Ann Sheldon, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). I am here today to provide you with some initial thoughts on the proposed changes to the gifted operating standards. As you are all aware, the adoption of the gifted standards was put on hold two years ago. Since that time, a few gifted policy changes have been implemented including the phase-in of the new gifted performance indicator. Last year, districts did not perform well on the gifted performance indicator that is composed of three elements: a gifted performance index based on state assessments; gifted value-added also based on state assessments, and gifted input points which looks at levels of identification and service across various grade bands, types of giftedness, and student demographics. Even with the very low standards set for the gifted performance indicator in 2013/2014, only 154 districts met the criteria.

In fact, levels of gifted identification, service, and staffing have declined significantly over the past decade. State gifted funding is now provided to every district, and Ohio Revised Code clearly states (Section 3317.40) that funds for gifted students should be spent on gifted students. Unfortunately, over half of Ohio's districts report that they are not spending state gifted funding they receive on gifted students. Given the overall poor results on the gifted performance indicator and clear lack of compliance with current laws, the proposed new draft of the gifted operating standards is baffling and beyond disappointing. This draft is infinitely worse than the draft standards the gifted community objected to two years ago. Instead of striving to increase the quality of instruction and accountability to support gifted children, this draft effectively eliminates all standards of quality service, staffing, and support. It makes no sense if the goal is to improve educational opportunity for gifted students, and it certainly does not reflect best practice.

To be more specific, the draft eliminates:

- **Any quality definition or criteria for service** including service settings and the need for qualified gifted intervention specialists to provide service or support in regular classroom settings;
- **Any caseload restrictions and direct service contact time for gifted students;**
- **Any definition of qualified gifted staff including gifted intervention specialists and gifted coordinators;**
- **Any significant reporting of qualified personnel, professional development,** and assistance to regular classroom teachers thus removing any meaningful data collection to analyze the effective use of resources;
- **Any funding accountability requirements;** and, finally,
- **Any compliance language including that regarding ODE audits and the process to remediate non-compliant districts,** all of which is required under Ohio Revised Code.

I am well aware that ODE leadership and some members of the board prefer an outputs-only accountability system and generally support education deregulation. This philosophy is certainly reflected in this draft. With regard to outputs, OAGC has never been opposed to a thoughtful move toward a mixed outputs/inputs-based system. But such a system requires accountability measures that are complete, accurate, and meaningful. It also requires consequences for districts that are non-compliant or that do a poor job identifying and serving the population. And finally, it requires ODE oversight to ensure that districts are truly identifying gifted children and that service numbers actually reflect best practice. Unfortunately, most of these elements are not currently in place in Ohio.

As a member of the gifted performance indicator taskforce, I'm proud of the work we did on this groundbreaking measure. But I must tell you that every individual on that taskforce knew that the indicator is

still very much a work in progress. This is not just a matter of perfect getting in the way of good. Devising effective and measurable outcomes for gifted children is incredibly difficult given the quality of the tools we have: State assessments are limited to gifted students in grades 3-8 for math and reading and for limited subjects in other areas and grades. The very low cut scores of the OAA and OGT made the gifted performance index of questionable value. (The new PARCC cut scores to be adopted also appear to be very low.) And the fact that none of Ohio's assessments are adaptive means that students scoring closer to the ceiling are much more likely to "ceiling out." We are years away from actually knowing how effective the output measures are in the gifted performance index and value-added scores. To combat the limitations of these outputs, one element of the gifted performance indicator was developed based on input measures. This was designed to encourage districts to identify and serve gifted children with integrity. ***But this measure is only as good as the quality of the defined service.*** If the definition of service is watered down to mean virtually anything, this element loses all effectiveness as a barometer of district effort. The measure will have little meaning, which subverts legislative intent and good education policy. While this is certainly bad for children, it also makes it impossible to determine what service options are the least or most effective, which undermines any system designed to improve quality.

With regard to education de-regulation, gifted students are the poster children for how this can backfire. Gifted children are the most de-regulated student population in Ohio. There is no mandate to provide services to gifted children and little incentive to identify them even though identification has been required for years. The results?

- ✓ Identification of gifted students has decreased by 8.5% since 2008.
- ✓ Licensed gifted staff levels have decreased by almost 25% since 2008.
- ✓ Services have plummeted to 23% of the gifted count. (For reference, in 2000, the service rate was 41%.)
- ✓ Over half of all districts in 2014 reported that they are using some or all of their gifted formula funding for purposes other than identifying and serving gifted students.
- ✓ Only one-quarter of Ohio's districts are meeting the new gifted performance indicator, the elements of which are currently set at a very low threshold.

Some regulations exist for a reason. The removal of all staffing, service and accountability provisions in this draft will make the current poor state of gifted education in Ohio even worse. Districts will soon be legally able to say they are serving gifted children when in fact those students will receive nothing more than a piece of paper with a "served" stamp on it. If the intent of this draft is to mask the abysmal state of gifted education in Ohio, then mission accomplished. It will be a victory for those who want the public to be in the dark about how poorly many of our brightest students are educated in this state. But it is an incredible blow to gifted children (particularly those who are rural, minority or economically disadvantaged), their parents, taxpayers, and the state as a whole.

If board members want gifted children to be identified properly and provided with appropriate services and support systems, then this draft needs to be completely overhauled. Despite differing philosophies about local control, deregulation, outputs vs. inputs etc, I would encourage each of you to focus instead on what's best for children rather than adults as you amend these standards. Members of OAGC as well as the gifted community as a whole look forward to working with board members to develop gifted operating standards that will actually improve the current sad state of gifted education in Ohio. Please let me know how we can help you.

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