

Testimony on the Gifted Performance Indicator

May 13, 2014

President Terhar, members of the board:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As the board will be asked to vote on various aspects of the gifted performance indicator in the next month or so, I would like to offer my thoughts and recommendations. First though, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the department staff who supported the work of the gifted performance indicator work group. They provided an incredible amount of data and worked many hours to meet the requests of the group. Some of the data provided were astonishing especially with regard to underrepresented student populations. Districts, by and large, are not providing the same opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority gifted students as they are for white, non-economically disadvantaged students. I'm concerned that what we came up with in the points system doesn't fully explain the disparity between identification and service of different student populations, but it is a start. While I would also have liked to include a component to support acceleration, I hope that this can be revisited before 2016.

I think I speak for all members of the work group when I say that I know our work on the indicator is incomplete and imperfect. We are significantly hampered by the current assessments with low cut scores in terms of being able to measure gifted performance. This is a problem that cannot be overcome unless there are new assessments with more realistic cut scores or if new cut scores are developed for Ohio's current assessments. This must be addressed at some point, especially if the implementation of the new state assessments is delayed.

As board members begin to develop thresholds, it is important to look at the intent behind the gifted performance indicator. There will likely be a huge temptation to set the thresholds at a low level. But please think about what that means to gifted students if those bars are set too low. It will be demoralizing to gifted children and their families if this board gives the stamp of approval to districts that are doing very little for gifted students. It will also severely limit parents' ability to fight for services for their children, if this board says a district is doing just fine even if they are doing little more than identifying students. This indicator is not the same as other performance indicators in that services are not mandated for gifted students. The indicator is meant to encourage districts to provide services without a specific mandate to do so.

Ultimately, the thresholds should be set to encourage districts first, to identify gifted students properly across all areas including minority and economically disadvantaged students, and secondly, to provide all gifted students with services appropriate to their needs.

My specific threshold recommendations are as follows:

1. **Gifted Value-Added Element -- C or above.** The message to districts and parents that is okay for gifted student achievement to grow at a level below average is contrary to the intent of the gifted performance indicator, which is to push districts to provide more for gifted students. Research indicates that gifted students are typically capable of growing much more than a year. At C and above, 406 districts meet the measure. At D and above, 505 districts meet the measure. (Note: there are 50+ districts currently with no value-added rating.) If the bar is set to a D level, almost all districts meet this element.

2. **Gifted Performance Index (PI) -- 116 or 117 (out of 120).** Using the standard of other report card indicators, it is reasonable to expect 80% of gifted students in a district to score at advanced levels. If 80% of students scored at advanced levels and the remaining 20% scored no more than proficient, the score is 116. At 80% advanced, 10% accelerated, and 10% proficient, the score would be 117. This is entirely appropriate, given the incredibly low cut scores of the OAAs (Ohio Achievement Assessments) and the OGT (Ohio Graduation Test). Math cut scores, in particular, are very low, which would explain why the average gifted PI in math is 117. Currently, the median overall gifted PI is 116.

- Setting the threshold at 110 – 609 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 112 – 592 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 114 – 513 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 115 – 428 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 116 – 284 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 116.5 – 193 districts meet the measure.
- Setting the threshold at 117 – 123 districts meet the measure.

3. **Gifted Inputs** – The scale of the gifted input element is 100. Ultimately, the score needs to be at 80 to be consistent with the other report card measures. The median score range is currently 34, which is a clear reflection of how little districts are doing for gifted students. To receive 34 points, districts do little beyond identifying the state average number of students in Superior Cognitive and Specific Academic areas and maybe include a few minority and disadvantaged students as part of their identification process. *They do not have to provide any services at this level.* While the scores are low now, it will not take much effort for many districts to pull their scores up significantly just by documenting services they are already providing in high school and by adding whole grade screening in grades K-3. (Note: If all quality parameters are removed from the gifted operating standards, districts will just have to document anything as service and maximum service points may almost be a given.) For this element, I would recommend a phase-in beginning at 50 or 60 points for 2013-2014, 65 - 70 points in 2014-2015, and move to 80 points in 2015-2016. Setting a low threshold for this particular element completely defeats the purpose of having a gifted performance indicator. This is where board members need to decide if high standards are important for all children or if it is more important to set a standard that can be easily met by all districts.

- At a cutoff of 20: 534 districts meet the element including 79 that serve zero students and an additional 90 that serve between 0 and 10%.
- At a cutoff of 25: 458 districts meet the element including 41 that serve zero students and an additional 78 that serve between 0 and 10%.
- At a cutoff of 30: 366 districts meet the element including 24 that serve zero students 52 that serve between 0 and 10%
- At a cutoff of 35: 304 districts meet the element including 8 that serve zero students and an additional 8 that serve 39 that serve between 0 and 10%.
- At a cutoff of 50: 88 districts currently meet the element.
- At a cutoff of 60: 31 districts currently meet the element.

I was asked by several board members to share my opinion on the minimum ADM threshold for the gifted value-added element that was discussed yesterday in the accountability committee. The work group discussed the differences between 500 and 600. My personal preference is to set the threshold at 500, which affects twenty-three districts. Seventeen of those districts already identify enough students to receive both a value-added score and a gifted performance index score. Of the remaining six, the problem appears to be that the districts are not identifying any students in grades K-3. One district isn't identifying any students at all. At an ADM threshold of 500 and below, there are only 19 districts (not counting island districts) without a value-added score. Eight of those districts still qualify for both a gifted value-added grade and a gifted performance index score.

If the ADM level is set at 600, the effect is to tell 23 districts that they no longer need to identify or serve gifted students. Worse, the message to parents in these districts is that their gifted children don't matter in this accountability system. I agree there has to be minimum ADM. I believe that the data show 500 is reasonable.

While not part of the gifted performance indicator discussion, I also would like to comment on another decision made in yesterday's accountability committee, which I believe may have unintended consequences. The decision was how to deal with missing subgroups in providing an overall value-added grade. The committee voted to lower the number of points to measure this component to account for the missing subgroup. This action may actually encourage some districts to suppress the identification of gifted students so that negative growth scores won't matter. My recommendation would be to take into consideration the minimum ADM of the district set for the gifted value-added element to be graded. If the district is above the minimum ADM, whether it is set at 500 or 600, districts should receive an "F" for the gifted value-added subgroup if that subgroup is missing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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