

Ohio State Board of Education
Tuesday, June 14, 2016

**Brian Bontempo, Superintendent, Lake County ESC &
President, Ohio ESC Association**

Ohio's Proposed Gifted Operating Standards

President Gunlock, Vice President, Superintendent Rivera and Members of the State Board of Education:

- Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Lake County ESC and the Ohio ESC Association. My name is Brian Bontempo. I am the Superintendent of the Lake County Educational Service Center and currently serve as President of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association (OESCA).

With me today is Judy Chaffins, Director of Gifted Services, for the Allen County ESC. As Director of Gifted Services and a practitioner, she is here to assist in answering any specific questions you may have relative to the proposed gifted standards and the role of ESCs in supporting gifted services to students in Ohio's schools.

We believe in high standards for all students. We value the identification and replication of best practices. And, we believe that if the state sees value in providing high quality educational opportunities for gifted students they should adequately fund and resource those opportunities and hold all of us accountable for results.

- Generally speaking, according to ODE's survey of the field, ESCs believe the proposed rules:
 - provide the guidance needed to support identification of gifted students,
 - clearly define opportunities for identification of students as gifted,
 - provide flexibility in how districts may serve gifted students, and
 - Clearly define Gifted Staff qualifications for ESCs that receive unit funding.

However, many also believe :

- The proposed rules DO NOT clearly describe standards for the quality and extent of gifted services, and
 - DO NOT believe the components of the gifted indicator and the use of the indicator in the annual district report card are essential to evaluation of gifted education services.
- Operating standards, by definition, set a minimum expectation. In this case, they identify the minimum state requirements that apply to the implementation of educational and related support services to gifted students by school districts and other educational agencies. Because standards set a minimum expectation or floor, it is vitally important that we get it right so the services afforded to our best and brightest stretch them to reach their highest potential.

We believe it is important to strike an appropriate balance between 1.) meeting legal requirements, 2.) Providing flexibility at the local level based on a local community's identified goals and priorities, and, most importantly, 3.) Serving the best interests of the child with high quality opportunities.

- As you know, in Ohio there is a requirement to identify gifted students but no requirement to serve them. And, while there are specific gifted indicators on the state report card, these indicators alone are not enough to ensure high quality opportunities. When faced with cost pressures and other mandated requirements, districts will act first to comply with the law. As such, we likely need to look at both "inputs" and "outputs." As we identify and grow best practice instructional models for gifted students, perhaps we can back off input control, but that may not be supportable today.
- We must find ways to insure universal access to high quality opportunities for all kids. If we want to increase achievement for all students, and the implementation of best practices, then we need a system in place to insure those results; this means inputs that provide appropriate parameters or guardrails, and outputs that are clear and appropriate indicators of success.

Where districts are unable to do so on their own, ESCs can assist, collectively, through a consortia-based model to provide services that might not otherwise be available. This could include technical assistance in plan development, sharing of best practices, research, and coordination, and the operating standards should support and encourage these types of approaches.

- While the purpose of today's meeting is on the standards and is not focused on funding it is difficult to separate funding from service delivery and is part of a

separate, but related and parallel conversation. On the ESC-side, for example, gifted coordination units are funded at half of their value. This approach is dismissive of the role of ESCs, puts more stress on the school districts, and requires schools to make financial decisions which ultimately impact the service to students.

- Ultimately, there is a need for a systemic approach:
 - Fund Gifted Service Adequately – For example where ESCs receive gifted unit funding the units should be fully funded; and
 - Support Rules or Standards that
 - Provide High Quality Professional Development and Coordination;
 - Ensure Quality and Fidelity of Implementation;
 - Ensure that gifted students are treated equitably with other student population subgroups; and
 - In instances where ODE must provide technical assistance to districts whose plans do not meet requirements, ESCs are well positioned to provide that technical assistance, support and coordination.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.