



Legislative Positions for the 129th General Assembly

Updated July 7, 2011

Funding

The level of gifted funding under the Evidence-Based Model (EBM) for FY2011 was \$68 million, including \$8.1 million for educational service centers (ESCs). The executive budget called for the elimination of the EBM and includes the gifted funding from FY2011 in the basic aid line item with no specific spending rules for those funds. The EBM funding system had a disastrous effect on services to gifted students in the state of Ohio. Because gifted spending rules were not required before July 1, 2011, gifted services in Ohio have decreased by 22 percent in less than two years. Almost 350 districts have cut or eliminated services. The only thing preventing the elimination of gifted services in many districts was the “maintenance of effort” language that required districts to support gifted education at least to the level of state gifted funding received in FY2009. Language in HB30 tried to rectify the situation by opening the pathway for a return to the previous system of gifted units and gifted supplemental identification funding. This funding system was clearly understood by districts and supported by education organizations.

Fortunately, a maintenance of effort provision was included in the House version of the budget (HB 153) that requires districts to support gifted services in districts at the same level as state funds supported in FY2009. This temporary funding mechanism, while welcome, will still result in further reductions of gifted services. Because there is no mandate for gifted services and no district accountability for the performance of gifted students, gifted education reductions will continue throughout the next biennium.

If Ohio is to regain a competitive edge, policy makers simply cannot shortchange the education of gifted students. The Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC) recommends the following:

1. Ensure that gifted education funding returns to a stable form of funding. If the new funding system to be developed does not require gifted funds with the formula to spent on gifted students, gifted education will effectively end in Ohio. Unless gifted children are required to be served by districts, any system of funding for gifted will be ineffective. OAGC recommends that gifted funding for the next biennium be restored to the previous system of gifted units and gifted supplemental identification funding. Districts, by and large, understand and support this system of funding for gifted education. Districts that choose not to apply for gifted units will not have to do so. Districts that are too small to support a gifted unit can continue to receive gifted services through the ESCs.
2. Provide vouchers to gifted students whose districts choose not to provide services and allow community schools for gifted children to open in any district that does not serve all gifted children. This is not a substitute for the systemic foundation of gifted services that should be required in all of Ohio’s school districts. It will, however, give a level of control to parents in districts that choose not to provide gifted services, while ensuring that districts that do choose to support the needs of gifted children are not penalized.
3. Ensure that any accountability system, including the proposed ranking system, incorporates measures that effectively hold districts accountable for the performance of gifted students.
4. Remove the provision that allows full-time district administrators and other qualified individuals to be gifted coordinators. This provision will exacerbate the destruction of the gifted infrastructure in Ohio. It also raises questions about how gifted funds can be spent. Are districts going to be allowed to use gifted funding to support full-time principals who also have the title gifted coordinator? Will state funds also be allowed to pay for administrators operating under provisional gifted licenses even though they do not have the full credentials or qualifications to do so? This provision is

Gifted Policy Positions

Develop Regional and Alternative Opportunities—Fewer and fewer districts are offering gifted services to students. Because districts are not required to meet the needs of gifted students, many of these children waste precious time as well as state and local tax dollars sitting in classrooms that deliver material at a level and pace that is inadequate for gifted students. Many of these students are unable to advance to the level that is appropriate for them, as districts are afraid to lose their grade-level Ohio Achievement Assessment scores. The time has come to develop other public opportunities for these students. Several options should be considered.

- ✓ **Establish County or Regional Gifted Magnet Schools**—Educational service centers, joint vocational schools, and interested school districts and universities should be allowed to develop gifted magnet schools.
- ✓ **Expand Community School Opportunities for Special-Needs Students**—Community schools for special-needs populations, including gifted students, should be allowed in any county.
- ✓ **Expand Open Enrollment**—Allow gifted students to enroll in other districts if their own districts do not offer gifted services.
- ✓ **Allow Vouchers for Special-Needs Students, Including Gifted**—There are often few or no options for students whose special needs are not being met in their home districts. Ohio should consider allowing vouchers for students with special needs, including gifted students, when districts are unable or unwilling to provide appropriate services.

Use Innovative Techniques to Reach More High-Achieving Students—Ohio lags behind other states in several areas that have been effective in building highly skilled workers, particularly in the STEM fields.

- ✓ **Encourage Students to Move on When Ready by Allowing Funds to Follow Qualified Early Graduates**—Both Kentucky and Arizona are pushing legislation that will allow qualified students to graduate from high school early and to earn funds to be spent on college. Arizona’s Move on When Ready legislation allows for testing to show content mastery at the high school level. Once a student has established sufficient high school credit through the content tests, he or she is allowed to graduate early. Funds will then be used by those students for post secondary opportunities in multiple ways. Kentucky’s legislation allows early graduates to receive up to \$2,500 for postsecondary coursework. Similar legislation in Ohio could eliminate wasted time in high school, better prepare students for postsecondary work, and save state and local tax dollars by eliminating duplicative or unnecessary high school work.
- ✓ **Create a Virtual Gifted Middle/High School**—Access to high-level coursework is particularly difficult in smaller districts and in rural areas. Ohio gifted students could benefit greatly from a state-supported virtual middle/high school that provides high-level courses approved by the ODE regardless of where a student lives.
- ✓ **Remove the Prohibition on STEM Schools for Gifted Students**—Whereas national studies call for specific STEM opportunities for high-ability students in math and science, the Ohio Revised Code prohibits STEM schools for gifted and high-achieving students. This prohibition should be eliminated.
- ✓ **Develop a Math/Science Residential High School for High-Achieving Students**—More than fifteen states have established residential high schools, and the research on these schools demonstrates their effectiveness in developing and retaining math and science talent. Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee, for example, all have residential STEM high schools. Ohio is behind the times in promoting high-level educational opportunities in this area.

Remove Barriers for Students to Reach Their Potential—As Ohio moves to educate students to compete in the world economy, it is critical that legislators remove a number of outdated policy provisions to ensure that all students can move ahead to fulfill their potential. To that end, the OAGC recommends the following measures:

- ✓ **Allow Alternative Tests for Graduation and to Show Content Mastery**—The OAGC is concerned that many students are being held back by the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), which is first offered in the 10th grade. Many districts have dismantled strong math and science programs in order to fit the parameters of the OGT. The OAGC supports the use of SAT, PSAT, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), ACT end-of-course, or SAT subject exams as alternatives to the OGT. These tests show a strong correlation to success in postsecondary work. The OAGC believes that the use of the PSAT, ACT, or SAT as a substitute for the OGT allows for strong accountability, discourages districts from dumbing down opportunities for high-achieving students, and increases flexibility for students. While the Ohio Core legislation calls for the Ohio Department of Education to develop a system for students to be able to demonstrate subject competency, the resulting credit flexibility policy does not go far enough, and there is not enough state oversight of the how the policy is implemented in districts. The potential for misuse of this policy is huge. Some districts currently are charging students to receive credit through this option. Several states, including New York, Virginia, and Maryland, have received waivers from the U.S. Department of Education to allow individual students to use these exams in lieu of state-developed exams. STEM schools in Ohio also were able to receive a waiver to allow students to take the OGT early. If STEM school students can take the OGT early, students in other Ohio districts, community schools, and nonpublic schools should be afforded the same opportunity.
- ✓ **Allow and Provide Incentives to Early Access to Ohio Achievement Assessments**—Many of Ohio's gifted students are held back from accelerated opportunities because there is a perceived—and sometimes real—disincentive in the accountability system with regard to performance on Ohio Achievement Assessments. Districts often fear that a student may not receive as high a score on a higher grade level exam, which could result in a lower rating for a building. Sometimes the scores of students who are subject accelerated are not recorded at the correct building level. ODE's policy on which students should be allowed to take exams at an accelerated level is muddled at best and highly confusing to districts. These false barriers that impede access to appropriate gifted education can be corrected by providing incentives in the report card. For example, scores for students who are accelerated could be weighted. ODE should petition the U.S. Department of Education to allow above-grade-level testing, as they did for the OGT.
- ✓ **Increase Participation of Secondary Students in the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Program and Increase Scrutiny of Dual Enrollment Programs**— OAGC supports the Post Secondary Enrollment Options program. The current limitation of minimum GPA should be removed, and post-secondary institutions should be encouraged to promote this program. OAGC also believes that dual enrollment programs offered on school district campuses should face increased scrutiny in terms of staff qualifications, the amount of money students are charged to take the courses, and the transferability and integrity of the credit awarded. Institutes of higher education often will not accept dual enrollment credit taught on high school campuses, as there is little accountability on course instruction and content.
- ✓ **Develop a Grouping Policy**— ODE should develop a statewide instructional grouping policy or model for districts to adopt. Research has long supported instructional grouping as one of the most educationally and socially effective and cost-efficient methods to support gifted children.
- ✓ **Remove Barriers to Early Kindergarten Entrance**—There is conflict in law regarding early entrance to kindergarten. While the acceleration law allows for early entrance to kindergarten, other sections of the Ohio Revised Code have not been updated to reflect this change. In order for districts to receive funding for students who enter kindergarten early, the Ohio Revised Code must be corrected.

- ✓ **Remove Barriers to Acceleration**—Districts often are reluctant to accelerate students because they fear losing grade-level Ohio Achievement Assessment scores. Also, ODE’s policy on which students may be counted as accelerated and which students may not is confusing and limiting to districts. ODE must rework its position. Districts should receive incentives for properly accelerating students, and the assessment of accelerated students should be evaluated to ensure that districts are not penalized for the acceleration. This is particularly important in smaller schools, where one or two test scores can make the difference between meeting achievement benchmarks or not.

Establish Accountability Measures in the State to Measure Achievement of High-Ability Students—To ensure that no child is left behind and no child is held back, OAGC supports the accountability recommendations in *Gifted Education in the 21st Century*, a report prepared by the 2002 Ohio Gifted Task Force and approved by the State Board of Education. The report states, “Currently, schools are not held accountable for ensuring that children who are gifted are served according to their needs. There is no system in place to ensure these children reach their full potential. Ohio’s report card system, while addressing district results in proficiency, does not specifically address children who are gifted.” To that end, OAGC supports the following measures:

- ✓ **Develop a District Dashboard for Indicators That Relate to High-Ability/High-Achieving Students**—Ohio district report cards include very little meaningful information about opportunities offered and performance above bare proficiency. Some districts rated Excellent offer no gifted services and no Advanced Placement courses and may have low ACT scores and high college remediation rates. Ohio has developed a district dashboard for students with disabilities that can serve as a model for gifted students. Measures on a gifted dashboard could include the number and percentage of gifted students served in each of the areas of identification; depth and breadth of gifted services offered; number and percentage of gifted students in underrepresented populations; number of students taking Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and PSEO courses; number and percentage of students who are accelerated; and value-added growth. The Ohio Revised Code requires that a gifted indicator be placed on the report card in 2012. The measures on a district gifted dashboard eventually could be aggregated into a single measure for the report card. Districts should be appropriately rewarded for providing advanced opportunities for gifted and other high achieving students. No district should be rated Excellent if it does not identify or fully serve its gifted population.
- ✓ **Mandated Services**—Providing appropriate educational opportunities for gifted children can no longer be optional. Gifted students often spend a disproportionate amount of their school day reviewing information that they learned long ago. Artificial boundaries must be removed from these students. In order for Ohio to be competitive in the 21st century, gifted children must not be held back academically.

Teacher Preservice Training—In order to prepare all educators to support the needs of gifted children in the classroom, the OAGC recommends that all classroom teachers be provided with sufficient preservice training in gifted education. Even though the Ohio Revised Code requires all teacher preparation programs to include some gifted training for all preservice teachers, very few actually comply with the law. Ideally, all educator preservice programs should provide a three-credit-hour course to address

- the nature and needs of gifted children including the social and emotional aspects;
- the laws and administrative rules regarding the identification of gifted children;
- the common myths and misconceptions surrounding gifted children, including those that tend to discriminate against children who should be referred for assessment;
- strategies to adjust the depth, breadth, and pace of curricula through appropriate methods of differentiated instruction, appropriate grouping, pre- and post-assessment, and acceleration; and
- the principle that a gifted intervention specialist or coordinator should be consulted when a gifted student’s needs are beyond what the classroom teacher can meet.

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