



Senate Testimony on HB33 May 2023

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB33. My name is Abbie Sigmon, and I am the incoming executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). (For more information about gifted education, please see the [2022 State of Gifted Education](#)).

Gifted education funding in Ohio has gone through multiple revisions over the last decade. The current formula is based on a 2018 gifted cost study whose recommendations were largely incorporated into the Cupp-Patterson funding bill. The current formula provides allocations for gifted identification, gifted coordinators, gifted intervention specialists, and gifted professional development for general education teachers. This formula provided approximately \$74 million in FY2022 (after caps and guarantees). In addition, \$3.8 million is allocated to ESCs (Educational Service Centers) for gifted coordinator and intervention specialist units. HB110, the last biennial budget bill, also included several provisions to increase gifted accountability and transparency. These provisions are just now being implemented and current amendments to HB33 have removed any sunset language - of which we are extremely thankful. These provisions are incredibly important as gifted children are the only children not required to be served according to their needs in Ohio. OAGC recommends that the Ohio Senate retain these amendments. If Ohio policymakers are truly committed to workforce development, requiring gifted services needs to be an integral part of the equation.

Major Concerns Regarding HB33

Before going into our requests for changes to HB33, it is important to thank the governor for increasing the ESC gifted unit funding from \$3.8 million to \$5.4 million. This is the first increase in many years. ESCs report spending over \$11 million on gifted staffing and services. Many of these ESCs provide services to smaller, rural districts that would have no services without the support of ESCs. While \$5.4 million is well below the \$8.1 million that ESCs received a decade ago, it is a welcome improvement. ***OAGC believes ESCs supporting smaller, lower-wealth districts should be given priority in funding.***

Maintain the Accountability and Transparency of Gifted Funds, Services, and Staffing

With regard to improvements to gifted education funding, our most urgent request to the Ohio House was to maintain the gifted accountability and transparency measures that were included in the last biennium. Without the House support, many of these provisions would have sunset. As critical as funding is, accountability for the use of gifted funds is equally as important. With accountability and transparency language maintained in HB33, OAGC asks that the Ohio Senate retain that language. If the



transparency and accountability of gifted funds are allowed to sunset, districts will go back to spending gifted funds in the formula on anything they want with impunity.

OAGC requests the following provisions be added to HB33:

- 1. Reduce the Gifted Student:Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio from 140:1 to 100:1**
- 2. Gifted Funding Formula Changes**
- 3. Support for Merit Scholarships**

Unreasonable Gifted Student to Gifted Intervention Specialist Student Ratio

OAGC would like to see a few changes to the gifted formula such as updated salary figures and coordinator to ADM ratios. However, the major concern OAGC has regarding the gifted formula is the ratio between gifted students to gifted intervention specialists in grades K-6 which is 140:1. This ratio stretches gifted intervention specialists to a level that degrades services to gifted students. While there are many ways to serve gifted students, some of which are lower cost, this ratio goes well above the recommended level in the gifted operating standards at 80:1 for students in self-contained or cluster-group settings. ***The 140:1 Gifted Student/Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio needs to be reviewed and reduced to a more reasonable level. OAGC recommends the ratio of 100:1. The approximate cost of this change would be \$15 million when the formula is fully funded. A ratio of 120:1 would cost approximately \$7.5 million.***

Gifted Funding Formula

As previously mentioned, in 2018, under contract from the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Education Research Center (OERC) conducted a gifted cost study. Most of the recommendations were incorporated into the Cupp-Patterson school funding bill (HB305/SB376) in the 133rd General Assembly and HB1 in the 134th General Assembly. The formula was ultimately adopted in the current budget. OAGC believes the formula is an improvement, but the organization recommends several changes:

- As discussed, we would like a decrease in the Gifted Student to Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio
 - The 140:1 Gifted Student/Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio needs to be reviewed and reduced to a more reasonable level. OAGC recommends the ratio of 100:1.
- Maintain the Current Level of Gifted Professional Development for General Educators
 - OAGC recommends retaining, at least, the current level of gifted professional development funds. (Gifted cost study assumed PD could be eliminated in four years.)
 - Classroom teachers serving gifted students will require sustained levels of gifted professional development. Gifted professional development is an ongoing cost and should be funded as such.



- Using a 3000:1 ADM/Coordinator Ratio and No Funding Cap on the Number of Coordinators
 - The current formula uses a 3300:1 ratio merely to reduce the funding level for coordinators.
 - This was based on 2008 operating standards.
 - Capping the number of coordinators at eight merely serves to hurt our largest districts. There is no basis for the cap. The ADM to coordinator ratio should be restored to 3000:1 and no cap on the number of coordinators should be applied.

Support for Merit Scholarships

OAGC also welcomes the governor's merit scholarship which would provide a \$5,000 scholarship to the top 5% of students in each district for those that attend a state-funded college or university. We do believe, however, that this will exacerbate the friction between students taking College Credit Plus courses versus those taking Advanced Placement, IB, and other courses. Weighted grades, already important, will become even more so to students fighting to be in the top 5%. ***OAGC believes it might be useful to incorporate a non-GPA factor in the merit scholarship criteria (e.g., ACT or SAT scores) to ease the inevitable increase in pressure on weighted grades due to the new scholarship.***

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.

For more information, please contact OAGC Executive Director, Ann Sheldon at anngift@aol.com or 614-325-1185 or OAGC Incoming Executive Director, Abbie Sigmon at abbiesigmon@gmail.com.