

ADVOCACY CORNER

By Abbie Sigmon

Balancing Billions in the Budget

We've ridden through another roller coaster of a budget season at the Ohio Statehouse. Most notably, changes in vouchers, school funding, reading retention, and the dissolution of the Ohio Department of Education have led the conversation in education circles in Ohio. With a small extension granted, The Operating Budget (HB33) was signed into law by Governor DeWine on July 7th.

HB33 - Operating Budget

SB1 - Reform the Ohio Department of Education

During the 134th General Assembly's lame duck session, Senator Reineke introduced SB178, the original bill that sought to reform the Ohio Department of Education. Speaker Huffman, by reintroduction SB178 as SB1 in the 135th General Assembly, indicated one of his most important priorities as speaker: overhaul the Department of Education. After heated deliberation in both the House and Senate, SB1 was ultimately folded into the budget bill effectively ensuring its passage.

This bill eliminates the Ohio Department of Education, and restructures it under a new agency. Duties previously under the purview of the State Board of Education are now under the control of the newly created Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW). The director of ODEW will be appointed by and report directly to Governor DeWine.

K-12 Funding

DeWine's February State of the State underscored the importance of literacy, workforce readiness, and K-12 funding. After months of hearings, testimonies, and conferences, the 135th General Assembly agreed on an additional \$1.5 billion over the biennium for public education. Universal school vouchers, a major point of contention, were passed. As written, all Ohio K-12 students are eligible for school vouchers, known as Ed Choice. However, Ed Choice scholarships are entirely dependent on family income. Full scholarships are only available to students from families who earn up to 450% of the federal poverty line. Partial scholarships are available to families who do not meet this criterion. Teacher minimum salaries will increase from \$30,000 to \$35,000. This is expected to affect 86 current school districts who will need to renegotiate affected teacher salaries. In an effort to keep Ohio's best and brightest enrolled in Ohio colleges and universities, the budget also retained DeWine's initial proposal of a \$5,000 in-state scholarship to students who graduate in the top 5% of their graduating class. In an effort to address literacy in Ohio, the third-grade reading guarantee was maintained in the final budget. Originally passed in the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, HB117 (Eliminate Third Grade Reading Retention) was removed from the budget. Third grade students who do not pass state tests may be retained. The State Board of Education voted to increase

third grade reading cut scores to 695 for the 2023-2024 school year.

Gifted Funding

Governor DeWine's initial budget proposal included an increase in the per-pupil gifted professional development amount from \$14 in FY 2023 to \$21 in FY 2024 and \$28 in FY2025. DeWine also asked for up to \$5,357,606 in each fiscal year for gifted education at ESCs. This funding will be distributed through the unit-based funding methodology in place prior to FY 2010. Neither the House nor the Senate made any changes to either of these initial proposals and they were signed into law.

The OAGC's most pressing request of the Ohio House was a change in the accountability and transparency language regarding gifted funding. Because funding accountability and transparency language was due to sunset this year, OAGC testified in the House Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education specifically asking for the following changes:

1. Make permanent the funding accountability and transparency language added into the last biennial budget bill (HB110)
2. Maintain and improve the level of accountability for gifted funding by strengthening the language that requires all districts to spend state gifted funding on the elements in the gifted cost study formula.
3. Maintain the requirement for ODE to collect and post data on gifted services offered by each district by grade band as well as the number of licensed gifted personnel employed or contracted by the district.
4. Maintain the requirement that ODE report the amount of state gifted funds provided to each district in the gifted expenditure report already produced by the ODE.

Additionally, we were also able to lobby for services offered by each school district to students identified as gifted in each of the following grade bands:

- Kindergarten through second grade
- Third through sixth grade
- Seventh through eighth grade
- Ninth through twelfth grade

With some small hurdles to jump through in the Senate and Conference Committee, we are happy to report that our amendments were ultimately accepted into HB33.

What does this mean for gifted education in Ohio?

All sunseting language has now been made permanent. Instead of asking legislators to renew and extend gifted funding each budget year, language has been updated to ensure that funding applies to every fiscal year hereafter. By removing the language that "other ODE approved services providers" from the list of services on which gifted student funds may be spent, districts will now be more fully accountable for the use of gifted funds.

However, a large caveat is the dissolution of ODE and the creation of ODEW (SB1). It is not fully known how this new cabinet will run, who will be the director, and what other changes will come about once transition has taken place. But, by keeping up to date with our Advocacy Alerts, we will be sure to share any and all information with the OAGC community.

Other Bills of Importance

HB11 (Scholarship Program Changes) aka Backpack Bill would publicly fund private education by creating Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) for K-12 students. Private, charter, and home schools would be able to retain their curriculum autonomy while also receiving state funds for their operation. Lacking any real oversight or accountability, this bill also creates the opportunity for discrimination. While the OAGC does not oppose vouchers, this bill is concerning. As of the writing of this article, *HB8 (Parental Notification Requirements) aka Parents' Bill of Rights*, has passed the House and is expected to be introduced into the Senate. The Parents' Bill of Rights requires public schools to notify parents and guardians of students' health and well-being as well as any educational materials that have "sexuality content." Opponents find this bill detrimental to student well-being, especially those students who identify as LGBTQ+. Students will no longer feel safe enough to confide in teachers. Additionally, the topic of "sexuality content" will limit the use of medically accurate instructional materials in the classroom.

Currently, *SB104 (Regarding College Credit Plus)* is being heard in the Senate Workforce and Higher Education committee. Proposed CCP changes look to address accessibility in three main ways. First, the chancellor of higher education would certify relevant instructors through a new certification process. Second, the bill currently aims to split the cost of textbooks 50/50 between both the higher education institution and the school district. However, recent hearings also discussed providing students with cost-free, online instructional materials. Third, students will be allowed to enroll in CCP twice a year at dates that will be set by the chancellor. With ongoing developments in this bill and others, please stay up to date by reading our advocacy alerts:

<https://oagc.com/advocacy/advocacy-alerts/>

Science of Reading

The science of reading was named as a specific education priority in Governor DeWine's proposed budget. As with all changes in instruction, OAGC worked to ensure that this new instruction would include concerns from the gifted community. Does structured literacy still allow for differentiation of gifted children? Will educators need more training for differentiation? What does the science of reading look like for a twice exceptional child?

In order to more adequately address concerns regarding the science of reading and its impact on gifted children, OAGC and ODE worked together to create a webinar entitled "Supporting Students Who Are Gifted: Using Effective Literacy Practices Aligned with the Science of Reading." Alongside ODE employees, Denise Cooley, of North Canton Schools, helped to address concerns around identification, professional development, and more.

Watch the ODE Webinar here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81qbCzQUjMI>

Gifted Advisory Council

The Ohio Department of Education's Gifted Advisory Council has met in-person twice so far this year. This council's purpose is to include stakeholders (educators, parents, administrators, etc.) in the creation of ODE-approved gifted education plans and policy recommendations. These

stakeholders also serve as advisors for the review of newly gifted services.

The February GAC meeting included a presentation and short discussion with Scott Peters regarding 'local norms' using Ohio MAP assessment data. After this group discussion, all GAC members in attendance split into three workgroups:

1. Equitable Identification Practices
2. Highly Effective Student Supports and Services
3. Job Embedded Professional Development

While varied in their scope, each of these workgroups intend to make gifted services for Ohio students more inclusive and better supported.

Read more about GAC here:

[\[https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education/Rules-Regulations-and-Policies-for-Gifted-Education/Gifted-Advisory-Council\]](https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education/Rules-Regulations-and-Policies-for-Gifted-Education/Gifted-Advisory-Council)

State Board of Education

As previously mentioned, SB1 (folded into HB33) ultimately eliminated the State Board of Education and the superintendent of public instruction. Instead, the newly created Department of Education and Workforce will be led by a cabinet director that is appointed by and answers to the governor. Amidst the SB1 hearings, state superintendent Stephanie Siddens announced her resignation from the position. An interim superintendent, Christopher Woolard, was appointed by the board in early May. Governor DeWine has not indicated who he will appoint as the head of ODEW.

Building a Wider, More Diverse Pipeline of Advanced Learners

The National Working Group on Advanced Education, a workgroup formed with leadership by the Fordham Institute, has released their report entitled *Building a Wider, More Diverse Pipeline of Advanced Learners*. The purpose of this workgroup was to create a list of recommendations for school districts, charter schools, and policy makers for the betterment of gifted learners in the United States. Thirty-six total recommendations are listed throughout the document. These span recommendations for early education, identification, accelerated learning, equitable grouping, social and emotional learning, educators, materials, and state policies.

An over arching theme of this report is inclusion, not exclusion of gifted services. The report emphasizes that districts should seek to include all students who could benefit from advanced learning programs. Outside of the 36 total recommendations, this workgroup also suggests that the gifted community examine and eliminate certain terminology from the gifted lexicon. The report suggests that "gifted" is replaced with "advanced" whenever possible. Phrases like "advanced potential" seek to include more students who could benefit from advanced learning opportunities.

From a policy perspective, it is important to note that this report recommends a state-level requirement to provide services to advanced learners. As we know all too well "[t]oo many states require identification and nothing more."

Read this report here:

[\[https://oagc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FordhamReport.pdf\]](https://oagc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FordhamReport.pdf)