



February 26, 2025

House Education Testimony

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Abbie Sigmon and I am the executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). With nearly 1,000 members, OAGC promotes and supports the development of gifted students in Ohio by advocating on their behalf.

There are more than 225,000 identified gifted students in Ohio. The state of Ohio has a gifted identification mandate with no service mandate. Comparatively, we have fewer than 940 Gifted Intervention Specialists (GISs) and fewer than 1,150 gifted staff - including ESC staff. While I will be discussing specific changes to the Operating Budget, it is important to note that these ratios of gifted staff to gifted students are deeply unsatisfactory and directly contribute to the daily burnout, struggles, and exhaustion of gifted staff.

§3317.022 Gifted Professional Development Funds

The 2018 Gifted Cost Study performed by the Ohio Education Research Center under the purview of the then Ohio Department of Education outlined four main gifted cost recommendations: identification, professional development, gifted coordinators, and gifted instructional services. These recommendations from the OERC have shaped gifted funding in this state, however; the gifted cost study inexplicably assumed that professional development for general education educators could be eliminated in four years. Professional development for general education educators is an ongoing cost and should be funded as such.

Gifted services in Ohio have expanded by over 300% in less than a decade. And, as previously mentioned, staff to gifted student ratios are so vast that these students must be served by general education teachers who have the knowledge and understanding of their unique needs, abilities, and capabilities. According to the Gifted Rule (3301-51-15), general education teachers who are designated service providers and do not otherwise have licensure or endorsement in gifted education must receive professional development in gifted education covering specific competencies from qualifying providers. The removal of this section of the law is not consistent with Ohio's requirements for general education teachers providing gifted services.

Please retain previous budget language: Gifted professional development funds calculated to the following formula: The greater of the number of gifted students enrolled in the district as certified under division (B)(22) of § 3317.03 of the Revised Code and ten per cent of the district's enrolled ADM) X the district's state share percentage X \$1, for fiscal year 2024, or \$28 for fiscal year 2025. The most recent estimates for Fiscal Year 2025 from the School Funding Payment Report (SFPR) estimate that gifted professional development will cost the state of Ohio just over \$2 million a year.

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.

Thank you to the members of this committee for listening to my testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

For more information, please contact OAGC Executive Director, Abbie Sigmon, at: (330) 495-5230 or executivedirector@oagc.com.