

ADVOCACY CORNER

By Abbie Sigmon

It's early February as I sit in my office to write this article. A layer of ice/snow covers my yard. My email inbox is full of statehouse news reports, questions about the upcoming Teacher Academy and Coordinator Workshop, press releases, and meeting requests amongst the usual daily updates. It is just February. I know that this edition of the OAGC Review won't be in your mailbox for weeks, so I write this Advocacy Corner in full awareness that the news is coming fast. A colleague likened the news to a firehose and we are all trying to understand and process everything we can while still catching our breath.

On separate occasions in the last month, I spoke to two OAGC Affiliates: the Greater Cleveland Coordinators of Gifted and the Gifted Coordinators of Central Ohio. I gave them each some advocacy updates from the Statehouse and general news from the Department of Education and Workforce. I then opened up my presentation for questions. Each group asked me about federal news related to the shuttering of the Department of Education. "Will I lose my job?" one attendee asked.

Federal Education News

It's a heavy question that deserves an answer that helps to dispel rumors. But, in this time of news like a firehose, I hesitate to speak in absolutes. President Trump said he wanted the Department of Education to close during his first term, but Congress never acted on his desire. Now in his second term, President Trump calls the department a "big con job," and discussed closing the Department of Education using an executive order. The newly-created Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has already cut much of the Department of Education's research department and it's likely more funding will be cut soon. Based on overall government spending, the Department of Education is one of the smallest federal departments with a yearly budget of \$79 billion.

As I told the affiliates last month, because the Department of Education was established by Congress in May of 1980, the president is not able to close the Department of Education using an executive order. Instead, the closure of the Department of Education would require an act of Congress with bipartisan support. Knowing this, President Trump has instead identified certain programs that he could abolish or transfer to other federal departments.

Programs like Title I and IDEA funding are likely

to be affected. Title I schools are those that receive federal funding to help low-income students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides \$15 billion to support students with disabilities. Those two programs may not be dismantled in totality and instead move to another department like the Department of Health and Human Services under director Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Evenstill, the future is unknown. We live in a world where the news is unrelenting. These changes and their effects are not fully known. I know it's not comforting, but all I can do is let everyone know the legalities and the truths as I see them.

State and Federal Trends - SB1

At both the state and federal level, the rollback of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, the increase of career and technical education, and the expansion of school choice have been at the forefront. Governor DeWine has championed all three of these efforts in his Blue Book (budget recommendations to the Ohio Congress). Most recently, the Ohio Senate passed SB1 - Advance Ohio Education Act. This bill, if passed in its current form, would completely overhaul public universities. DEI programs would be eliminated (including certain DEI scholarships), faculty would not be allowed to strike, all students would be required to take an American history course, amongst other limitations on classroom discussions and "controversial beliefs." SB1 drew outrage and over 800 (200 in-person) opponent testimonies from students, academics, and teachers' unions. The outrage wasn't enough and SB1 was passed earlier this month. SB1 will head to the House before being signed by the Governor. Changes to the bill are not likely.

136th General Assembly - Budget Year

Governor DeWine presented his Blue Book in early February. The Blue Book is a nearly 600 page document that outlines the Governor's budgetary priorities. As a reminder, the Governor will present his priorities to both chambers of the Ohio Congress. The House of Representatives used these recommendations to create their budget bill (HB96). HB96 will be heard in various House committees after which the budget bill will get amended and voted out of the House. The bill will then move to the Senate. Senate committees will hear testimonies related to their purview. The Senate will make their changes and amendments, vote on the bill,

and then send their version of the bill to the Governor by June 30th, 2025. It's not quite Schoolhouse Rock, but that's the main idea.

Governor DeWine described this budget year as a "lean year" meaning Ohio doesn't have a huge influx of new dollars in our coffers. At the same time, Governor DeWine prioritized the phase-in of the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Bill. During his press conference that accompanied the Blue Book's release, Governor DeWine spent time outlining the highly successful Governor's Merit Scholarship - a program OAGC has supported since its inception. The Governor's Merit Scholarship gives the top 5% of a high school's graduating class \$5,000 per year for four years of in-state tuition. Excitingly, the Governor hopes to expand the Merit Scholarship to also guarantee admission to recipients at any main campus of state public college and universities.

HB96 - Operating Budget

Roughly a week after presenting the Blue Book, the Ohio House of Representatives released their budget (HB96). Clocking in at 4,063 pages, HB96 full phases in the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Bill however it freezes the base cost in fiscal year 2022. The Ohio Fair School Funding Plan was originally introduced in the 2019-2020 session of the Ohio legislature. Under this legislation, property taxes and local incomes would be used to determine the funds sent to schools. These funds would come in direct payments to schools instead of bundled funding to districts. Keep your eyes peeled, however. Senator Brenner, chair of the Senate Education Committee, has mentioned he may be presenting his own school funding formula in the coming weeks. It's always an exciting time at the Statehouse.

Gifted Professional Development

Major changes within the budget include the removal of gifted professional development funds for general education teachers (ORC § 3307.022). This is almost certainly a direct response to the 2018 gifted cost study performed by the Ohio Education Research Center (OERC) on behalf of the then Ohio Department of Education (ODE). This cost study erroneously assumed that professional development hours would only need to be funded in the state of Ohio for four years. As we all know, ongoing professional development is necessary not just for

seasoned teachers, but to ensure new general education teachers receive the gifted education hours necessary in Ohio. According to the Detailed School Funding Payment Report, the state of Ohio is on track to spend just over \$63 million on gifted education in FY25. Of that \$63 million, \$2,096,673.07 is projected to be spent on gifted professional development. Ohio is projected to spend over \$8 billion on education in FY25. I have been (and will continue to) speak to legislators about this egregious oversight in the budget.

Additional lobbying conversations have focused on GIS:student ratios, reducing the cap on gifted coordinators (currently set at eight), accountability language, assessment issues, and, of course, funding. Current GIS:student ratios are 140:1. I know I am preaching to the choir, but these ratios degrade services. The recommended level in the gifted operating standards is 80:1. Capping the number of gifted coordinators serves no purpose and only hurts larger districts who have the need and ability to pay for more gifted coordinators. We are thankful to have increased funding accountability language since the last biennium, however; without the State Board of Education's power to hold ODEW accountable, OAGC is asking for more stringent deadlines and accountability provisions around waivers and complaints with ODEW. The 2024 release of approved gifted assessments brought with it a bevy of complaints - certain assessments were not approved while others were approved with less-than-clear accompanying guidelines. Yet again, OAGC is advocating for a gifted assessment review panel that consists of individuals outside of ODEW with specific gifted assessment knowledge. Gifted assessments should be reviewed by experts in the field. Finally, OAGC is asking for a removal of the cap on gifted funding in the foundation funding formula. Instead, we recommend moving funding outside the transitional aid guarantee to allow more funding to flow to smaller districts. We also ask that this general assembly specify that gifted funding to districts is designated in the Cupp/Patterson funding report and the gifted expenditure report so that district expenditures and state gifted funding can be properly compared.

Additional 136th GA Education Bills

SB19 (Regarding Public Schools - Academic Intervention), sponsored by Senator Brenner, aims to require the Department of Education and Workforce to report the numbers of students receiving each category of instructional

service offered by the school district. These include regular education instruction, vocational education instruction, specialized instruction programs or enrichment instruction that is part of the educational curriculum, instruction for gifted students, instruction for students with disabilities, and remedial instruction.

It is important to note, that while not officially amended into this bill as of the writing of this column, the Fordham Institute has encouraged Senator Brenner to include provisions that would require students who test accomplished or advanced on their sixth and seventh grade OsT be automatically enrolled in eighth grade algebra.

After the passage of SB104 (Regarding College Credit Plus, Bathroom Policy) in late 2024, HB62 (College Credit Plus Changes - Regarding the College Credit Plus Program) was introduced by Representatives and Bird in early February. This bill would amend certain sections of the College Credit Plus program and enact new provisions set to enhance the program. Participating public and private colleges would be required to notify secondary schools when CCP participants withdraw and would ensure that all participants complete orientation and academic advising. Additionally, participating colleges and universities would be required to both promote their CCP programs as well as to provide professional development programs for high school teachers teaching college-level courses.

Gifted Advisory Council

The Gifted Advisory Council met in late February, 2025. With the near-completion of the Gifted Plan, the gifted advisory council is considering their next steps. As is required by the Gifted Rule, the Gifted Advisory Council may be establishing criteria for identifying and recognizing schools, districts, and other educational providers that demonstrate an exemplary ability to serve students who are gifted.

To keep abreast of all advocacy news, please check the OAGC Web site frequently for new policy and advocacy items: <https://oagc.com/advocacy/advocacy-alerts/>

Do you tweet? For breaking news, follow the OAGC at www.twitter.com/oagcgifted.

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Early Entrance to Kindergarten for Gifted Students in Ohio: A Guide for Gifted Intervention Specialists and Coordinators

By Laurel Thwaites

As we step into early 2025, planning for the 2025-2026 school year is well underway. Across Ohio, schools are holding kindergarten information nights, equipping families with essential knowledge about their child's transition to school. As gifted intervention specialists and coordinators, you play a crucial role in guiding parents through the process of early entrance to kindergarten, a pathway designed for exceptional children who demonstrate advanced readiness both academically and developmentally.

Understanding Early Entrance to Kindergarten

In Ohio, early entrance to kindergarten refers to the process of admitting a student before they reach the typical age requirement. This form of academic acceleration provides gifted children with a curriculum that better matches their intellectual abilities, preventing boredom and underachievement. It also allows them to interact with peers at similar academic levels, fostering both engagement and social development.

The Benefits of Early Entrance for Gifted Students

For intellectually advanced children, delaying kindergarten may result in disengagement and frustration. Early entrance offers numerous advantages, including:

- **Access to an appropriately challenging curriculum** – Gifted students flourish when presented with stimulating and advanced learning opportunities.
- **Stronger peer relationships** – Learning alongside children with similar academic abilities can enhance