



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Testimony on the Governor's Proposed 2012-2013 Biennium Budget

The Ultimate in Total Education Since 1829

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am Scott Schaller, Interim Superintendent of the Ohio School for the Deaf. On behalf of all the parents, students, faculty, and staff at the Ohio School for the Deaf (OSD), I thank you for this opportunity to present the school's testimony on the Governor's proposed budget for Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013.

An important act of the Ohio Legislature in 1829 established the Ohio School for the Deaf, the first residential school in the State of Ohio. OSD is the fifth oldest school program for the education of deaf learners in the United States. For the past 182 years, OSD has successfully provided an educational program for hearing impaired learners in Ohio. This act of the Ohio Legislature enabled generations of deaf people to become productive taxpayers. Many of the graduates are gainfully employed and many have gone on to higher education. Our learners are a credit to Ohio's investment in their education over the years.

The school is under the supervision of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education. Furthermore, the school is accredited by the NCA/CASI (North Central Association – Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement) and the Conference of Educational Administrators in Schools and Programs for the Deaf. With the accreditation, the school has been conducting NCA/CASI quality assurance reviews on an annual basis.

The school curriculum adheres to Ohio's Academic Content Standards for its learners and its assessment requirements. In addition, individual assessments in math and reading track each learner's progress each year and influence instructional strategies for that learner.

Educating learners who are deaf or hard of hearing is a complex and highly specialized undertaking. Deafness is a disability that impacts language, speech, communication development, and academic outcomes. Due to the unique language and communication needs of deaf learners, class sizes are small. Unlike hearing learners, deaf learners do not acquire language, vocabulary, and life concepts through auditory means such as the television, radio, family discussions or other implicit means; therefore, our highly qualified teachers are specially trained to focus on explicit instruction to develop the vocabulary and literacy skills necessary to acquire knowledge. All of our learners have IEPs (individualized educational programs) that emphasize the development of both language and communication skills. You can say that OSD is creating the right conditions that help our deaf and hard-of-hearing learners overcome the impact and ramifications of deafness.

The school's Center for Outreach Services at OSD leverages federal dollars to support the education of Ohio's other 2,641 deaf and hard of hearing learners, the families who are served through the preschool and school-age programs in local school districts, and the professionals and paraprofessionals working with them. Among our statewide outreach programs and services resulting in better communication, coordination, and collaboration are:

- Early Childhood Education Services
- K-12 Education Services
- Student Educational Assessment Team

- Interpreting and Sign Language Resources
- Learning opportunities through interactive distance video for students, families, and professionals
- Professional development that is ongoing, systematic and linked to the daily practice of educators and professionals involved in teaching learners who are deaf or hard-of-hearing
- Statewide support and training for families through the Parent Mentor Project
- Parent classes in American Sign Language
- Professional library in collaboration with the State Library of Ohio

The school is in session from late August through early June and provides summer enrichment activities. This year's enrichment activity is Driver Education Camp that is open to all Ohio learners who are deaf or hard of hearing. OSD also reaches out to schools, families, and learners who are deaf or hard of hearing through distance education technology. In addition to the 145 students from 39 counties that attend school at OSD, there are 112 learners enrolled in the interactive video distance learning activities from 16 participating Ohio schools.

I'd now like to introduce Cheryl Prusinski, the head of the residential program at OSD.

A residential program is provided for learners who do not reside close enough to OSD to warrant daily transportation. All learners go home every weekend with the exception of several "open weekends" (e.g., homecoming football game). The residential program ensures that our students have round-the-clock access to communication to further instill communication and language development. The program teaches independent living skills as well as including a specific program which teaches our students how to transition from OSD into the working world.

OSD also provides social opportunities. Our students are able to play on sports teams, participate in extra-curricular activities, have leadership roles in student groups, and participate in local community events. In essence, we allow our students to grow up integrated in the school and community. Creating a positive sense of belonging among our students is critical to healthy social development and identity.

The Ohio School for the Deaf is a primary and secondary **SCHOOL** in all aspects, while technically a state agency. I, as well as our students, faculty and staff at the school, do understand and appreciate the difficult task you all have in making Ohio fiscally responsible. The school does not promulgate rules or regulations for other schools in the State as our mission is to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing learners and to offer solutions and services to other schools and educational programs with similar goals, namely to ensure that Ohio's deaf and hard-of-hearing learners lead rewarding and productive lives.

The Ohio School for the Deaf is, indeed, the premier statewide educational resource providing services and solutions on deafness to Ohio's schools and other educational programs. The school has been doing and will continue to do the work expected from the State.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, this concludes my testimony about the Ohio School for the Deaf. I want you to know that the school appreciates the program and financial support from the Ohio General Assembly for the past 182 years. Also, I thank you for your time and attention to the Governor's proposal. I would be happy to answer any questions now.