



Department
of Education

John Kasich, Governor
Stan W. Heffner, Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction

**Testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 153 - Biennial Operating Budget
May 11, 2011**

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Senator Chris Widener, Chair

Stan W. Heffner, Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ohio Department of Education

Chairman Widener, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the House version of House Bill 153, the biennial operating budget, as it relates to Ohio's system of K-12 education.

I am Stan Heffner, Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction and head of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). My term as Interim Superintendent began May 1, though I have served in the Department since 2004 as the Associate Superintendent for the Center for Curriculum and Assessment. I began my career as a teacher and principal in South Dakota, where I later served as the state's deputy secretary of education and cultural affairs. I have been in school administration in Ohio since 1984, spending 15 years as the superintendent of the Madison Local School District in Lake County before coming to ODE. As a life-long educator, my comments today are focused on putting students first.

College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness for all Ohio students is the guiding principle for everything we do at ODE. Preparing students to succeed in postsecondary education and the workplace is the essential task of the education system, and is the key to Ohio's long term economic progress. Achieving that standard requires an educational system that is strong in the critical areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment; teacher quality; student supports and options; and accountability and intervention. ODE will streamline its operations in the next few months in order to stay focused on these core areas while also implementing the new requirements included in the budget bill. Ohio's Race to the Top (RttT) plan, a top strategic priority for our agency, embodies our college- and career-ready orientation and will guide the work of ODE in the coming years.

Curriculum and Assessment

A high quality curriculum is the foundation of educational success for Ohio's 1.8 million students because it sets the pathway toward our goal of preparing all students for college and career readiness. The three "legs" of the curricular "stool" are what is written (the academic standards), taught (the model curricula) and tested (the assessments). In 2009, Ohio committed to an upgrade of its academic content standards in reading, writing and math by joining 44 states and the District of Columbia in adopting the Common Core State Standards. In cooperation with the higher education community,

these more rigorous standards are consistent with the Ohio Core and they establish clear descriptions of what high school graduates must know in order to successfully transition to postsecondary education without remedial coursework, and to secure jobs that will allow them to support themselves, their families and Ohio. As part of a state-led effort to share high standards aimed at making America more competitive while preserving state control, Ohio's participation in the Common Core was a critical element in winning the federal RttT competition. Ohio's standards for science and social studies, also revised and approved by the State Board of Education the same year, are designed to meet the same rigorous levels that lead to college and career readiness.

In March, the State Board of Education adopted model curricula to assist teachers in implementing the new standards. Developed through an intensive and thorough stakeholder process, the model curricula demonstrate in each grade level how the standards can be integrated into course planning, helping teachers align their lesson content with the expectations on the upcoming revised state assessments and providing them with web-based resources.

Following the adoption of the Common Core, Ohio joined two national consortia that have been working to develop accompanying assessments. Scheduled to come online in the 2014-15 school year, the next generation of assessments pioneered by the consortia will take advantage of technology to include advanced measures of student learning such as online-adaptive and extended essay response questions. Through these consortia Ohio can capitalize on the efficiency of cross-state cost sharing for test production and administration.

Ohio is also creating performance-based assessments through its RttT program to provide feedback in a rapid reporting system that will inform teachers' instructional planning throughout the year, and help students own responsibility for their learning. These assessments are a great example of how technology can be woven into instructional practice to give teachers new tools for understanding and connecting with their students and to better serve their needs, and they will also give excellent feedback on student learning to students and their parents.

ODE estimates that each year 4 million state tests are given, including about 1.4 million Ohio Graduation Tests. The current testing regimen must continue to be administered while the new assessment system is developed, including a new graduation assessment that employs end-of-course exams and a national college preparatory test. We hope to have further discussions with you on some amendments which can enhance our capacity to prepare for the implementation of the new assessment system.

Teaching Profession

Teachers have more impact on student learning than any other factor within a school, and ODE emphasizes increasing teacher effectiveness as one of the best ways to ensure students are ready for college or the workplace. As researchers Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves have noted, "It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get."

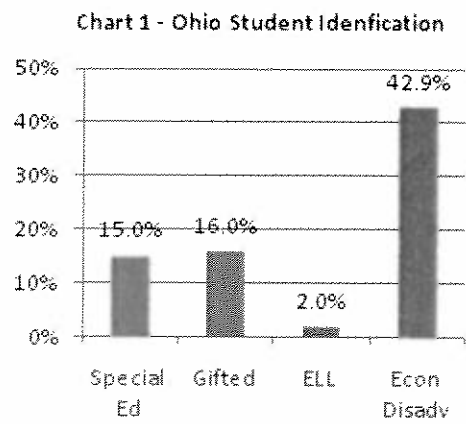
Ohio’s system of teacher licensure is a national leader in connecting teacher practice and certification, and ODE processes 100,000 licensure and endorsement applications every year. Established in 2009, Ohio’s tiered professional licensure system consists of four levels that require a progressive demonstration of professional practice. It incorporates a multi-year residency program for beginning teachers to provide intensive mentoring and support, the first state program of its kind. Licenses have already begun to be issued under the new system.

New programs in HB 153 are geared toward attracting, rewarding and promoting good teaching, including the Teacher Incentive Payment Program, performance-based compensation requirements, revisions to the process for alternative licensure, and retesting teachers working in the schools at the bottom 10% of performance index scores. We believe many of these provisions can complement the activities of RttT already underway.

Through RttT, ODE is developing a new teacher evaluation model that uses multiple measures to provide teachers with in-depth, usable information on how they can improve their practice. The requirements in the House version of HB 153 for new teacher and principal evaluation tools share most elements with the evaluation models designed for Ohio’s RttT districts, and the bill broadens their application to all districts and community schools. Though the House provisions accelerate the timeline for implementing the model evaluations, ODE is prepared to reconcile our existing models with the HB 153 requirements by the specified deadlines because we understand the vital importance of better evaluation methods for educators.

Student Supports and Options

Students learn at different paces and excel in different learning environments, so it is critical that the curriculum, teaching methods, and supports for students are provided in a relevant and meaningful way. Ohio’s educational system must be tailored to meet the unique needs of students who are disabled, gifted, of limited English proficiency or are living in poverty. ODE particularly concentrates on closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their counterparts. We focus on these students across the spectrum of our policies and programs, from examining the distribution of highly qualified and effective teachers to RttT’s emphasis on turning around the lowest-performing schools, in order to ensure the needs of all students are met in preparation for their success in life after graduation.



For special education and career-technical education students, ODE recognizes and appreciates that both the Executive and House versions maintained support in these areas, thereby allowing Ohio to

meet maintenance-of-effort requirements for the related the federal grants (IDEA, Perkins). Cutting state support in these areas would jeopardize hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.

Students in Ohio can also choose from a variety of educational options to meet their distinct needs, including traditional public schools, career-technical education programs, brick-and-mortar community schools, STEM schools, e-schools, scholarship programs and the postsecondary enrollment option (PSEO). The Executive Proposal expanded eligibility for the Educational Choice Scholarship program (EdChoice) from the current 14,000 scholarships to 30,000 in FY 2012 and 60,000 in FY 2013, and the House Version of HB 153 standardizes the tuition amounts for both EdChoice and the Cleveland Scholarship program to \$4,250 for grades K-8 and \$5,000 for grades 9-12.

ODE has advocated for parents and students to have school choice while assuring they attend choice schools. Our students can only be well-served if the educational options we offer are high quality, and in the coming months we will be examining ways to improve the oversight provided by community school sponsors. However, we believe some of the changes to community school policies in the House version of HB 153 are at odds with this approach.

In particular, we are concerned about the conflict of interest presented by the requirement for ODE to act as a de-facto sponsor while maintaining our responsibility to monitor other sponsors. Also, a variety of provisions related to the role of operators are expanded in a manner that may blur lines of authority and accountability. We would be happy to work with you in addressing these issues during the committee process.

Accountability and Intervention

Ohio's accountability system measures educational achievement through the local report cards provided to every school district and eligible school. Report cards inform students, parents, educators, administrators and policymakers on our progress towards the goal of preparing students to succeed in their pursuit of college and careers. As part of RttT, ODE is improving accountability and data collection through a statewide longitudinal data system that will provide information to educators on the academic progress of their students and enable us to track student progress from early childhood through higher education.

Despite our highest hopes for our schools, we must also be prepared to offer assistance and intervention to those which fall short of performance expectations. Ohio's State System of Support uses state and federal dollars to target school improvement assistance and planning to the districts with the highest need. The State System of Support and its regional educational service center (ESC) partners serve 1.2 million students in 299 districts and 159 community schools through deployment of the Ohio Improvement Process.

HB 153 proposes new initiatives to identify the lowest performing schools, require local educators to implement turnaround plans and explore a pilot program for parent-initiated reforms. The reform options defined in HB 153 parallel those required for federal school improvement grants, and include closure, staff change or conversion to a community school. In addition to interventions for low-performing schools, other new proposals from the Governor are aimed at recognizing schools which are succeeding at and encouraging innovation and creative approaches for all schools. Ohio's RttT plan further provides for researching, recognizing, and promoting effective educational practices.

Education Funding and Financing

The primary source of state funding for public schools is foundation funding. School districts also receive payments for homestead and rollback programs, and reimbursements for reduced and eliminated tangible property taxes. The Executive and House versions both propose a temporary "bridge" foundation funding formula for school districts, which makes per-pupil adjustments to FY 2011 levels scaled by an equity-based index, and the House version adds a supplemental payment to cap districts' funding reductions.

I will let Barb Mattei-Smith of the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education go into more depth on the bridge formula, plans for a new school funding formula and the restructuring of tangible property reimbursement phase-outs, but I do want to emphasize the importance of an equitable, effective system of school funding to the long-term success of the state's education system.

In addition to an appropriate funding distribution mechanism, state policies can help local districts make the most of their limited resources. It is imperative that we are responsible stewards of public resources, especially in these difficult economic times, and a key strategy for promoting efficient use of state funds is leveraging our regional infrastructure. Ohio has been moving towards increased regional coordination of educational services over the past 10 years, and many of our schools already participate in shared services opportunities. The forthcoming plan outlined in HB 153 for regional service agencies and increased attention on shared services is the next logical step. ODE looks forward to being a partner in crafting a regional system that best meets the needs of our educational providers in their efforts to meet the educational needs of our students.

Participating in shared services arrangements gives local districts access to cost-effective and specialized educational services; however, the removal of state software support in the House version is an unfortunate step in the opposite direction. These funds (line item 200426) maintain financial and administrative software used by over 900 schools and districts, and eliminating them would increase costs for local entities and put the integrity of data reporting and processing at risk. Good data is critical for sustaining an effective accountability system that informs educational policy decisions at the state level and instructional and financial decisions at the local level.

Conclusion

Ohio has successfully completed major educational changes in the past few years in a number of critical areas, including curriculum, assessment and teacher licensure. These efforts will continue to evolve with the provisions of HB 153. The Department of Education intends to maintain its focus on college and career readiness for all students to help lay the groundwork for Ohio's economic revitalization.

However, we have some concern about ODE's ability to assume all of the new responsibilities included in the budget bill, many of which I have already described, in addition to maintaining our ongoing regulatory and administrative responsibilities, given the cuts to our operations included in the House version of the bill. We understand that every agency must take its fair share of reductions to address the budget shortfall, but respectfully ask that administrative funding be restored to the levels proposed by the Executive version of the budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today; at this time I am happy to entertain any questions you may have.