



**Testimony on House Bill 59 - Biennial Operating Budget  
February 13, 2013**

Ohio House Finance Appropriations Committee  
Representative Ron Amstutz, Chair

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Ohio Department of Education

Chairman Amstutz, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Ohio House Finance Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Executive version of House Bill 59, the biennial operating budget, as it relates to Ohio's system of K-12 education.

***Introduction and College and Career Readiness***

I am Michael Sawyers, Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction, and head of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). I came to the Department in 2010 with nearly 20 years in Ohio schools as a teacher, building administrator, and superintendent to oversee Ohio's work committed to in its federal Race to the Top grant. I became Deputy Superintendent in June of 2011 and Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction in August of 2012. It is my passion to see Ohio transform its education system so that all students are prepared to leave ready for the next stage of their lives, whether that is to move directly into a career or to the college of their choice. For this to occur, instruction aligned to rigorous standards must be provided that meets the unique learning styles of all students. Teachers and leaders must use data to determine what students know and are able to do, and to provide support for students that may be struggling or who have mastered the content and are ready to continue learning. We must all be held accountable to ensure that we are meeting this challenge for Ohio's most precious asset –our children.

Career and college readiness for all Ohio students is the standard guiding principle for everything we do at ODE. It is also 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. Our challenge is great. Currently, more than 40 percent of students who graduate from a public high school in Ohio take at least one remedial course when they enroll in one of the state's two- or four-year public higher education institutions. Too often we hear

reports of jobs going unfilled because companies cannot find the skilled workers they need. This situation is unacceptable and identifies a large disconnect between our school system and career and college readiness for our students. We must and will continue to address the challenges of successfully preparing our students for careers and college.

Let me outline our strategies to meet these challenges and how the proposed budget will further our progress.

### ***Race to the Top and Education Reform Efforts***

Funds received through the Race to the Top grant provided a significant jump start to critical education reforms in our state. September 2014 will mark the end of Federal Race to the Top funds. Our schools and districts are, in fact, well positioned to continue these efforts as many reforms have been inserted into recent legislation or Ohio's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility request. These include implementation of Ohio's New Learning Standards, the next generation of assessments and new teacher and principal evaluations, just to name a few. We appreciate the GRF increases proposed in the Governor's budget which will allow this critical work to continue beyond Race to the Top funding.

### ***Early Childhood Education and Literacy in the Early Grades***

In addition to the previously described Race to the Top grant, Ohio also secured a separate, \$70 million Race to the Top grant to propel advancements in our state's early childhood education efforts. In fact, Ohio is one of only fourteen states awarded this grant and received the highest grant award. This work is the result of a wonderful collaboration between ODE, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the Governor's Office, the Ohio Business Roundtable, Battelle for Kids, and numerous other early childhood community stakeholders. Nearly 75 percent of high-needs children in Ohio enter school without the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten. Unfortunately, we know these problems persist and many will fail to graduate from high school unless we intervene early. Through Ohio's early learning challenge grant and other legislative changes, we will begin to close this gap. This initiative will improve Ohio's early childhood education system by updating student learning standards, developing a new way to evaluate readiness for kindergarten and providing enhanced training opportunities for educators. Parents will benefit from an enhanced system that will clearly inform them about the quality of services delivered by publicly-funded early learning providers. The systematic improvements being made through this grant will lay the foundation for bringing all of Ohio's publicly funded preschool programs to the quality standards necessary to allow our children to enter kindergarten ready.

Providing this support is critical so that students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade when the content they must learn becomes progressively more difficult. Reading is fundamental to learning, which is why the changes made to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee in Senate Bill 316 are so important. This initiative is not about retaining students. It is about ensuring that students are being provided the extra help they need from qualified teachers in the early grades.

### ***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 for preparing all students for career and college readiness. In 2009, Ohio upgraded 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. Ohio has also revised its science and social studies standards. These more rigorous standards are consistent with the Ohio Core and provide clear descriptions of what high school graduates must know and be able to do in order to successfully transition to postsecondary education without remedial coursework, to secure jobs and become productive citizens.

The State Board of Education also adopted model curricula to assist teachers in implementing the new standards. Developed through an intensive and wide reaching 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. When I talk with educators around the state, I often hear that the new standards are fewer, clearer, and deeper. Districts throughout Ohio are implementing these new standards to benefit our students.

A meaningful approach to preparing our students for careers and college should begin with specific connections in the classroom. The State Board of Education has been working with the Governor's Office of Workforce Development to adopt model curricula from kindergarten through twelfth grade that embed "career connections learning strategies" into regular classroom instruction. The more students are able to connect the relevance of their education to the jobs they aspire to do in the future, the greater advantage they will have upon graduation to successfully enter careers and college. Examples may include career days, internships, or cooperative educational experiences.

Following the adoption of the new learning standards, Ohio joined the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a national consortium that has been

working to develop new assessments for English Language Arts and mathematics. Ohio is also creating updated assessments in science and social studies to align to the same requirements. Scheduled to come online in the 2014-15 school year, these assessments will use technology to include advanced measures of student learning such as online-adaptive and extended response questions. Additionally, the new assessment system will introduce ten end-of-course exams and a nationally standardized college and career ready test. The funding included in the budget to fully implement the new assessment system is critical.

One of the major challenges for improving the use of instructional technology for classroom learning and assessments is providing the infrastructure to give schools robust internet connections. For that reason, another essential investment to support the new assessment system is the appropriation of \$10 million in technology infrastructure to allow schools and districts to connect via information technology centers to the state broadband network.

### ***Teaching Profession***

Teachers have more impact on student learning than any other factor within a school. Ensuring teacher effectiveness will increase the number of students that graduate remediation-free and ready for college and careers.

Ohio's system of teacher licensure is nationally recognized for connecting teacher practice and certification. ODE processes 100,000 licensure and endorsement applications annually. Established in 2009, Ohio's system consists of four licensure levels, inclusive of a multi-year residency program for beginning teachers to provide intensive mentoring and support, the first state program of its kind. Additionally, the State Board of Education is in the process of adopting new testing requirements for first-time teachers.

Ohio is also implementing new teacher and principal evaluation systems to identify how well teachers and principals are performing. Perhaps most importantly, the new systems provide specific feedback and support to ensure the continuous growth of educators. The new systems rely on two components: (1) a rating of performance, based on multiple observations and other factors and (2) multiple measures of student growth, indicating how much the students are growing academically.

### ***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 our students are provided in a relevant

and meaningful way. Ohio's educational system must be tailored to meet the unique needs of students.

Last summer the U.S. Department of Education published for the first time uniform four-year graduation rates for all 50 states. Ohio's graduation rate was 80%, with 22 states ahead of us. Being in the middle of the pack nationally might make us feel like we are doing okay - until you dig a little deeper. Ohio's graduation rate for our poorest students was 65%, which trails 32 other states. Ohio's graduation rate for our African American students was just 59%. Only six states were lower. This is unacceptable. We must ensure that all of our students are graduating, which is why Ohio's flexibility request focuses on closing the achievement gaps for our most at-risk students. We must believe all students can and will achieve.

Students in Ohio can also choose from a variety of educational options to meet their distinct needs. These include traditional public schools, career-technical education programs, STEM schools, community schools (both site-based and e-schools), scholarship programs and the postsecondary enrollment options program which is proposed to be replaced by the College Credit Plus program. I am very excited about the College Credit Plus program. When ready, all students will have greater access to college level coursework, regardless of where they live.

Two additional scholarship opportunities are proposed in the budget under the EdChoice Scholarship Program: one focuses on those schools failing to make enough progress in kindergarten through third grade literacy and another for economically disadvantaged students. In addition to the EdChoice Scholarship Program there are three other scholarship programs – the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, the Autism Scholarship Program, and, in its first year of implementation, the Jon Peterson Special Needs Program. Choices are good as long as they are quality choices, which is why there must be sufficient oversight of providers and communication and outreach to parents. The increases proposed in the Governor's budget are necessary for this oversight and communication to continue as the number of choices for Ohio's students continues to increase.

### ***Accountability and Intervention***

Ohio's accountability system measures educational achievement through the local report cards provided to every school and district. 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.

A key component of House Bill 555, approved this past December, replaces the current academic performance rating system for schools and districts with a phased-in A-F letter grade system. Successfully engaging families in their child's education and informing a community about its schools' performance occurs when meaningful information is shared. The new report card system provides clear deliverables to communicate this vital information. Further, the enhancements inform school and classroom decisions based on individual student progress.

The report card will be divided into six measurable components:

1. Achievement,
2. Progress,
3. Graduation,
4. K-3 Literacy Progress,
5. Gap Closing, and
6. Prepared for Success

This new report card will truly hold all of us accountable for the areas we must focus on for our students to be successful. For example, the new K-3 Literacy Progress component will report our progress in ensuring that students are reading at grade level. The Gap Closing component will report our progress in ensuring students' success in English Language Arts and mathematics for our most at-risk students. And, the Prepared for Success component will ensure we are graduating students remediation free for both careers and college.

### ***Achievement Everywhere Education Reforms***

The Ohio Department of Education appreciates the goal of the new funding formula to equitably distribute state resources and differentiate funding based on the needs of students. We are excited about the Straight A Fund that will allow traditional school districts, community schools and educational service centers to invest in initiatives that result in long term efficiencies that help drive dollars to the classroom and increase academic achievement. We also support moving from days to hours to allow districts more flexibility and will diligently work with the State Board of Education to remove bureaucracy in Ohio's minimum operating standards, while ensuring the safety and welfare of students.

### ***Conclusion***

There is a lot changing in Ohio's education system - curriculum and assessments, teacher evaluation and licensure, K-3 literacy, and the accountability system- to name a few. At ODE, we now have the opportunity to better collaborate with the Ohio Board of Regents, given their

recent relocation. Educators are working harder than ever to put all of these critical pieces together. These changes are long overdue and must continue to occur. House Bill 59 continues to build upon these reforms by providing opportunities for innovation and greater flexibility. ODE will continue to partner with the Governor's Office of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education, other state agencies, our schools and districts, and all of you to keep our focus on our overarching goal to ensure that all of Ohio's children are ready for careers and college upon graduation.

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