

John Kasich, Governor
Michael L. Sawyers, Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction

**Testimony on House Bill 59 - Biennial Budget
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Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, Representative Bill Hayes, Chair
Finance and Appropriations Committee, Ohio House of Representatives

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Chairman Hayes, Ranking Member Lundy and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I am Stephanie Siddens, Director of the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Our office has responsibility for administering and funding two of Ohio's publicly funded preschool programs 1) Early Childhood Education for children ages three and four from low income families and 2) Preschool Special Education for children ages three to five with identified disabilities. My office is also responsible for implementing Ohio's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RttT-ELC) along with other key state agencies.

Ohio's High-need Population

Ohio has over 720,000 children under the age of six and approximately 55 percent of those children are considered high-needs based on family economic status, native language, or having an identified disability. We know from examining seven years of data from our Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (which currently only focuses on literacy) that there is an approximately 25-30 percentage point achievement gap in the skills of high-needs children as they enter kindergarten compared to their peers.

We know that the majority of these children will continue to struggle throughout their academic careers and this gap will increase over time unless we intervene to support our youngest learners. Research shows that children who participate in quality early learning and development programs demonstrate enhanced language skills and improved reading and math skills through grade three. They are also less likely to be retained in the early grades and less likely to be referred for special education services. It is critical that Ohio ensures all publicly funded programs are held to the same high standards to ensure that each of our children, especially children with high needs, enter kindergarten ready to be successful academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

Ohio's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant

Ohio was one of 14 states to be awarded a federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RttT-ELC). The award of almost \$70 million was the highest of all states' awards and is being spent over four years. The grant allows for an unprecedented opportunity for Ohio to focus deeply on reforms of state level systems that support children from birth to five by developing new standards, assessments, professional development, and a common rating system for programs.

It is important to note that Ohio's federal RttT-ELC grant is structured differently than the K-12 Race to the Top grant that Ohio was awarded in August 2010. The K-12 Race to the Top grant called for funds to be distributed to local districts. But in the RttT-ELC grant, states are required to focus on improvement of state level systems. Ohio received this award because of the strong collaboration between the

Governor's office, state agencies that serve young children in Ohio, and the Ohio Business Roundtable. These state agencies include:

- Ohio Department of Education (ODE),
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS),
- Ohio Department of Health,
- Ohio Department of Mental Health, and
- Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Ohio's RttT-ELC grant application lays out an aggressive reform agenda to close the kindergarten readiness gap. This will be accomplished by increasing access to high quality services, improving the quality of early childhood experiences, and measuring and reporting progress on the goals we want to achieve. These early experiences lay the foundation for all of the subsequent learning for a child.

Ohio's early learning reform agenda, as outlined in the grant, includes the following goals to be met by 2015. We want to:

- Increase the quality of 1,300 already funded settings that are available to high-needs children;
- Ensure 37,000 high-needs children served in these settings have access to high quality services; and
- Close the kindergarten readiness gap by five percent for high-needs children.

The Executive Budget proposes \$7,040,000 in each fiscal year in RttT-ELC federal funding (line item 200672) in the ODE's budget. Unlike Ohio's larger RttT grant funded out of line item 200665, the RttT-ELC grant does not expire during this biennium.

Increase Access and Quality

Ohio has a strong and successful history of implementing a voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for its center based child care programs through Step Up To Quality. A state level tiered quality rating and improvement system empowers parents and families to be savvy consumers of programs. It also provides funders assurances as to the effectiveness of their investments and provides programs with a roadmap for quality improvement through state-provided technical assistance and professional development. All early learning and development programs funded through ODE and ODJFS (i.e., district preschool programs, child care and family child care) are being phased into Step Up To Quality beginning in FY 2014.

ODE and ODJFS are working with the Governor's office and national experts to revise and expand Step Up To Quality to include ODE licensed and funded programs as well as home based child care providers. This will include the expansion and revision of standards for programs, shifting from a three-tier system to a five-tier system of quality, and a common monitoring process for ODE and ODJFS to evaluate the quality of programs. Ohio will support ongoing improvement of local programs through professional development and technical assistance that will focus on the new Step Up To Quality program standards and use of new comprehensive standards and assessments for children birth to age five which were adopted in October 2012 by the State Board of Education.

Early Childhood Education (line item 200408), currently provides funding for 203 school districts, educational service centers (ESC), or joint vocational school districts (JVSD) to provide preschool services to 5,700 three and four-year-old children of income eligible families. The per pupil amount of \$4,000 provides high quality preschool including requirements for comprehensive research based curriculum

aligned to the new child standards, use of assessments to inform instruction, health and developmental screenings, teacher credentials, and family engagement. The Executive Budget maintains this level of funding in FY 2014 and increases the funding by \$2 million in FY 2015. The new funds will be distributed to existing or new early childhood education providers based on community economic disadvantage, limited access to high quality preschool or childcare services, and demonstration of high quality preschool services using the new Step up to Quality and child assessment metrics. ODE expects to serve approximately 500 additional children in FY 2015 with this added funding.

There are two major sources of funding for preschool children identified with a disability. The first is state GRF funding contained within line item 200540 and the second is federal funding through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funded through line item 200661. Preschool services for children identified with disabilities are mandated under state and federal law. Through these funds, approximately 23,000 children each year receive educational experiences that are aligned to Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards. Children receive services through center-based and itinerant teacher service-delivery options and may be provided with related services as needed.

The Executive Budget proposes a new formula for distributing state GRF funding for preschool special education students. Each district would receive funds of \$4,000 for each preschool child with a disability plus one half of a per pupil amount depending on the severity of the disability. The per pupil amounts are the same as those used for the school age students with disabilities and would be equalized using each district's state share percentage. This child-based formula would replace the current unit-based formula that is teacher-based. In FY 2014, a total of \$103 million is proposed which represents a 22 percent or a \$19.5 million increase in funding. In FY 2015, an additional 1.0 percent increase is proposed. All funds would be allocated to school districts who may authorize all or a portion of the funding be transferred to educational service centers or county boards of developmental disability boards to provide services.

Child Care Licensing (line item 200442) supports the on-site inspections of approximately 1,400 preschool programs and 450 school age child care programs each year. All ODE funded preschool and school age programs are required to meet the health and safety rules as outlined in chapters 3301-37 (preschool) and 3301-32 (school age) of the Ohio Administrative Code. ODE conducted about 1,600 onsite inspections in FY 2012 and we anticipate approximately the same number in FY 2013.

Measure and Report Results

Ohio will collaborate with the state of Maryland to expand its long standing Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and develop new pre-kindergarten and kindergarten formative assessments. These new assessments will include all essential domains of school readiness and allow us to determine children's skills at kindergarten entry and their developmental trajectory so that teachers can best support children as they participate in school. The development of the expanded Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is being supported through the federal RttT-ELC. The ongoing maintenance of the current kindergarten readiness assessment, that focuses only on literacy, is flat-funded at \$95,000 (line item 200437) in each fiscal year.

Ohio also plans to build upon existing data integration projects to create an early learning data system infrastructure. ODE, ODJFS, Health and Mental Health will collaborate to:

- Link children across publicly funded early childhood programs through kindergarten entry using a common identifier,

- Collect and report program quality data on all types of early learning and development programs, and
- Collect and report child formative assessment information across publicly funded programs participating in Ohio's Step Up To Quality.

Through these reforms, Ohio will be able to generate information that is timely, relevant, and accessible for state agencies, early learning and development programs, and early childhood educators to use for ongoing improvement. Ohio will be able to understand the status of children's academic, social, emotional and physical development upon entry into kindergarten, be able to tie those results to the quality of early learning experiences, and be able to determine how best to support young children as they move forward in school. Through increased funding and supports for early childhood programs, Ohio will be able to assure children are fully supported in their growth and development throughout the birth to grade 3 continuum.

Chairman Hayes, Ranking Member Lundy and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, I greatly appreciate your time and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.