



**Testimony on House Bill 59 - Biennial Budget  
February 28, 2013**

Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, Representative Bill Hayes, Chair  
Finance and Appropriations Committee, Ohio House of Representatives

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Good morning, Chairman Hayes, Ranking Member Lundy and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. My name is Joni Hoffman, and I am the Director of the Office of Community Schools at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Today I am pleased to be with you to discuss the Community Schools program.

**Overview**

Community schools are now in their 15th year of operation with more than 115,000 students enrolled in 367 schools under the oversight of 69 community school sponsors. These 115,000 students represent more than six percent of the public school students in Ohio. In FY 2012, the total state funding to educate community school students was \$777 million.

Of the 367 community schools in Ohio, most are new start-ups, although the number of conversion community schools is increasing as well. Community schools often specialize in their format and mission. For example, 24 are internet-based schools, or “e-schools,” which provide curriculum and instruction to students online. Nine of these e-schools operate statewide. Eighty-seven community schools serve primarily dropout recovery students and 36 have a special education focus.

**Oversight of Community School Sponsors**

The Office of Community Schools provides advice and services for the community schools program, including providing technical assistance and information to anyone considering proposing a community school, to governing authorities of community schools, and to entities sponsoring or considering sponsoring a community school.

In the last budget bill, the Ohio Department of Education was given additional authority to sponsor up to 20 schools per year, five of which may be new community schools and fifteen whose sponsors have non-renewed or terminated their sponsorship. Currently, the Sponsorship Office sponsors seven community schools.

ODE’s primary role is to serve in an oversight capacity over community school sponsors. Currently, 16 sponsors approved by the department are actively sponsoring new start-up community schools. These 16 have their authority described in a Sponsorship Agreement with ODE. The remaining 53 sponsors are statutorily authorized in this role.

To support and improve sponsor performance, the Office of Community Schools provides targeted as well as general technical assistance to sponsors, schools, and developers. During the past two years, the office has increased its partnerships with other ODE offices, agencies and community school organizations to broaden the network of technical assistance providers. Greater use of electronic delivery of guidance, such as webinars, conference calls, and topic specific e-mail blasts, have also been employed to improve efficiency in making technical assistance widely and quickly available.

The Office of Community Schools reviews sponsor performance to ensure that sponsors are carrying out their obligations under rule and law. Over the past year, the Office of Community Schools, in collaboration with representatives of sponsors and statewide community school organizations, worked to redesign the evaluation approach used to assess the degree to which a sponsor is fulfilling its obligations of oversight and technical assistance as well as the sponsor's alignment with national quality sponsor practices. Guiding principles from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) formed the basis of the review of quality practice and NACSA is assisting ODE in piloting the quality review portion of the sponsor evaluation. This "Sponsor Performance Review" as well as the other work to assess sponsors will help inform the development of an evaluation system for sponsors by January of 2015 as required in House Bill 555 of the 129<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

### **Oversight of Community Schools**

In addition to the sponsor oversight responsibilities, ODE is also engaged in monitoring and reporting individual school performance. House Bill 79 of the 126<sup>th</sup> General Assembly put in place criteria that require community schools with persistently poor academic outcomes to close permanently. To date, 20 community schools have closed under these criteria.

With two exceptions, all community schools are subject to closure under this accountability measure. The two exceptions are 1) schools that serve either a primarily dropout recovery population in grades 9-12 and for which ODE has approved a closure waiver application or 2) those in which a majority of the students are identified as students with disabilities. Currently, 72 dropout recovery schools were granted a closure waiver and 36 schools serving primarily students with disabilities are exempt from closure, together representing about 29 percent of all community schools.

House Bill 555 of the 129<sup>th</sup> General Assembly requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules to establish an accountability system for dropout prevention and recovery community schools, including specific indicators of performance called for in the recent legislation. The first rule, covering graduation rates, assessment passage rates and gap closure measures, must be in place by June 30<sup>th</sup> of this year and the second rule, covering growth measures, must be in place by December 2013. When fully implemented, dropout prevention and recovery community schools will also be subject to closure for persistently poor academic performance.

### **Community Schools Budget**

ODE's administrative oversight and technical assistance responsibilities are funded through appropriation line item 200455. This line item also includes funding for administration of the EdChoice, Cleveland Scholarship, Autism Scholarship, and Jon Peterson Special Needs programs. My colleague, Sue Cosmo, will share with you information on ODE's role in administering and overseeing these programs. The line item is proposed to be increased by 10.8 percent in FY 2014

and 2.2 percent in FY 2015. These increases are necessary to appropriately oversee and hold accountable the increased number of community schools and their sponsors.

Chairman Hayes, Ranking Member Lundy and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.