

**Testimony on House Bill 59 - Biennial Operating Budget
May 15, 2013**

Ohio Senate Education Finance Subcommittee
Senator Randy Gardner, Chair

Dr. Richard A. Ross, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ohio Department of Education

Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Turner and members of the Ohio Senate Education Finance Subcommittee, my name is Dick Ross and I am Ohio's State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to talk with you about the Straight A Fund that will promote educational innovation and increase operational efficiencies in Ohio's schools.

The Straight A Fund is the single most important investment in our budget because it will allow superintendents, principals and teachers to use the current research and their experience as a basis to test new ideas and programs that will better meet the learning needs of all of Ohio's boys and girls.

New ideas and teaching methods are vitally important because we cannot continue to do the same things and expect better results in student academic achievement and cost efficiencies.

There is a lot of pent up energy among Ohio's educators. They want to test new ideas, implement what research is telling them about best teaching practices, and understand how to more broadly apply these practices so more boys and girls will be exposed to better learning opportunities.

Also, we have a responsibility to Ohio taxpayers to have a more effective and efficient system of education in Ohio and to return the savings that result from these efforts to the classroom.

What works

For new reforms and initiatives to be successful, our schools and districts must invest some of their own resources. Through the Straight A Fund application process, schools and districts will be required to demonstrate a long-term commitment to the innovations proposed so that when the Straight A Fund is no longer available, these innovations and new practices will be able to continue. We will also strongly encourage schools and districts to eliminate programs that are not working.

We also know that for these new practices to be sustainable, districts or schools must have buy-in from many stakeholders. Schools or districts must demonstrate support from their school boards, teacher associations and community leaders.

Finally, we need to know which innovations work, why they work, and under what conditions they work so that successful practices can be replicated. Understanding what works will also help inform future budgetary and policy considerations.

Some examples

Through recent legislation, districts and schools are implementing a new system of early childhood education, a new testing system, the new Third Grade Reading Guarantee and a new report card system that uses an A-F grade scale to more accurately show how schools and districts are performing. The Straight A fund will help the field implement these policies in new and creative ways that will drive improvement and efficiencies. Let me give you some examples:

- Technology exists to allow educators to teach social studies, science and math to students, who will all have access to the same information, but who will read that information online at their own reading level. This allows teachers to help poor readers have access to the required learning at their individual levels. It also allows them to provide richer learning to gifted students.
- Funds could allow schools to develop new models of blended learning to achieve greater academic results for students in a very cost-effective way. Also, software applications could be utilized to promote learning anytime, anywhere - including gaming software for subjects that are hard to master.
- Software developers could be supported to work with a district or a group of districts and community schools to create a system that promotes career development and other initiatives that districts and community schools have difficulty funding or staffing.
- New emerging leadership strategies could be supported. For example, we want to encourage our educational leaders to work with private sector developers to bring new entrepreneurial ideas into our schools.

The Straight A Fund can generate many cost-effective partnerships. For example, districts could form partnerships with each other and with higher education institutions to change recruiting and hiring practices. Schools could work with a teacher education program at a neighboring college to help that institution recruit future teachers from the top ten percent of the high school class, or work with these teacher preparation programs to field-test new career ladders for the profession. Districts, community

schools and colleges could create a charter college of education, located in the partnership districts and schools that could experiment with different teacher leadership roles and responsibilities.

Traditional schools, districts and community schools also could collaborate with higher education on new teacher training models that better tailor teaching to individual student needs and improve the ability of the teachers to teach problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

As you can see, the Straight A Fund can allow for an infinite number of ways to create a more effective, efficient educational system to meet the needs of Ohio's boys and girls. The House cut the appropriation for the Straight A Fund by 50 percent. I urge you to restore the funding to the levels proposed by the Governor so we can allow our educators to increase student achievement and progress, improve productivity, and bring about operational cost reductions over time. I also request caps on rewards to be removed so there are no barriers to implementing the new, innovative ideas of our educational leaders.

I ask that you help Ohio be known as a state that has transformed its education system to meet the economic and civic needs of our state, now and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.