

Testimony on the Education Provisions of House Bill 64, the FY16-17 Biennial Budget

Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Representative Robert R. Cupp, Chair
February 26, 2015

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Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the K-12 education sections of House Bill 64, the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Biennial Budget. I am Dr. Richard Ross, superintendent of public instruction and head of the Ohio Department of Education.

Throughout Gov. Kasich's first term, he has been a strong advocate of K-12 education. The governor believes, and I believe, we need to take Ohio to the next level and create more pathways and more opportunities for Ohioans to succeed. Much work already has been accomplished thanks to the governor's leadership and our work with our partners in the General Assembly. We implemented an A-F report card, the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, and a teacher and principal evaluation system. In addition, we have introduced students to the strong connections between learning and careers and have strengthened career-technical education through an appropriate accountability system that links students with real-life career experiences. All of these policies are driving needed improvements statewide and early childhood, K-12 and higher education continue to be priorities for the governor. His budget initiatives will give educators, parents and communities the resources they need to help students everywhere achieve more and more.

Department of Education Priorities

My vision for K-12 education in Ohio is to ensure that every girl and boy receives a high-quality education, can read at grade level and graduates college or job ready. To achieve these goals, we must prioritize policies and initiatives that are best for students. Department priorities include:

- Providing the basic education funding necessary to support student success and achievement;
- Offering early learning programs to promote school readiness;
- Promoting and supporting quality school choice options for all students;
- Setting expectations for what all students should know and be able to do;
- Aligning student assessments with the state's academic content standards to determine that students are meeting expectations;

- Providing focused, high-quality professional development for educators;
- Holding districts, schools, educators and students accountable for student growth and performance; and
- Initiating school improvement programs aimed at improving school learning environments, engaging parents and supporting student intervention programs.

Gov. Kasich's budget builds on the department's priorities by creating policies that provide flexibility to schools, focus on student success and create quality choices for students and families.

Regulatory Relief

Ohio has a strong history of local control. The governor's budget will empower local school boards and free school districts from some of the burdens state government places in the way of local innovation and flexibility. As a former superintendent of three school districts, I can attest to the need for deregulation and ability to make decisions at the local level. And, for districts that have the highest level of performance, we shouldn't make them jump through needless hoops when they have proven that they are excelling in certain areas.

The governor's budget builds on previous regulatory relief efforts by:

- Increasing the current competitive bidding threshold for schools from \$25,000 to \$50,000 to be consistent with other local government entities;
- Permitting schools to contract with a hospital or other licensed health care program to provide health care services to students;
- Eliminating district and school EMIS reporting, and the department's posting, of information related to extracurricular services offered to students;
- Eliminating the need for a concurrent educational service center resolution in cases where a local school board determines that transportation of certain students is impractical;
- Removing the requirement that our state's consistently high-performing teachers complete additional coursework for purposes of licensure renewal;
- Providing teachers rated "accomplished," as part of Ohio's Teacher Evaluation System, with true off years from the annual teacher evaluation requirements;
- Providing an option for local boards of education to exempt new teachers from the annual teacher evaluation requirements in the year the new teacher takes the Resident Educator Summative Assessment;
- Reducing Resident Educator program mentoring requirements and allowing districts to make local decisions regarding the professional development needs of Resident Educator program participants;
- Eliminating the current requirements that certain school districts establish a site-based management council to operate a poor-performing school building using state board rules;
- Expanding opportunities for districts to contract with providers of academic remediation and intervention services to serve all grades outside regular school hours without state board rules; and
- Modifying the duration for which a pupil activity program permit is valid for licensed educators.

Regulatory Relief for High-Performing School Districts

The budget proposes additional relief from state law and state board of education rules for our highest-performing school districts with proven track records of success in ensuring their students can read at grade level and graduate college and job ready. A school district will receive the designation of "high-

performing” for purposes of determining additional regulatory relief if the district meets the following criteria for the two most recent school years:

- 1) Received a grade of A in overall Value-Added;
- 2) At least 95 percent of third grade students scored proficient or higher on the third grade reading assessment; and
- 3) Have a four-year cohort graduation rate of 93 percent or higher.

Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, a fourth criteria will be considered in defining a “high-performing” school district. A school district will have to demonstrate that at least 75 percent of its students are remediation-free on a nationally standardized assessment that measures college and career readiness. Once designated high-performing, a school district will maintain this status for three years unless the school district fails to maintain at least 95 percent proficiency on the third grade reading assessment.

A high-performing school district may elect to be exempt from:

- Teacher credential qualification requirements for third grade students who require reading intervention and remediation under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee;
- Minimum or maximum class size requirements;
- Requirements to have a service agreement with an educational service center; and
- Requirements to consult with an educational service center to provide services to children with disabilities.

A high-performing school district also will be permitted to hire qualified nonlicensed staff to teach for up to 40 hours a week and will have the opportunity to request from me a waiver from additional statutory requirements, which I will approve or deny on a case-by-case basis.

Straight A Fund

In his last budget, Gov. Kasich created the Straight A Fund to create sustainable programs that help improve student achievement, increase efficiency and drive more dollars to classrooms. Too often in education, we wait for prescriptions to come to us from Washington and Columbus. We should not prescribe our way to excellence. Excellence will percolate up from the people we have at the local level. Our educators have shown excitement for this program as evidenced by the hundreds of applications we received.

In the first round of Straight A grants, 24 projects were funded representing more than 150 school districts and partners. Ohio’s Straight A Fund connected principals with businesses to provide project-based learning opportunities for students. As a part of Ohio’s Straight A Fund, teachers in the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative have offered 165 high school courses that give college credit to 48,000 students in 27 districts. Over the five-year grant period, 6,610 credits are expected to be offered.

In the second round of grants, our selection process was improved thanks to the General Assembly in House Bill 342. Second round applicants that showed higher cost savings were prioritized for funding, and educational service centers were allowed to be the lead applicants in consortiums. In this round of Straight A grants, 40 projects were funded representing more than 200 school districts and partners. Ohio’s Straight A Fund connected buses with GPS systems, students to the latest robotics technology and much more.

Ohio's Straight A fund introduced an important concept in education by requiring that funded projects be sustainable. Grantees must be financially able to maintain their projects over five years, either through program cost efficiency or by eliminating other, unneeded or unsuccessful programs or processes. The department is evaluating grants to ensure they are meeting these requirements around sustainability. The department also is monitoring the direct academic impact of each project, as well as the ways in which projects may have created ripples that alter the means for delivering instruction in other areas. For example, early evidence suggests that once technology becomes available for one intended purpose, it spurs other uses. We also have seen first-round projects replicated in the second round of grant applications.

The Straight A Fund is considered the largest education innovation fund in the nation and has helped our districts and schools implement their best reform ideas. It makes sense to continue the Straight A Fund and Gov. Kasich is doing just that by allocating \$200 million in lottery proceeds over the biennium to support two more rounds of Straight A Fund grants.

Community Connectors

The Community Connectors program brings businesses, faith- and value-based organizations, community nonprofits and school districts together to create mentor programs that build life skills and workforce readiness. Community Connectors emphasizes goal setting, character, personal and career-oriented skills and helps students build the grit and resilience they'll need to be successful in school and life.

We know the power that lies in community partnerships like these, and we have several successful examples across Ohio. The Cincinnati Youth Collaborative has been connecting Cincinnati area schools with business and community partners for 30 years. Collaborative volunteers mentor students who face challenges like poverty, homelessness, disciplinary problems and unstable homes. Yet, even with these risk factors, 96 percent of the seniors in the program in 2014 graduated from high school compared with just 74 percent graduating in Cincinnati Public Schools overall. Of the graduates, 88 percent went on to college, a career or enlisted in the military. Community Connectors builds on successful collaborative models like the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative and is worth our expanded investment.

The benefits of the program go beyond helping individual students. That's why the budget increases the program's support by appropriating \$30 million over the biennium and continues to match \$3 for every \$1 provided by local partners. Through these dynamic partnerships and social connectedness, Community Connectors strengthens communities and creates new pathways for civic engagement that will result in higher levels of wellbeing, health and workforce readiness for our state.

Community Connectors is currently accepting applications for FY15 grants through March 6, 2015. Once applications are received, they will first be reviewed by independent evaluators who will read and score each application. The Community Connectors Advisory Board will then recommend finalists from which I will make the final selections. We have received overwhelming interest in the program from faith-based organizations, businesses, community nonprofits and school districts. Through additional funding in House Bill 64, Community Connectors will make a remarkable impact on the lives of students and communities in every corner of our state.

I am pleased to have several members of my senior leadership team with me today to provide you with details on other budget proposals including: the expansion of early childhood education opportunities; standards and quality measures for school counselors; a pilot program to explore competency-based

education; an extension to our innovative school and district waiver program; incentives for districts who expand advanced placement and College Credit Plus opportunities for students; opportunities for adults who want to get high school diplomas; reforms to our community school laws; reductions to the time students spend taking tests; and much more.

As you can see, in his new budget, Gov. Kasich seeks to strengthen education across Ohio—because every child, in every classroom, in every school deserves a quality education. I'm happy that Gov. Kasich's education proposals for the next biennium build on the progress we've made so far and encourage us to take things to the next level. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the budget's K-12 policy initiatives. We at the department of education look forward to working with the members of the General Assembly on these proposals. My staff and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.