

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

Ohio Senate
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Senator Cliff Hite, Chair
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Chairman Hite, Vice Chairman Sawyer and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding House Bill 64. I am Stephanie Siddens, senior executive director for the Center for Curriculum and Assessment at the Ohio Department of Education. I will focus my testimony today on the governor's as introduced budget bill.

Our center encompasses programs for curriculum and assessment, early learning and school readiness and exceptional children. All of our work is focused on providing strong supports to schools, families and students to ensure all children enter kindergarten ready to learn and graduate from high school prepared and ready for success in their choice of either entering college or engaging in a career.

Angel Rhodes already spoke about the important work related to new early childhood education initiatives and the foundations established through Ohio's *Early Learning Challenge Grant*. The executive proposal's increases in early childhood education programs work toward ensuring students enter kindergarten ready to learn. I will speak about additional initiatives in the executive proposal that support the preschool to grade 3 continuum, as well as speak about how we use assessments to support children grade 3 and above.

Licensing Settings for Safety and Health

One of the department's functions is the licensing and monitoring of early childhood and school age child care programs. The department provides oversight and conducts on-site inspections for nearly 2,000 preschool and school-age child care programs in school districts, educational service centers, joint vocational school districts, county boards of developmental disabilities and chartered nonpublic schools to ensure basic safety and health standards, as well as educational standards, are met. Recommended appropriations of \$1.8 million in each fiscal year (GRF line item 200442) will increase the funding levels in this program to allow for additional staff to reduce staff-to-program ratios to levels in line with the staffing levels at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and recommended levels to adequately support programs in meeting standards. This will increase staff capacity to ensure the department adequately serves the increasing number of sites requiring licensure and to monitor

compliance with the requirement that all programs participate in Ohio's tiered quality rating and improvement system.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

One of the outcomes of the *Early Learning Challenge Grant* was the development and implementation of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, as well as preschool assessments that are used to support children academically, socially, emotionally and physically as they enter school. Through Fiscal Year 2014, Ohio assessed kindergarten students using the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), which only assessed literacy skills of incoming kindergarten students. In FY15, the new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment continued to cover language and literacy but also assessed mathematics, science, social studies, social foundations, and physical wellbeing and motor development. The goal of the new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is to better assist educators in the evaluation of young children's development and readiness for academic success at the beginning of the kindergarten year. Approximately 130,000 kindergarten children are administered the test each year by 6,500 teachers in over 900 public school districts and community schools.

In a moment, I will discuss our January 2015 recommendations for test reduction. One of those recommendations was to reduce the number of questions on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. We listened to the feedback and recommendations from Ohio teachers and administrators and as a result, the department reduced the number of items on the assessment by 21 percent. This reduction, along with improved training on how districts can better use technology, will help teachers more efficiently administer the assessment.

Increased funding will provide for this more comprehensive assessment system that includes the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, preschool assessments, professional development for teachers and administrators on use of the assessment and technology supports for teachers and administrators to report scores and have access to online resources and professional development.

In the current biennium, the GRF set-aside for the KRA-L (\$95,000) paid for the cost of printing and mailing the test materials to local school districts. The executive proposal recommends funding of \$1.2 million in FY16 and \$2.8 million in FY17 (line item 200437) to fund the comprehensive assessment system, including the assessments and supports and resources for schools.

Early Literacy Supports

One of the first measures of student success in elementary school is the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Dr. Ross and the governor share the same goal that every boy and girl of Ohio can read at grade level by the end of the third grade. To assist elementary schools in providing reading supports to students in grades K through 3, the executive proposal includes \$3 million in each fiscal year.

The majority of the funding (\$2.5 million annually in GRF line item 200556) would provide school buildings with grants to fund summer literacy camps. The department would develop guidelines and award grants with priority given to school buildings with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, buildings with low student achievement and school buildings making progress in improving students' literacy skills. Buildings would be encouraged to partner with other school buildings, public libraries that often support summer reading activities and other organizations committed to early literacy efforts.

Funding also would be used to establish regional professional development teams. These teams would provide communication, outreach and professional development opportunities targeted to K-3 language and literacy supports. The department will help ensure teachers are using best practices and models to successfully help students meet the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

Testing Reduction

The success of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee is an excellent example of why testing serves an important purpose for monitoring and improving student learning. However, there are opportunities for improved efficiency in Ohio's testing system. The governor and Dr. Ross are committed to reducing the testing burden on students, improving testing efficiency and maintaining accountability systems that ensure all students receive a high-quality education.

Testing is a fundamental part of effectively educating Ohio's children because, at its core, testing shows evidence of student progress. Ohio's testing system also serves to provide two checkpoints, in third grade and in high school, that are necessary to ensure that students are staying on track to succeed. Educators use the evidence provided by teacher tests to guide their teaching each day. District, state and federal officials also use test results to monitor and improve student learning.

Historically, certain populations of students have not received the same quality of education as their peers across Ohio. To address these equity challenges, Ohio began standardized testing two decades ago — long before No Child Left Behind — to hold all teachers, schools and districts accountable for every student's learning. This type of testing provides a snapshot of how students are performing based on a standard set of expectations. These test results are the foundation of Ohio's A-F school and district report cards and the student growth portion of Ohio's Teacher Evaluation System.

The department has spent significant time evaluating the comprehensive testing landscape in our state and has studied the amount of time students spend taking tests. Based on the data we received as part of our research for Dr. Ross's recent testing report, the average student in the average school will spend approximately 19.8 hours on testing in a school year, starting in the 2015-2016 school year. According to our recent analysis, testing constitutes only 1-3 percent of a typical student's time in school, depending on the grade level. In addition, most schools and teachers spend a significant amount of time preparing for standardized tests, especially state tests.

In his recent testing report, Dr. Ross made four legislative recommendations that would reduce student testing time by nearly 20 percent annually. The governor's budget includes these four proposals. First, the budget would limit the amount of time a student takes tests at the state and district levels to 2 percent of the school year and limit the amount of time spent practicing for tests to 1 percent of the school year.

Second, the budget shifts the administration of the third grade reading test from the fall to the spring. Students who do not reach the required promotion score on the spring test will have a second opportunity to take the test in the summer. Districts will continue to have the option of using a state-approved alternative test as a way for their students to show they are reading at grade level.

Third, the budget includes a proposal that would make the administration of the state's diagnostic tests in mathematics and writing for students in first through third grades optional. This recommendation gives districts local control to decide which diagnostic tests in writing and math are appropriate for their students in these grades.

The final testing reduction proposal relates to teacher evaluation. My colleague Julia Simmerer will be addressing this recommendation in her testimony.

State Tests

While the above recommendations seek to reduce the testing burden on students and identify opportunities for increased efficiency in our system, the department is ultimately responsible for development and administration (creating test forms, technology support for online assessment, distributing, scoring and reporting) of achievement and high school graduation tests that are required by state and federal law.

In FY14, more than two million Ohio Achievement Assessments for grades 3-8; 1.3 million Ohio Graduation Tests; 46,000 alternate assessments for students with disabilities; and 39,000 Ohio Test of English Language Acquisition assessments were administered to over one million Ohio students. About 84,300 special versions of these tests and additional resource materials for 1.2 million parents were produced as well. Data obtained from these tests also are used for teacher evaluation and Ohio School Report Cards underscoring the need for valid and reliable information through assessments.

This year, Ohio implemented a new assessment system that includes a single English language arts assessment by combining reading and writing, a series of end-of-course exams that will replace the Ohio Graduation Tests and a nationally standardized assessment of college readiness. These new assessments take advantage of technology through online delivery and provide increased ways to administer the tests through technology-enhanced items and improved efficiency in reporting results to inform instruction. The new assessment system will show how well students apply the content mastered through performance-based tasks and are designed to be a measure of levels of readiness for college and careers. Ohio's state and federally mandated assessment system is supported with both GRF (line item 200437) and federal funding (line item 200690). The governor's budget reduces GRF funding by \$3.2 million to \$72.6 million in FY16 and an additional \$2 million to \$70.6 million in FY17. Federal funding is requested in the amount of \$10.3 million for each fiscal year. Projected savings in the area of testing is based on graduation requirements passed in House Bill 487 of the 130th General Assembly and the phase-out of the Ohio Graduation Tests.

I was pleased to see that many of the policy proposals in the governor's budget I addressed today were retained by the House. Although we are still analyzing the changes made by the House, I would like to take this opportunity to address one issue. The House reduced the student assessment appropriation by \$33.6 million. We understand the strong feelings that exist in the area of testing. However, federal law requires each state to annually test students in: reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and once in high school; and science in one grade of the elementary grades, middle grades and high school. Regardless of the vendors who provide our student assessments, more appropriation authority will be needed to maintain a system of assessments, in compliance with federal and state law.

In summary, Governor Kasich's budget builds on the strong foundation of work in Ohio that supports children in the preschool to grade 3 continuum. The budget also supports increased flexibility for schools and students with regard to testing and attainment of high school credit as children move through the K-12 continuum to prepare for college and careers.

Chairman Hite, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the subcommittee today about these important budget initiatives. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.