

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

Ohio Senate
Finance Subcommittee on Education
Senator Cliff Hite, Chair
April 29, 2015

Julia Simmerer, Senior Executive Director
Center for the Teaching Profession, Ohio Department of Education

Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Sawyer and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Julia Simmerer, senior executive director for the Center for the Teaching Profession at the Ohio Department of Education.

The department's Center for the Teaching Profession includes the offices of Educator Licensure, Professional Conduct, Educator Equity and Talent, and Educator Effectiveness and also supports the work of the Educator Standards Board. My team is responsible for processing applications and issuing educator licenses, investigating reports of educator misconduct, promoting programs to improve teacher quality and effectiveness, and ensuring that all students receive instruction from qualified and supportive educators.

The department of education is committed to helping ensure that Ohio's boys and girls are served by the highest caliber of teaching professionals because teachers have the single largest impact on student achievement. Ohio has positioned itself as a leader in promoting instructional quality, and I am pleased to share several ways in which the Center for the Teaching Profession supports Ohio's educators so that our young people can graduate prepared for college and careers.

Licensure

The Office of Educator Licensure issued 196,098 licenses during 2014. The licensure fees paid by Ohio's teaching professional funds the Office of Educator Licenses and Office of Professional Conduct (line item 200681). The executive proposal recommends appropriation authority of \$16.4 million in FY16 and \$16.9 million in FY17. The department will use increased funding as part of efforts to improve customer service and quickly respond to questions and concerns on licensure issues.

Increased funding will also allow the department to respond to an increasing need for investigations and hearings by the Office of Professional Conduct. This includes increased costs for hearing officers, court reporters and attorneys. In calendar year 2014, the Office of Professional Conduct received 9,087 professional conduct referrals, of which 997 cases were investigated. This represents an increase of 40% from the previous year.

The executive budget included two provisions which provide relief in the area of educator licensure. The first is to allow a modification in the duration for which a pupil activity program permit is valid for licensed educators. Pupil activity permits are required for individuals who direct, supervise or coach a student activity program that involves athletics or routine or regular physical activity or activities with health and safety considerations. Currently, a pupil activity permit is valid for three years for both licensed and nonlicensed individuals. Licensed educators hold teaching licenses for five years. We would like to align this permit for educators already holding five-year credentials. This would permit educators to manage and renew all licenses together on the same timeline.

The second licensure modification included in House Bill 64 would allow teachers who are consistently high performing to renew their licenses without meeting the additional coursework requirements. Prior to renewing a license, state law requires all teachers and administrators to obtain 18 continuing education hours (or six semester hours) every five years. The budget would exempt teachers meeting the definition of “consistently high-performing,” as determined by the State Board of Education, from this additional coursework requirement.

Teacher and Principal Evaluations

Educators from across the state worked collaboratively with the Educator Standards Board to create the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System and the Ohio Principal Evaluation System, which are designed to be rigorous, fair and standards-based annual evaluation models. Teacher evaluation looks at two aspects of a teacher’s quality: (1) teacher performance; and (2) student growth measures. One of the following four ratings is assigned to each educator upon completion of the evaluation: “ineffective,” “developing,” “skilled” or “accomplished.” The current system allows for a teacher rated “accomplished” to be formally evaluated every three years, instead of annually, so long as the teacher’s student growth measure is maintained at the highest level annually for three years. However, an informal evaluation, including one observation and conference, is still required each year. The executive proposal would allow an accomplished teacher to have true off years in evaluation based on his or her excellent performance.

Stephanie Siddens spoke about three of Dr. Ross’s recommendations to reduce the amount of time students spend taking tests. The fourth legislative recommendation included in the executive proposal relates to some of the tests given as part of the teacher evaluation system. If there is no growth data from state tests available to measure student growth, districts and schools evaluate student growth using local measures. Locally determined measures include: (1) locally created tests aligned to student learning objectives (or SLOs); and (2) shared attribution, defined as a student growth measure that can be attributed to a group. Approximately 66 percent of teachers were evaluated using these types of criteria during the 2013-2014 school year.

Generally, student learning objectives tests are given twice a year; once at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year. Although there is variance, these tests are one of the largest drivers of testing time. Approximately 26 percent of total student test-taking time is spent taking student learning objectives tests. The budget proposes eliminating the use of student learning objectives tests as part of the teacher evaluation system for grades preK-3 and for teachers teaching in non-core subject areas in grades 4-12. Teachers teaching in these grades and subject areas will demonstrate student growth through the expanded use of differentiated shared attribution. We estimate that eliminating these tests would reduce the average amount of time students spend taking tests by 3.1 hours per grade level.

Resident Educator Program

Another way we ensure quality instruction is through implementation of the Ohio Resident Educator program. This is a four-year induction program that provides ongoing support and professional development to new teachers throughout their residencies. Years one and two of the program provide intensive support to resident educator participants to assist them in accelerating their professional growth. Year three of the program is the year the majority of the educators complete a required performance-based assessment. The final year of the program is designed to support resident educator participants in exploring leadership opportunities available in their respective districts and school buildings.

The performance-based assessment taken in year three is called the Resident Educator Summative Assessment, also known as RESA. This assessment requires the successful completion of five tasks as one of the requirements to advance to a professional level license. The RESA is aligned to Ohio's standards for the teaching profession and there is some overlap with the teacher performance side of the teacher evaluation system. Because teachers dedicate time and resources to complete the RESA, local boards of education should have the option of exempting resident educator participants from the annual teacher evaluation requirements in the year the teacher is completing the Resident Educator Summative Assessment. The budget would provide this flexibility.

My team and I are currently reviewing the Resident Educator program now that a complete cohort of participants has completed the four-year licensure program. The department is streamlining all requirements of the program so they align and support the local evaluation and professional development needs of new teachers. We acknowledge that district program coordinators and mentors know best what their resident educators need for support.

In addition to the work the department is doing to improve the Resident Educator program, the budget provides some additional flexibility with respect to the current requirements of the four-year program. The budget focuses the mentoring requirements to the first two years of the program and provides districts the ability to make local decisions to determine what level of support teachers need during years three and four of the program.

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.