

Ohio Gifted Education Cost Study: Executive Summary

May 2018

Ohio's current Fiscal Year 2018-2019 state operating budget includes a provision requiring the Ohio Department of Education to complete a cost study of gifted education that examines the funding of gifted courses and programs for identified gifted students. This mandate calls for a particularly close examination of gifted education as it is provided by rural school districts. The Ohio Department of Education directed the study team to conduct their work within the context of meeting – but not exceeding – Ohio's current gifted education operating standards, which went into effect on July 1, 2017.

Over 250,000 public school students have been identified as gifted. State law requires the identification of gifted students in grades K-12, but it *does not* require that these students be provided with gifted education services; however, state law does stipulate that if local school districts decide to serve these students, gifted education services must meet state operating standards. These new standards do not change the threshold requirements for being identified as gifted, but they do include new requirements for whole-grade screenings, professional development and the sending of “no service” letters when districts do not provide gifted services.

The study reveals the state of gifted education prior to the implementation of the new operating standards. This FY2017 profile highlights: a) total reported spending of \$108.7 million, of which \$73.5 million – about two-thirds – was provided by the state; b) 564 of 610 school districts providing gifted education services, but 46 districts reporting no gifted education expenditures; and c) a wide range of gifted education identification and service. Statewide, 16.4 percent of all students are identified as gifted and 8.5 percent of all students and 51.8 percent of identified students actually receive gifted education services.

Within this picture, there is a lower rate of identification and there may be under-identification of students in poor rural (12.7 percent), urban (8.8 percent) and major urban (9.7 percent) school districts.

In terms of the costs of meeting the new standards, the bottom line is an estimated FY2017 cost that moves from an actual (albeit conservative) figure of \$108.7 million (\$73.5 million state-only) to a study-generated estimate of \$230.2 million of which \$101 million is state-only funding. The \$101 million state-only difference amounts to an increase of \$27.5 million or 37.4 percent over the current actual (capped) state gifted funding level. This larger amount provides funds to identify and serve a larger cohort of students (100 percent of identified students, rather than the current 51.8 percent receiving services).

The cost study concludes with a listing of public policy implications. These policy implications cluster within three themes: improving fiscal and related gifted education program accountability and productivity; enhancing gifted student identification and services, including among under-identified and underserved student populations; and better understanding the cost structures and service models used in rural school districts in order to better identify and serve gifted students in these schools.

The Ohio Education Research Center and its consulting partners completed the study. The team used a mixed methodological approach that included relevant state and local data analysis combined with site visits to a sample group of nine school districts that were substantially meeting the new gifted operating standards in FY2017, the year prior to their initial implementation. Perspectives from educational service center personnel were also obtained through interviews. This local data, in turn, was blended with state data to create gifted education practice models – or constructs – that were then costed out. This approach helped manage data limitations, including the fact that there is less than one year of experience with the new operating standards.