

**Testimony on Ohio Fair Funding Proposal
(Special Education, Gifted, and English Language Learners)
FY 2020-21 Biennial Budget**

**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Representatives Robert R. Cupp and John Patterson, Co-chairs
April 4, 2019**

**Michael J. Barnes, Superintendent
Lakewood City School District**

Thank you Jenni.

Opening

Co-Chairman Cupp and Patterson, and fellow members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education:

I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to present testimony today in support of the Fair School Funding Plan, and specifically today, for Special Education, Gifted Education, and English Language Learner Education. My name is Michael Barnes, and I am the Superintendent of the Lakewood City School District, in Cuyahoga County. And again, I am thankful for this opportunity.

Gifted

As Jenni mentioned earlier, the Ohio Education Research Center conducted a Gifted Cost Study on behalf of the Ohio Department of Education. The goal of the study was twofold: a) develop a deeper understanding of the cost of providing Gifted Education services in a manner that is compliant with the state's Gifted Education operating standards; and b) identify the most appropriate method of funding Gifted Education.

Currently, districts are funded for Gifted identification and also the coordination of Gifted services. The Gifted Cost Study found this to be an underrepresentation of what it actually costs to provide gifted education that meets Ohio's Gifted operating standards. Our current funding methods fails to take into consideration all of the cost drivers for Gifted Education.

The slide that you have before you right now, represents the seven (7) Gifted Education Cost drivers that were identified and quantified from the Gifted Cost Study. Our recommendation is to fund each of these category areas at per pupil amount. (Reference - speak to the chart)

Our final recommendation related to Gifted Education is to establish an Incentive Program for rural districts. The Gifted Cost study referenced earlier, noted identification, funding and service inequities. These inequities negatively impacting students who would benefit from receiving adequate Gifted Education services .

We are recommending that an incentive program be funded and put into place for rural districts in order to close the underserved Gifted service gap.

English Language Learners

Our third and final category is English Language Learners and our recommendations.

Before I do a deeper dive into each of these three (3) recommendations, I would like to share some personal stories about English Language Learners (ELL) in my district.

Lakewood City Schools doubles the state average of students who are English Language Learners. Nearly half of our ELL students are refugees, representing 24 countries. Currently we have 32 different languages spoken district-wide by students in our schools. Most of these students also have the task of translating for their parents and other relatives in the home. As you can imagine, this poses challenges for these students as they work hard to navigate through our system. We have staff who are committed to ensuring the success of this population of students. As it is with other districts with similar demographics, we are interested in a funding formula that will provide for the unique needs of these and other students.

Our first recommendation is that a multiplier be returned to the base cost. In fiscal year 2014, the weighted funding for English Language Learners was converted to per pupil amounts. In the most recent biennium, the per pupil weights for English Language Learners remained constant while the per pupil base cost increased. To avoid parity issues, the weighted funding for English Language Learners should be a multiplier of the base cost.

Our second recommendation is that the Ohio Department of Education authorize and fund a cost study. Like the results from Gifted Cost Study, it is our belief that English Language Learners Education cost drivers will be accurately identified and quantified allowing the students to receive what they need and allowing treasurers, superintendents, and school boards to more accurately plan.

Finally, recent changes at the federal level under the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires district tracking of ELL students two (2) years after exiting ELL status. We are recommending that Category 3 Funding be adjusted to satisfy this mandate. Specifically, we ask that Category 3 Funding be revised to include ELL students for the two (2) years after they have achieved proficiency. Achieving proficiency means no longer receiving services as an ELL students.

Also, we recommend that Category 2 Funding be revised to include all students enrolled more than 180 days until they achieve proficiency. In my district, we continue service for ELL students beyond the school year and into the summer because they need it. The current funding system ends at the conclusion of the 180 days school year.

Closing

In closing, we ask our legislators and all Ohioans to consider our plan in its entirety, as an essential roadmap to guide school funding decisions. Together, we strive to ensure that Ohio's children will have the quality educational opportunities they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world. And together, we can adopt a comprehensive, fair school funding plan that meets the needs of Ohio's children, future workforce, and economy.