

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
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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 sections of House Bill 64, the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Biennial Budget. I am Steve Gratz, senior executive director for the Center of Student Support and Education Options at the Ohio Department of Education.

The governor and Superintendent Ross believe we need to create more pathways and more opportunities for Ohioans to succeed. Over the past four years, the Ohio Department of Education has taken important steps in ensuring all students receive an education that is engaging and relevant by expanding career-technical education, increasing career counseling requirements for schools and providing more opportunities for adults to get out of poverty.

I am here to discuss a number of initiatives in the budget that further the governor's goal of promoting school innovation, providing access to career-focused credentials and certifications and expanding opportunities for students to receive college credit while still in high school. These initiatives address the needs of students who demonstrate mastery beyond their grade levels, and they provide services to those who need extra help. Overall, these budget proposals challenge our traditional factory model of education in which many students simply chug along from kindergarten through high school, unless they fall off the conveyor belt before obtaining a diploma. For many of our students, our current model reproduces low achievement and inequity, year after year, generation after generation. The budget initiatives I'm about to discuss represent an important step forward in how we educate all of Ohio's boys and girls.

Competency-based Education Pilot Program

Students must be engaged in school in a way that makes learning come alive. The governor is proposing a three-year, competency-based pilot program that will incentivize 10 districts to develop and implement innovative competency-based education models that advance students as they master course content. Districts may pilot competency-based education for a part of the district or part of a building. Each pilot school will provide students with timely, individualized support and will incorporate partnerships with business, industry and institutions of higher education to provide practical learning experiences. Under this proposal, the department will award each pilot school a grant of up to \$250,000 in each year (GRF line item 200588) of the biennium for planning in FY16 and implementation in FY17. The pilot will examine creative models of instruction and the feasibility of a competency-based funding model based on course completion rather than student enrollment and seat time.

Innovative School Waiver Pilot Program

In June 2014, the General Assembly passed a law that created an innovative school waiver pilot program to grant up to 10 districts flexibility from state testing requirements and encourage the implementation of inventive education programs. Dr. Ross will grant waivers this spring to eligible applicants, which include members of the Ohio Innovative Lab Network and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) schools. The department will collaborate with the participating pilot districts and schools to seek U.S. Department of Education approval for using alternative, state-approved assessments.

Governor Kasich's budget proposal extends the innovative school waiver pilot program to allow up to 10 additional school districts, STEM schools or community schools the opportunity to apply and be granted waivers in FY16 to develop new, innovative alternative assessment systems. All school districts and community schools will be eligible to apply for one of these additional waivers during the 2015-2016 school year.

Access to College-level Credit

Previous budgets have focused on providing opportunities for high school students to earn college credit. Not only does this help reduce costs for students and their families, but it also helps get students motivated to achieve in high school and college and begin their journeys toward rewarding jobs and careers. In order to make these opportunities accessible to more Ohio students, we need more high school teachers who are qualified to teach courses for college credit. The \$13.5 million the governor has outlined in his budget over the biennium will get more teachers in disadvantaged high schools the coursework they need to be qualified to teach college-level courses. Additionally, up to \$5 million in FY17 will reward school districts that have the highest student participation in College Credit Plus and advanced placement courses. This funding is a set-aside of the Straight A Fund (Lottery Profits Education Fund line item 200648).

Career Tech Credentials

Industry-recognized credentials have become an important part of career preparation for all students, yet some students in career-technical education programs do not even attempt to earn credentials. They either do not know the credentials exist or do not have the means to pay the associated costs. No

student should be denied access to a lucrative career for these reasons. The governor's budget ensures that all students enrolled in career-technical education programs are informed about the opportunities to earn credentials. In addition, career-technical education providers will be required to pay the costs of credential exams for economically disadvantaged students. The budget allocates \$1 million each year (GRF line item 200545) to reimburse these providers for the costs of the credential exams in accordance with a schedule of reimbursement that will be developed jointly by the department of education, Ohio Board of Regents and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation.

Adult Diploma Program Extension

There are nine million adults in Ohio. One million of these adults do not have high school diplomas, and until recently, there was no way for adults to earn high school diplomas. Last year, the governor's Mid-Biennium Review created the Adult Diploma Pilot Program that allows adults to attend Ohio technical centers, or community or technical colleges, to work toward industry-recognized credentials and receive high school diplomas. The department recently announced grant awards for five pilot sites throughout the state. Many more schools have expressed interest in joining the program, so the governor's budget expands this grant for up to five additional sites in the next fiscal year. The budget also proposes the payment structure for the existing sites and appropriates \$17.5 million over the biennium (GRF line item 200572) to fund adults once they enter these programs.

Extension of GED Reimbursement

While the Adult Diploma Program seeks to get adults a high school diploma and an industry-recognized credential, earning a GED has been an invaluable way for adults to get into college or obtain entry-level jobs. The GED Voucher Program lessens the cost of the exam and thereby removes one of the barriers many Ohioans face in earning this important credential. The GED Voucher Program has been in place since 2014 and provides all first time computer-based test takers that are state residents the option to obtain a voucher worth \$80 toward the \$120 application fee and career and educational guidance from a career-technical planning district. The budget allocates up to \$2 million in each fiscal year (GRF line item 200550) to be used to pay career-technical planning districts for the amounts reimbursed to students. These funds are also available to the Department of Youth Services and the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction for individuals in these facilities who have taken the GED for the first time.

OOD/ODE Partnership

Current Ohio operating standards for the education of children with disabilities require school districts to offer transition services no later than the first IEP when the child turns fourteen or older. Districts cannot fulfill this requirement without partnerships with agencies that provide unique supports for students with disabilities. The Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities agency is one such agency, and since FY14, OOD has served approximately 11,400 individuals with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 25. Governor Kasich proposes establishing a partnership between the department of education's offices for Career-Technical Education and Exceptional Children and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities that will increase the number of students better prepared for pathways to career and college readiness and increased employment outcomes at higher wages.

The budget allocates \$5 million in each fiscal year (GRF line item 200540) to build capacity to deliver a regional system of training, support, coordination and direct service for secondary transition services for students with disabilities beginning at fourteen years of age. The department will allocate to Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities \$2.5 million to act as a match for federal revenue to support this project. Every \$1 dollar contributed yields an additional \$3.69 in federal dollars. OOD will utilize project funds to hire counseling staff to be embedded in schools to provide career counseling services to students with disabilities and engage them in work experiences and other career readiness activities. Goals of the program include earlier engagement of students with disabilities in career services and increasing the number of students with disabilities exiting school with industry recognized credentials. This partnership will also align Ohio with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, which has a focus on transition-age youth and improved outcomes.

Early Warning System

The high school dropout problem in the United States has been called a national crisis. About 25 percent of all high school students leave the public school system before graduating. Early warning systems use readily available school data to identify students who are at risk of dropping out, allowing educators to intervene early.

Ohio's Early Warning System was included in the MBR and requires the department to establish a clearinghouse of information regarding the identification of and intervention for at-risk students to enable local school districts to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school using a research-based method. Federal funds were leveraged to pay for the initial development of the clearinghouse, but the ongoing cost of the program will require a GRF appropriation of \$350,000 in each year of the biennium (GRF line item 200421).

Ohio Means Jobs

During the governor's first term he created the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation in an effort to streamline Ohio's education and workforce programs. Key to this monumental task was the re-launch of OhioMeansJobs.com. OhioMeansJobs.com helps employers find the right people and helps job seekers find great jobs. OhioMeansJobs.com serves as an online career counselor for job seekers where they can plan their careers, search for hundreds of thousands of jobs and post resumes. In an effort to reach more Ohioans and further align education and workforce programs, the department of education joined the effort and created a student portal within OhioMeansJobs.com. The student portal allows students to create backpacks where they can explore careers, discover career preparation programs and design their own personalized career pathways. Launched in late 2014, OhioMeansJobs.com already has over 63,000 users who have registered and started building their own backpacks. The budget allocates \$1.075 million over the biennium to support career planning and integrate reporting tools in OhioMeansJobs.com that will assist educators to help students plan for their futures.

Tech Prep Expansion Grants

Career-technical education programs prepare students for multiple options after high school, including gainful employment and postsecondary studies. And today, all career-technical education students in

Ohio have the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit while enrolled in their career-technical education programs. This ranges from a few semester hours to some students earning their associate degrees prior to graduating from high school. We refer to this alignment between secondary and postsecondary career-technical education as Tech Prep.

The budget proposes \$3.6 million in each fiscal year (GRF line item 200545) for Tech Prep to support the expansion of postsecondary credit options available to students enrolled in secondary career-technical education programs. College Credit Plus options and statewide articulated credit opportunities all need to be built into secondary career-technical education programs and made available to students. The additional funding will expand the capacity of Tech Prep through the development of high school to college pathways (Programs of Study), the alignment of secondary and postsecondary curricula and the creation of College Credit Plus opportunities.

Chairman Cupp, 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.