

March 12, 2015

Honorable Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today. Since the 2009-2010 dismantling of the gifted unit funding system, formal gifted services in Allen County have been cut dramatically. Under the maintenance of effort provision, four districts cut their gifted programming completely and two cut back the number of service days. In 2009, the Allen County Educational Service Center (ESC) employed five trained gifted teachers and two coordinators. We conducted gifted programs in five districts and directly instructed over 300 students. This school year, we employ two teachers providing service in two districts with one coordinator. In addition, one teacher has been cut back to four days of teaching time which translates into the ESC providing service for a total of nine days versus the twenty-five (5 days per teacher) provided in 2009. Simple math tells us we have lost sixteen days of direct teaching time with gifted students of Allen County and furthermore, impact one hundred sixty-four less students.

The enclosed chart demonstrates the number of employees serving students and the amount of money each district received in Allen County in 2008-2009 contrasted to now. When unit funding was the method of payment to the ESC, trained gifted teachers were employed and more services were offered from more districts. As soon as funding shifted from unit funding to the Bridge and Pass formulas and money was sent to the districts versus the ESC, services were cut.

Districts have not used the designated gifted funding for gifted students, teachers or services because the line item has little accountability and the pervasive cultural myth is that gifted students do not need to have specially trained instructors. In fairness to Allen County school districts, inadequate school funding has placed them in difficult positions financially which has exacerbated the issue.

Most of the public, including many administrators, are unaware there are funds in school budgets designated for gifted. Some treasurers have informed me they do not get any "gifted funding" anymore. Some say they have to use it for "all" their students, not just the "gifted" ones.

The total capped amount of gifted funding coming into Allen County to districts is \$649,974.00 this year. That amount is designated by law to cover salaries, testing, scoring, professional development and resources. In 2009, total gifted funding coming directly to the ESC was \$281,324.00. At that time districts did not receive money directly, unless they had their own unit funding. Districts had to pay excess costs (to make up the difference between what was funded and what the employees actually cost) for Allen County ESC gifted teachers with that amount, but more service was provided then than now.

The perception in rural communities that trained gifted instructors are not needed and general education teachers can fill that role through differentiation creates a flawed solution to a complex issue. Training of teachers in differentiation is minimal. It is required through the teacher evaluation system (OTES), but even OTES evaluators are typically not trained in differentiation. The term has been thrown around for decades to meet the needs of gifted students but the evidence indicates it is dramatically misunderstood, misused and more often than not, when used, has little effectiveness.¹

In recent years, I have had more and more parents tell me they just do not want to risk being seen as the "pushy" parent and advocacy efforts for their children are minimal. When some do risk it, administrators assure them that regular education teachers do a great job instructing the gifted through differentiation and there is no need for anything further. Recently, administrators in one district, told

me that at their district, “Parents just want their kids to be kids and live a normal life. They don’t want them to be pushed.” I would suggest that in light of a changing world and global economy, we need students who have been appropriately educated to remain competitive in future job markets. Our brightest offer the best promise of innovation and problem solving abilities to keep us productive. It is unethical to allow them to plateau and take the easy path versus learning to complete rigorous challenges and produce quality work.

In America, we have always been able to offer not only the academic aspect of schooling but the life-enriching opportunities of the arts and sports. We have been known for our creativity because of this richness and diversity. But creative and innovative instruction is not easily measured quantitatively and our current testing mandates are diminishing this. Our urban districts do much gifted identification through the category of creativity. Our schools need the leadership of trained gifted personnel to help diversify our instruction in this way as well. Programming, computer coursework and enrichment services, particularly at the elementary level, need to be coordinated by trained specialists that can oversee the effectiveness of each. Finding the right “fit” for gifted students takes knowledge and skill that is more easily developed when that is your singular focus.

The bottom line is simple: funding needs to be tied to trained gifted personnel, and it was less complicated when it went directly to the Educational Service Centers instead of the districts. Funding also needs to cover the total cost of the employee and not put a burden on districts or ESCs to use other money to help support the positions. However, if districts are given the money, they need to be held accountable for its intended use.

Since gifted students have little protection under state or national law, they are truly the students left behind in our present educational system. While it may be important for districts to exercise as much local control as possible, the evidence and data clearly indicate when given this responsibility for gifted education, the typical district choice - particularly in rural areas, is to claim service by ineffective methods, focus it on middle school and high school coursework, or eliminate it. When left to local decisions, competing priorities, prejudice and lack of knowledge regarding gifted students needs leads to a non-standardized range of opportunities from exemplary to nothing at all in districts throughout our state. It is a highly inequitable and arbitrary way to educate our children.

While I am here to advocate for gifted funding, I cannot envision it being successful unless it is part of a better solution for school funding overall. As difficult as it is, please try to find a successful approach to education funding. Public schools are a foundation for our democracy. They help students of all races, religions and backgrounds interact on a regular basis and learn to understand and respect each other more than any other institution can or will.

I ask you to save our public education system and embed gifted services as an integral and non-negotiable aspect of it. I believe it is the best investment our society can make for our future. Thank you for your time today.

Respectfully Submitted,

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¹ <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/07/differentiation-doesnt-work.html>

Gifted Education Funding		
Allen County, Ohio		
Comparison Chart		
	2009	2014
ESC Hired Gifted Coordinators	2	1
ESC Hired Gifted Teachers	5	2
Lima City Hired Gifted Teachers	4	3
Lima City Hired Gifted Coordinators	1	0.1
County Students Identified	1297	1121
Lima City Students Identified	173	246
County Students Served by a Trained Gifted Teacher	308	144
Lima City Students Served by a Trained Gifted Teacher	46	142
# of Districts with Trained Gifted Intervention Specialists Providing Instruction	7	3
\$ Budgeted for Districts	0	\$ 649,974.00
\$ Spent by County Districts	Excess Costs for Teachers	\$ 251,143.00
\$ Spent by Lima City	\$ 95,402.31	\$ 215,417.00
\$ Budgeted for ESC	\$ 281,324.00	\$ 64,872.36

Allen County ESC Gifted Funding Through the Years					
2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
\$ 296,992.00	\$ 197,505.00	\$ 255,663.00	\$ 261,862.00	\$ 288,488.00	\$ 281,324.00
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
\$ 270,117.00	\$ 270,117.00	\$ 270,117.00	\$ 159,027.00	\$ 66,780.00	\$ 64,872.00