

House Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee

March 12, 2015

Testimony of Vikki Clemons, Executive Director of Instructional Services,
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Good Afternoon Chairman Cupp, Ranking Minority Member Phillips & Members of the House Primary & Secondary Education Subcommittee of Finance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the significant role that Educational Service Centers [ESCs] play on behalf of the state and the Ohio Department of Education in driving innovation and deploying key educational initiatives for all children of all abilities in Ohio.

My name is Vikki Clemons and I am the Executive Director of Instructional Services at the Hamilton County Educational Service Center (HCEESC) in Cincinnati, Ohio. We serve twenty-two [22] primary customer districts and provide services in over 120 school districts, 40 non-public schools and 30 community schools across the state partnering with other ESCs. Among our client districts is Cincinnati Public Schools, the third largest school district in the state. I am testifying today on behalf of the HCEESC and all ESCs across the state.

Educational Service Centers [ESCs] are a vital resource and are uniquely designed to serve the diverse needs of their specific customers across the state. ESCs do not always provide the same range of services but most collaborate and leverage resources with other entities to fulfill the needs of the districts they serve as evidenced by the alliances formed over the past several years. Like you and the agencies you serve, not all ESCs have been created equally nor would we want them to be. Those in rural areas have different needs and challenges from those in the metropolitan/urban areas. Some serve large geographical areas. Some serve small geographic areas.

Cincinnati Public Schools, because it has enrollment over 16,000 students, is not required to align to an ESC. Yet, the district has chosen to voluntarily align to our service center to take advantage of the expertise, customized services and economies of scale available through an ESC.

While this relationship between school districts and ESC's is crucial, the role that ESCs play on behalf of the state and ODE is equally, if not, more critical, to success in transforming our educational system to meet the needs of all learners in this global economy. ESCs drive innovation as recently evidenced by the numerous ESCs partnering with school districts on the Straight A Innovation grants.

ESCs have been instrumental in deploying initiatives from the state and federal levels, communicating the most recent data and information regarding the need for change, and providing the professional development, technical assistance and support to bring about the necessary changes to drive improvement for all learners.

For many years, ESCs have been considered integral partners in the federally required State System of Support [SSOS] for schools and school districts. Sixteen [16] ESCs currently serve as fiscal agents for Ohio's State Support Teams. The goal of the SSOS is to build the capacity of local education agencies (LEAs) as well as entities that serve preschool age children to engage in inclusive, continuous and sustainable improvement in order to meet IDEA State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) performance indicators, raise student achievement and close the achievement gap.

The ESCs and SSTs also provide support to the State Personnel Development Grant [SPDG], the State Diagnostic Teams [SDT], State Performance Plan [SPP] Committees, and School Improvement Grant [SIG] schools and districts along with numerous other committees.

In support of Ohio's education reform initiatives, Ohio's ESEA Waiver and Legislative requirements, HCESC and ESCs across the state provide professional development, technical assistance, support and coaching to schools and school districts to assist them with effective implementation in areas such as:

- Great Teachers & Leaders
 - Educator Evaluation
 - Ohio Teacher Evaluation System [OTES]
 - Ohio Principal Evaluation System [OPES]
 - Ohio Superintendent Evaluation System [OSES]
 - Credentialing & Policy Development
 - Ohio Resident Educator Program
 - Beginning Principal Mentoring Grant

- Standards & Instruction
 - ODE Training on Common Core Standards
 - ODE Training on New Learning Standards including aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment
 - Third Grade Reading Guarantee Implications & Support
 - Early Learning Standards
 - STEM support and leveraging of resources to schools and districts
 - College and Career Readiness

- Assessment
 - Value Added Specialists for design and delivery
 - Student Growth Measures and Student Learning Outcomes State Trainers
 - New Generation Assessments & PARCC Transitions for rigor, relevance and relationships in learning
 - Early Learning Assessments

- School & District Report Cards

- School Improvement
 - HCESC provides a School Improvement Coaching model to support schools and districts in school improvement status aligned with Title I School Improvement initiatives and School Improvement Grant [SIG] initiatives
 - Currently, there are over 40 FTE coaches working in the Cincinnati Public Schools along with many other related services for the urban schools
 - School Improvement Support is also provided to Community Schools throughout the region with personnel dedicated to serving community schools
 - ESL Consultation, instruction and tutorial services are provided to support districts

HCESC also provides direct services in the area of Intervention and Support Services utilizing a staff of over 375 FTE employees to meet the needs of our districts. ESCs across the state provide similar services.

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of services provided, HCESC and other ESCs actively seek federal, state, regional and other grants in collaboration with school districts to support their efforts. We also provide networking opportunities through Instructional Councils, Pupil Personnel Task Forces, Superintendent meetings, Business Manager Meetings, Treasurer Meetings, Principal Cohorts and numerous other means to support and communicate critical information to customers.

Each and every one of these items mentioned are "pieces of the puzzle" or "pieces of the system" that our school districts are struggling to effectively implement to improve the educational opportunity for all children. These are the areas that school districts seek our support and guidance because they know we have the relationship with ODE and other partners to bring them credible resources and the ability to leverage resources on their behalf.

ODE recognizes the value of this role as well; we are currently serving as fiscal agent for a project in collaboration with Battelle for Kids, Education First, the Ohio ESC Association and ODE to identify ways in which ODE may augment its staff and meet districts needs by better leveraging the ESC system to provide technical support. The state subsidy ESCs receive from the state can help make that happen and must be retained.

In summary, a vital function and valued service is provided by the ESCs across the state in assisting the Ohio Department of Education and the state in deploying federal and state initiatives and requirements at the local district and school levels. The more communication, professional development, technical assistance and support that can be provided directly to the schools and districts in the midst of all these changes and challenges being presented to them as they strive to transform an age old educational system, the more effective the educational system will be for all children and therefore the state and country.

I ask that you take in consideration the vital role that ESCs play and the enormous needs of the schools and districts in this age of accountability and economic conditions.

Mr. Chairman and committee, I thank you for your time and consideration. I will be happy to address any questions.

Respectfully,
Vikki Clemons, HCESC