

Testimony before the House Primary and Secondary Finance Subcommittee

March 12, 2015

Good (morning/afternoon) Chairman Cupp and members of the Primary and Secondary Finance Subcommittee. My name is Bruce Hawkins, and I appreciate the invitation from Chairman Cupp to testify today on behalf of the Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer Network, its member Information Technology Centers, their school districts, and in support of the information technology needs for the K-12 community in Ohio.

The Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN) consists of 22 regional data centers known as Information Technology Centers (ITC). Each ITC is a local governmental entity collectively owned by school districts that in turn receive technology services from that center. ITC services are many, including fiscal accounting, payroll, student scheduling, attendance tracking, report cards, teacher grade book, parent access portals, network management, Internet access, library automation, video distance learning, IP telephony, electronic mail, document management, and many others. As a collaborative of school districts the ITCs offer these educational technology support services at significant savings to over 900 school districts and other K-12 entities in Ohio.

State funding in support of the OECN comes from the Ohio Educational Computer Network funding line 200-426, and I will take a moment to discuss how those funds are targeted in support of Ohio's schools. There are two set-asides in 200-426. We refer to the first as the network connectivity set-aside. The initial amount proposed for this purpose is ten million dollars. This is a \$700,000 reduction from the amount in the current biennium.

This funding is used in support of the following activities:

- School building connectivity – this comprises the largest area of use to fund \$1,800 per building annually for districts, community schools, stem schools, ESCs, and non-public schools who apply for funding based on defined program requirements.
- Network operations support provided by OARnet (Ohio Academic Research Network).
- Disaster recovery/business continuity facility for the ITCs
- Subsidy for purchase of Internet bandwidth
- The licensing and hosting of a comprehensive service management platform for the OECN. In layman’s terms this is what you might call a “help desk”, although the tool goes above and beyond what that term might suggest.
- Funding to support an ongoing peer review process to monitor customer support and continuous improvement practices of the ITCs

The second set-aside provides funding to ITCs in support of fiscal and student data reporting services offered to schools. The amount proposed in the bill is \$5,000,000. This amount is a reduction of \$220,000 from the current biennium.

Any remaining amounts in allocated in 200-426 can be used in support of the Ohio Education Computer Network. For the most part these undesignated funds are used to develop and maintain the state-owned school finance software package.

Also of note is a “paper” reduction of \$2.5M in the OECN line item as a result of the movement of funding for INFOhio from 200-426 to 200-465. The funding allocated for INFOhio is the same as the current biennium. When we inquired regarding the reasons for this change, ODE responded that the INFOhio program was better aligned with the intended purpose of 200-465.

Over the past 20 years the State has made significant investments supporting K-12 technology. For example, in the FY 14-15 budget there was an additional ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) in one-time funds earmarked to upgrade the connectivity for 22 ITCs and seven large urban districts. On behalf of the Ohio Education Computer Network I want to express our appreciation to the Governor and Legislature for providing this funding.

To understand its importance to Ohio’s schools, consider how bandwidth has grown in the first eight months of this fiscal year. On June 30, 2014 the network was purchasing a collective 23.8 Gb of bandwidth per month. At the beginning of March 2015 the total bandwidth purchased has grown to 48Gb. It has more than doubled due in part to the availability of larger connections to the ITCs. The expanded consumption of Internet is one measure that demonstrates the important role technology plays in today’s educational environment. Without continued state support the burden of supporting this growth will come from local funds and divert dollars that could be spent on computers or resources for students in the classroom.

I mentioned funding in 200-426 is being reduced in the budget as proposed by the Governor. While OECN funding has fared better than others, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that even the smallest of funding cuts are painful. We are concerned about the cut in funding for 200-426 in the proposed



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budget and respectfully ask for OECN funding to be restored to FY 15 levels to continue to provide a consistent level of technology support for Ohio's schools.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the OECN and Ohio schools.

Attending with me today is MCOECN Chief Technology Officer Sam Orth. Sam and I will be happy to address any questions you might have regarding technology funding for Ohio K-12 schools.