

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE WITNESS INFORMATION FORM BEFORE TESTIFYING

DATE: 3/18/15

NAME: Chad L. Aldis

ORGANIZATION: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute
(IF APPLICABLE)

POSITION/TITLE: VP Ohio Policy and Advocacy

ADDRESS: 37 W. Broad St - Ste 400, Columbus, OH 43215

CITY: Columbus STATE: OH ZIP: 43215

TELEPHONE: (614) 223-1580

ARE YOU REPRESENTING: YOURSELF _____ ORGANIZATION

DO YOU WISH TO TESTIFY ON
LEGISLATION (BILL NUMBER): HB 64
SPECIFIC ISSUE: Education Budget
SUBJECT MATTER: Education

DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE _____ THE ENACTMENT OF LEGISLATION REGARDING THIS ISSUE?

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE GROUNDS ON WHICH YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE SUCH ENACTMENT:

Bill proposes some strong and meaningful changes to Ohio education law

WILL YOU HAVE A WRITTEN STATEMENT, VISUAL AIDS, OR OTHER MATERIAL TO DISTRIBUTE?
YES NO _____

(IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE COPIES TO THE CHAIRMAN OR SECRETARY)

HOW MUCH TIME WILL YOUR TESTIMONY REQUIRE? 5 minutes



Testimony on House Bill 64

Chad Aldis

March 18, 2015

Thank you Chairman Cupp, Ranking-Member Phillips and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, for giving me the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 64. My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

In general, we are supportive of most of Governor Kasich's proposed education changes. Some of the provisions that we believe are critically important include:

- Taking tangible steps to reduce the amount of standardized/state testing without weakening our state accountability system.
- Providing regulatory relief to schools.
- Moving toward reducing the impact of caps and guarantees in the state funding formula, as they distort the needs of districts and build funding inefficiencies into the system in practice.
- Opening the door (and providing funding) for schools to experiment with competency-based/mastery learning.
- Strengthening the EdChoice voucher program.
- Improving Ohio's charter school sector.

Expounding a little bit on the charter reforms, Fordham has spent a significant amount of time over the past year looking at Ohio's charter school sector and have sponsored a couple of national experts to study and write reports on the state's charter schools. With that background, some of the provisions proposed by Governor Kasich that we believe are critically important and encourage the House to keep include:

- Requiring all charter sponsors to be approved by the Ohio Department of Education.
- Improving the ability of ODE to take action against low performing sponsors.
- Allowing ODE to factor school quality into the equation when deciding whether it should sponsor a school itself.
- Strengthening the independence of charter school governing boards through requiring independent treasurers/attorneys and giving boards the right to fire charter operators without worrying about the repercussions that could arise if an operator chose to/was able to appeal that decision.
- Providing incentives, including financial, for high quality authorizers.
- Preventing sponsors from selling services to schools that they oversee.

These are strong reforms. We believe that by ensuring proper oversight of charter school sponsors and aligning incentives with performance, Governor Kasich is placing Ohio's charter sector on a new and better path.

Despite our belief that HB 64 is generally strong, we want to call the House's attention to a few provisions and offer recommendations to improve them.

1. Allowing the Department of Education to sponsor an additional 20 schools per year. While this is likely necessary to ensure quality schools aren't closed when a poor performing sponsor loses its right to sponsor schools, HB 64 doesn't amend current law that allows ODE's sponsor operations to add up to 5 new startup schools to its portfolio each year. This has the potential to blur the lines of responsibility, as ODE is already the overseer of sponsors. It's unclear who oversees their work as a sponsor.

Recommendation: Continue to allow ODE to sponsor schools as a last resort and allow that only for a limited duration (<2 years). Remove provision from law allowing them to sponsor 5 new schools per year.

2. Extending the Straight A Fund for another two years. We've been supportive of the program from the beginning. After seeing the first two grant cycles, we believe that the emphasis should be on innovation and its ability to increase student achievement without as much of a focus on financial sustainability.

Recommendations: First, make clear in grant language that projects should primarily be judged on their ability to improve student learning long term. Second, use approximately \$6 million each year to create a startup fund for charter schools. The pool would require a rigorous application and review process and would award grants in the amount of \$500,000 per school. It is essential to recruit high-performing charter schools to Ohio as our state doesn't get federal charter start up dollars.

3. Imposing a limit on standardized testing of 2 percent of the annual student seat time. As noted previously, we support the Governor's to address the testing issue. It's not clear that the proper mechanism is to limit all testing to 2 percent.

Recommendation: The state should focus any testing limit only on what the state requires and should not place a limit on what districts are allowed to offer if they feel it will help their students and teachers. A limit of 1 percent of time spent on state required testing in grades 3 through 8 would serve the same goal without infringing on local control.

4. Shifting from using Student Learning Objectives to shared attribution as the objective measure in teacher evaluations. The goal to reduce testing is noble and the increased testing caused by

SLOs is significant and, in our opinion, offers mixed reliability. However, this solution moves away from the concept of individual responsibility and would likely be unfair for many teachers.

Recommendation: Continue with law as written but give districts and teachers the option of basing evaluations entirely upon principal observations when value added measures or approved vendor assessments aren't available. Maintain any requirements around transparency and improvement plans that apply to other evaluations under the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)

5. Increasing the amount of the EdChoice Scholarship in high school to \$5700 is a move in the right direction, but the funding amount in each of Ohio's private school voucher programs continues to be an impediment to program growth.

Recommendation: Serious consideration should be given to increasing the funding amount for EdChoice and Cleveland voucher recipients to the base funding amount (\$5900 in FY 16 and \$6000 in FY 17). This would match the base funding amount for charter school students. In addition, the current limit of \$20,000 per scholarship in the Jon Peterson and Autism scholarships makes it harder for students with the most severe disabilities to access the programs. The limit should be removed and those students funded at the same level as other students with similar needs.

6. Expanding the Innovative School Waiver Pilot Program by an additional 10 schools. While we've traditionally been very supportive of innovation, this effort's focus on flexibility in terms of state testing requirements seems misguided. Innovation should give districts the flexibility on HOW to improve student outcomes, not to change the measure, especially when the measure is whether students can read and do math.

Recommendation: Suggest that this provision not be extended in its current format.

All in all, HB 64 contains some really good provisions that should make a positive impact on education in Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.