

## **Testimony on the Straight A Fund Provisions of House Bill 64, the FY16-17 Budget**

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 the Straight A Fund section of House Bill 64, the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Biennial Budget. I am Alex Fischer, chairman of the Straight A Fund Governing Board.

The Straight A Fund is considered the largest innovation fund in the nation and has helped Ohio's districts and schools implement their best reform ideas. The world is changing faster than ever. Technology and the pace of commerce mean employers are demanding greater skills and adaptability from their workers. Ohio's students must enter the workforce and college with the analytical thinking, problem-solving and technology skills needed to maintain competitiveness.

Although the first \$250 million invested in innovative education practices has helped transform learning in today's classrooms, there is more work to be done. The willingness of districts to implement innovative practices was demonstrated as 75 percent of Ohio districts submitted applications in rounds one and two.

In round one, 570 applications representing approximately 720 organizations made grant requests totaling \$760 million. Of these applicants, 24 projects were funded, representing more than 150 school districts and partners.

In the second round of grants, our selection process was improved thanks to the General Assembly in House Bill 342. Second round applicants showing higher cost savings were prioritized for funding, and districts were encouraged to apply as a consortium. Grant requests totaling more than \$223 million were made in 339 applications representing 662 organizations. In this round of grants, 40 projects were funded, representing more than 200 school districts and partners.

The Straight A Fund introduced an important concept in education by requiring that projects be sustainable. Districts must be financially able to maintain their projects over five years, either through program cost efficiency or by eliminating other, unneeded or unsuccessful programs or processes. The fund also will track the direct academic impact of each project, as well as the ways in which projects may have created ripples that alter the means for delivering instruction in other ways, including their ability to be replicated. Early evidence suggests that once technology becomes available for one intended purpose, it spurs other uses.

Here are some additional statistics regarding the first round of funding:

| <b>Preliminary Results –<br/>FY14 grantees</b>                                       | <b>Count</b> |
|--|--------------|
| Students grades preK-12 enrolled in Straight A initiatives                           | 262,565      |
| Students enrolled in new blended learning courses                                    | 7,483        |
| Students using new 1:1 personalized computing  | 5,600        |
| Students taking new STEM classes   | 2,577        |
| Teachers trained for innovations   | 2,428        |
| Teachers earning graduate credit and/or credentials to teach dual enrollment courses | 243          |
| New or revamped courses developed or available                                       | 698          |
| Upgraded classrooms, libraries, labs and other learning spaces                       | 285          |

As the Governing Board chair of the Straight A Fund, I was pleased to host a board meeting highlighting four of our grants prior to Straight A Day at the Statehouse on Feb. 5, 2015. Despite the weather, we had nearly 100 percent participation by our grant awardees. As a part of Straight A Day, representatives of Straight A projects from across the state converged at the Statehouse to showcase their work and progress. Here is some information about the grants that was presented to the Straight A Board the morning of Straight A Day.

**Beavercreek:**

The board was charmed by five students in first, second, third, fifth and eighth grades. These students not only led the board in the Pledge of Allegiance but also demonstrated their abilities to use their iPads as part of individualized learning. As a result of the individualized instruction model, approximately 300 students increased their math and reading proficiency by 155 percent in one school year.

This year, students are using their iPads to practice skills for 20 minutes a day, three times a week in both math and English language arts. They are tested on what they have learned and must demonstrate a score of 80 percent or higher to be able to move on to the next skill. They also must record a video as if they were teaching their new skills or knowledge to others. Doing so helps lodge the new knowledge deeper in their minds.

**Northern Local:**

High school students from Northern Local, Maysville and Rolling Hills school districts attended the board meeting to present the new opportunities available to them as a result of the grant – even though their fellow students had a snow day.

The Ohio Appalachian Collaborative is a consortium of 27 school districts that has made 395 college credit hours available to high school students. Sixty-three out of 110 identified teachers have enrolled in a dual enrollment credentialing program. Blended learning was incorporated for the first time in 17 districts with approximately 185 classrooms now having the capacity for classroom and online learning. Now, 7,700 students have access to these blended learning resources for the first time.

**Marysville:**

The Marysville Early College High School and Union County Innovation Center created a manufacturing-related STEM Early College High School, in partnership with Honda, where students can earn 45-60 college credits and a high school diploma in four years. The high school has four career pathways: Math and Science; Advanced Manufacturing (two-year degree); Information Technology; and Health/Science. Students talked to the Governing Board about project-based learning and the difference between the traditional school and the new STEM school. A student enrolled in the manufacturing track attending that day was alerted that a representative from Honda was at the meeting. The student promptly asked for his business card.

**Tri-Rivers/RAMTEC**

Superintendent Charles Speelman presented to the board the challenges of preparing a successful advanced manufacturing program with current equipment for training students. The Straight A Fund allowed Tri-Rivers to upgrade and expand their robotics training to eight additional sites and to graduate career-ready students. Students graduating from these programs will be able to fill the skills gap created by a lack of qualified graduates currently in the industry. A quote from student Tyler Ellis sums up the impact of this training, “When I graduate, I’ll be qualified for a Honda job that pays \$26 an hour. The company would also pay for my mechanical engineering degree so I can avoid college debt.”

These four stories are just the beginning of innovative processes available to Ohio’s students. As Governing Board chair, I have been excited by the grants and their potential and would like to see more innovative practices funded in the future.

Thank you.