

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Colleen Boyle, and I am the Director of Gifted Services for a large urban district in our state. Senate Bill 216 is a large and complicated bill, and there are aspects that I support. However, today, I would like to voice my serious concerns about the line in the bill that seeks to strike the required gifted professional development for general classroom teachers providing official and reported services to students who are gifted.

Ohio administrative code has required “ongoing professional development” related to gifted education for general classroom teachers serving gifted students for many years. The piece that is new with the standards that went into effect in July 2017 is the specific time requirement of 30 hours a year for two years and a district-determined amount for each year after. This time requirement was added for a few reasons.

First and foremost, there is a large body of research that has indicated the factors needed for general classroom settings to be effective services for gifted students as measured by various academic and social-emotional outcomes. Some of those factors, such as clustering of students, higher level instruction, and differentiation, are already indicated in the operating standards. The other critical piece found in the research is professional development. Joyce Van-Tassel Baska, a leader in both gifted program design and evaluation, found that gifted students began to show academic gains in general classrooms *after* their teachers had 24 hours of gifted professional development two years in a row, and those gains were only sustained when the teachers continuously had at least 24 hours per year each year after. This area has a strong body of research supporting the professional development requirement.

Those research findings are mirrored by outcomes in my own district. About 10% of students in my district are identified as gifted, and we are able to provide services in some format to about 30% of those students. When we look at state test performance of our gifted students, there are some striking findings. In the spring of 2017, students in gifted services significantly outperformed similarly gifted students on state tests; our served gifted students had a gifted performance index of more than 113 while their counterparts outside of services had a gifted performance index of 108. This was true across grade bands and content areas with one exception. Our high school gifted students receiving services scored no higher than those who were not served. When we look at the difference in services, one thing really stands out – teacher training. At our elementary and middle school level, services are provided by teachers with extensive training in gifted education. At the high school level, services are provided by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and College Credit Plus teachers with little to no training in the needs and proper instruction of gifted learners. These are good teachers overall. But, they do not have the knowledge of the special needs of this subpopulation to be as effective as they could be. The outcome is clear – teachers with the proper training elicit better student outputs than teachers, even good teachers, without the proper training.

There is a second reason that this time specification was added to the revised Administrative Code. Quite simply, districts were not complying with the previously established requirement to provide ongoing professional development to classroom teachers serving gifted students. If they had been complying, we would not hear some of the time concerns this first year, as the operating standards allow them to count any gifted professional development since July 2015 toward the hours required of teachers serving gifted students. If they had even provided one day of professional development per year, those teachers would have 12 hours accumulated toward their first 30-hour requirement. But that didn't happen. Rather, stories from all around the state indicate districts attempted to meet that longstanding requirement by putting a copy of an article in a teacher's mailbox or having a 30 minute "training" at a staff meeting and calling that compliance with the requirement.

There is a surplus of data in this state to corroborate those stories showing how schools, in some cases in an effort to manipulate their state report card data, increasingly reported to the state and students' families that their gifted students were receiving specialized services in the regular classroom while not providing the required professional development. In fact, there was more about a 300% increase in the number of students reported as served in a general classroom in a three-year span, jumping from about 6000 students to nearly 24,000 students. And yet, according to a report from the Ohio Department of Education, districts simultaneously reported decreasing amounts of professional development on specialized gifted topics from about 30% of district down to 25% of districts providing professional development, even though the previous state rules required ongoing professional development for teachers providing gifted services.

There is a greater likelihood that districts will comply with the ongoing professional development requirement when the operating standards specify the required amount of time. In fact, in a survey conducted by the Ohio Association for Gifted Children, superintendents repeatedly indicated they wanted more guidance around how to provide gifted services. This time requirement helps provide that direction they seek. In the five months since the rule went into effect, we have heard and seen an incredible movement toward compliance as districts begin to find ways to provide meaningful professional development. Even in my own district, I have seen a shift. I work in a district that is incredibly supportive of gifted education and has devoted a significant amount of resources toward the identification and services of gifted learners in our city. We have held ongoing professional development opportunities for years, and we have even labeled a few each year as mandatory for the cluster teachers and Advanced Placement teachers in our district. Even so, I have struggled to get those general classroom teachers to attend the required sessions because either they or their principals have selected other opportunities. They relied on the vagueness of the time requirement to redirect their attention elsewhere. And, sadly, the academic performance of our gifted learners in those classes reflect that lack of training. But this year, nearly 100% of my 156 teachers who fall under this requirement have begun their training with more than a third already completing it. Yes, we have had to be creative to find cost-effective ways to provide this training, but we are doing it successfully, as are many of my colleagues around the state.

We are already seeing positive changes as a result of the professional development that is occurring. Most importantly, I and my counterparts in other districts are getting feedback about how teachers are starting to realize why a student is labeled gifted and why those students act or respond as they do in class. Teachers are planning, trying out, and reflecting upon lessons that are properly designed to meet the needs of gifted learners rather than just generic lessons with low-level thinking. Here are some of the comments provided by participants following this type of professional development offered this summer:

- “My key takeaway ... was the excitabilities and the misdiagnosis of these when seen in children. I thought of my past students and really targeted some kids that I felt may have fallen through the cracks as far as this is concerned.”
- “I’m definitely going to put more thought into my WEPs next year now that I fully understand their purpose! I was so shocked that this was something so important, yet I was told to ‘just fill it out.’ Our WEPs are just a checklist, but I don’t see any reason why I can’t add in my own learning goals for students as I get to know them throughout the year. I think parents would appreciate this, as well as getting them more involved with any learning contracts I [may dare to] try next year!”
- “I learned to look at the whole students; not just their test scores. For example, some students may be underachieving because they are bored. This does not mean that they are not gifted. So, in conclusion, you need to look at the whole student, their test results, social emotional development, etc... to determine their giftedness and how to best meet their learning needs.”
- “Students who are identified are not always performing in the classroom as expected. The hardest working students are not always your gifted students. There is a difference between bright and gifted, but strategies for gifted learners can benefit all learners. The opposite is not true.”
- “The depth and complexity questions/ideas/icons were really eye-opening for me. I realized that there were so many questions I could be asking my students, and so many ways I could be stretching them that I wasn’t!”
- “This is something that is completely new to me. I am so thankful that I learned all of these characteristics, and am especially thankful for the students who helped put together tips for teachers! As a new teacher with no experience with gifted learners, I feel more ready than I ever have been to serve, identify, and NURTURE my gifted learners. It is a lot more than just being “smart”.”

This sustained professional development has the potential to positively change the way we serve our gifted learners in our schools. Schools have an obligation to provide the best, most appropriate instruction possible to all students, including those with special needs. But, to do that, we have to provide the appropriate training to our teachers. The gifted professional development standard helps lead us down that path. I know we live in an era of local control, and I support that on many levels. But, local districts have had wide control over what and how and how much professional development related to gifted education they provide in the past 10 to 12 years. But many districts are not doing what they need to do in this area, and the

result is families and the public are being given a false impression about the quality of gifted services being provided to their children.

This rule still allows for local control. Districts can choose to provide the training to all teachers or only those teachers that are reported as serving gifted students. They can provide it during the summer, during district waiver days, or scattered at smaller sessions throughout the year. Districts can provide the professional development in face-to-face training or online or through a mixture of both. They can use qualified staff within the district, bring in outside expert, or share the load with neighboring districts or educational service centers as a way of making the most of their resources. Ultimately, districts can, under the current wording in the operating standards, choose not to provide the training at all as long as they do not tell families or the Ohio Department of Education that general classroom teachers are providing meaningful, specialized services to gifted learners. Even with the 30-hour requirement, there is still a great deal of latitude for districts to exercise local control.

As you consider Senate Bill 216, I strongly request that you remove the line item that references the gifted professional development requirement and leave the Ohio administrative Code as it currently is written. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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