



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

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Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee

House Bill 49 Testimony

May 17, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Hite and members of the Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. My name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school social studies teacher from Worthington with 16 years of classroom experience, and I currently serve as Vice President for the Ohio Education Association. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about provisions contained in the budget bill for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019. On behalf of the more than 124,000 OEA members, we look forward to working with you on Substitute House Bill (HB) 49 to ensure that a high quality public education, and the resources needed to succeed, are available for all Ohio's students. The following are some of our key positions on provisions included in the budget bill:

School Funding

OEA believes the funding for K-12 education falls short of meeting the needs of Ohio's students and the school districts that educate them. The proposed school funding formula further erodes the state share of education spending and creates another list of winners and losers. OEA appreciates the increases made by the House in the Core Opportunity Aid from \$6,000 to \$6,020 and the additional funding for Capacity Aid. However, we remain concerned that the funding formula continues to disadvantage less wealthy rural districts because of the assumption that they have a "higher" capacity to generate local revenue when in fact they don't. The valuation per pupil measure in the opportunity aid calculation tends to make districts with low student populations appear wealthier even when their residents' income is relatively low.

We've heard comments that school districts should use money in reserves to help cover the costs of educating their students. Districts are pressed repeatedly to ask local residents to approve more tax levies if they don't want to let their educational programs deteriorate over time. When districts do go to the ballot, they need to be able to raise sufficient revenues to carry them for two or three years so that local school levies don't have to be on the ballot every year. In most cases, the balances maintained by school districts are often for needed repairs to buildings or to purchase technology and aren't "unencumbered" resources. Instead these funds are necessary to sustain the financial burden until the next levy. OEA believes that school districts should not be penalized for prudent fiscal practices.



OEA continues to believe that the formula itself is the main reason that districts are placed on the guarantee. Although guarantees have been in place for several decades, they were originally intended to be temporary payments to school districts that would be eliminated as the overall level of state support for public education increased over successive budgets. OEA asserts that many of these districts had funding levels that were insufficient under the past funding formulas. OEA opposes this change and cautions against reducing funding to school districts without determining if these school districts will be able to continue to offer the existing level of educational programs to students.

OEA appreciates the House modification to the gain cap limit from 5% to 5.5% in each year of the biennium. However, the proposed 5.5% gain cap still represents an underfunding of the formula by approximately \$805 million over the biennium. Including a cap on increases in state funding imposes an unfair burden on too many districts, including those with growing enrollment and those with declining property values. It also directly increases pressure to raise local property taxes. This is a flaw in HB 49 that we urge you to correct.

OEA also questions the reduction in transportation funding by approximately \$74 million over the biennium. This reduction in funding impacts roughly half of Ohio's school districts. Providing transportation is financially challenging for many districts, especially those in rural areas which have a large geographic area and low density student populations or for districts which have to transport to charter and nonpublic schools. School buses remain the safest way for students to get to and from school. OEA requests that sufficient funds be provided by the legislature for transportation services and for the replacement of outdated buses.

Additionally, the loss of tangible personal property tax (TPPT) revenues will have negative consequences for about 50 of Ohio's school districts whose TPPT replacement payments will be phased out over the biennium. Local voters will be severely challenged to replace the lost revenues.

The House added two proactive TPPT provisions to the budget bill to assist school districts. The first one is an offset payment to districts that are losing both TPPT replacements payments and their funding is limited by the gain cap. The second one is for districts receiving replacement payments in FY 2020 and allows these districts to extend the phase-out of the TPPT replacement payments over a longer period of time. OEA believes that if there are to be reductions in these replacement payments, they should be offset by increases in state aid through the formula or through a hold harmless provision.

OEA urges state lawmakers to work with education stakeholders to determine what constitutes a high-quality education and then commit the necessary state resources needed to make sure all children have an opportunity to receive a high-quality education, regardless of where they live or their family's income.

Charter School Funding

There remains a need to find ways to fund charter schools fairly without adversely impacting students in local public schools. Ohio's school funding formula should provide per-pupil charter funding in a way that is fair to both school districts and charters, as well as local taxpayers.

There are several ways in which this could be done. For example, the state could avoid compelling local school districts to subsidize the cost of students who choose to attend a charter school by directly funding charters out of the General Revenue Fund. Or the state could make up the difference between the per-pupil amount sent to the district and the total cost of paying for a student who attends a charter school. In either of these scenarios, the charter school would receive the same amount of funding, while at the same time also easing the current burden placed on local school districts.

We hope there is an opportunity for education stakeholders to work on charter funding reform. Such an effort could finally move Ohio beyond the current system that pits charter schools and school districts against each other and that wastes untold time and resources by requiring district officials to confirm whether charter school deductions are for students who actually live in the school district.

Educator "Externships" for Licensure Renewal

OEA supports the decision by the House to remove the provision in the initial version of HB 49 that would have required teachers to complete an on-site work experience with a local business or chamber of commerce as a condition of licensure renewal beginning September 1, 2018.

Teachers recognize the importance of understanding the job skills that employers are seeking, but a requirement to work in an outside business is not necessary to achieve that understanding. Teachers currently create customized professional development plans tailored to their specific needs that are approved by the local professional development committee. This proposal could also place an unworkable burden on businesses that would need to absorb thousands of teachers in need of "externships." OEA feels that this would be an unnecessary hoop for educators to jump through to renew their teaching license.

Resident Educator Program

OEA is concerned about the proposed elimination of mentoring and the supports that are needed for Ohio's new teachers in their first two years of their teaching careers currently included in Ohio's Resident Educator Program. The primary reason that educators leave the profession is a lack of support. OEA believes Ohio must retain high-quality mentoring programs and professional development for early-career educators.

However, at the OEA Representative Assembly held last week in Columbus, nearly a thousand OEA members elected to represent educators from across the state overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for the elimination of the current Resident Educator summative assessment (RESA). OEA members, especially early-career members, believe that the current summative assessment does not help develop young educators and should be eliminated. Further, early-career educators are profoundly distressed that the time spent complying with summative assessment tasks often comes at the expense of time to prepare for their classrooms and makes it harder to give attention to their students.

OEA respectfully requests the Ohio General Assembly to consider the following steps:

1. Maintain a set of requirements for high-quality local mentoring programs and professional development for early-career educators, especially during the first two years of teaching
2. Eliminate the current summative assessment of the resident educator program (years 3 and 4)
3. Direct the Educator Standards Board to make comprehensive recommendations regarding the most effective pathway to a professional educator license, informed by feedback from early-career educators and guided by the best interests of students and schools.

Community School Sponsor Evaluations

HB 49 makes several changes to Ohio's new charter school sponsor evaluation system that deserve careful analysis to prevent a reversal of progress that has been made on charter school accountability.

While it may be difficult to predict the cumulative effect of some of the changes in HB 49, it is clear that the ESC sponsor provision in HB 49 would open a gaping hole in sponsor accountability for e-schools.

OEA opposes the HB 49 ESC sponsor provision because it exempts certain ESC sponsors of e-schools from penalties in HB 2 for low-performing sponsors. Under HB 49, an ESC rated "effective" or higher would be allowed to sponsor any e-school and continue as the sponsor regardless of whether the sponsor later receives an overall rating lower than "effective." This specifically protects these ESCs from the sponsor penalties in HB 2, which require revocation of sponsorship authority after an overall rating of "poor" or three consecutive overall ratings of "ineffective."

Further, HB 49 exempts these ESC sponsors from requirements in the written agreement it must have with ODE under RC 3314.015. These include parameters when "the department can intervene and potentially revoke sponsorship authority," any "territorial restrictions and limits on the number of schools that entity may sponsor," and "permitting the department to modify the agreement" under circumstances such as poor fiscal management or lack of academic progress.

Access to student data verification codes

OEA supports the provision that would allow the State Board of Education and ODE to be able to know the personal identities of students associated with a so-called “SSID” numbers. This common-sense accountability tool will help protect the interests of students and taxpayers by elimination potential fraud when per-pupil payments are made to community schools under the school funding formula.

Paper option for testing

OEA supports the provision in the substitute bill that would allow schools to choose to administer state achievement assessments in a paper format. There is evidence that students perform better on paper tests as opposed to online testing. Particularly in early grades, there is concern that online assessments are a test of a students’ ability to use of technology instead of the subject matter. Additionally, some districts may have technology or logistical issues that make paper tests a better option. This provision in the bill will allow local schools to make a decision in the best interest of their students based on the conditions present at the local level.

Career Technical Educator License

The proposed “Level I” and “Level II” career-technical licenses represent a hybrid approach to local licensure that would replace the statewide career-technical professional educator license.

OEA recommends adopting both approaches: maintain the statewide professional career-technical educator license, while also providing the option of seeking a “Level I” and “Level II” career-technical license as proposed in HB 49.

If the proposed “Level I” and “Level II” licenses were to expand the pool of career-technical educators in vocational fields with educator shortages, this could be a worthwhile objective. However, it is unnecessary to lower the licensure standards of all career-technical educators by eliminating the option to pursue the statewide five-year professional educator license. The five-year professional educator license is available to educators in all other subjects. Therefore, implicitly eliminating the “professional” status of career-technical educators could reduce the appeal of career-technical education for future aspiring educators and students.

College Credit Plus

OEA agrees with the goals of the College Credit Plus (CCP) program to expand opportunities for college-ready students to take college-level courses prior to graduation. We are hopeful that CCP will increase student access to advanced level coursework, especially in districts that have lacked the resources to provide such courses in the past, and help make the pursuit of a higher education more accessible and affordable for all students. However, we want to ensure that the program is meeting the stated objectives and that continued implementation includes the participation of all interested parties.

To that end, in May 2015, OEA established a joint committee of higher education and K-12 members to study the CCP program. I'm pleased that HB 49 contains many changes to the CCP program that respond to the concerns of OEA K-12 and higher education members including requiring the creation of minimum eligibility standards for student placement; specifying the conditions under which an underperforming student may continue to participate in the program; and to determine what courses are eligible for funding under CCP. OEA looks forward to providing additional input on these issues as they move through the rules process.

OEA also supports the House removal of the provision that would have eliminated allowing school districts to negotiate local agreements with higher education institutions below the default floor amount (\$41.50 per credit in FY 17). Currently, partnering school districts and colleges can jointly request a waiver from the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education for payment below the default floor.

Local School Boards

OEA supports the removal by the House of a provision that would have required local school superintendents to appoint three non-voting, advisory members from the local business community to their school boards. OEA believes such decisions should be made by an elected school board that is accountable to the community. Most school board members are in fact small business owners or local professionals. OEA believes making greater use of the existing business advisory councils is a better way of eliciting input from the business community.

High School Graduation Requirements

Before I conclude, I urge you to act upon the recommendation of the State Board of Education to address Ohio's looming graduation crisis. The class of 2018, this year's juniors, is the first to be subject to new graduation requirements, including end-of-course exams. These students have faced changing standards and a shifting set of high-stakes tests. This includes high stakes attached to the PARCC tests which the state has since determined were inappropriate for our education system. Consequently, 38,000 juniors are at risk of not graduating next year. That's nearly 30% of the Class of 2018, with a disproportionate number coming from high-poverty communities.

The work group that produced the graduation recommendations included high school educators and administrators, people from higher education, members of the business community, and policymakers. During their discussions, it was clear that employers are looking for graduates who can communicate well, collaborate, think creatively, show up to work on time, and do a host of other things that aren't measured on standardized tests. Acting upon this recommendation will provide an opportunity for students to graduate that is not reliant on test scores. It does not give affected students a "gimme." Rather, it raises the bar on senior year by incorporating factors such as attendance, GPA, and work experience.

I believe it is necessary to have a long-term conversation about what a balanced set of high expectations should look like for students beyond the class of 2018. However, our students, parents and schools need answers to prepare for next year. For the 38,000 kids facing an uncertain future, I urge you to act on these recommendations by including language in the budget bill.

OEA looks forward to working with the legislature on making improvements to Substitute House Bill 49. Chairman Hite, I would be happy to address questions.