



Catholic Conference of Ohio

Senate Finance Subcommittee for Primary & Secondary Education
May 18, 10:00 am
Interested Party
Catholic Conference of Ohio

I Introduction

Good morning Chairman Hite, Ranking Member Sykes and committee members. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate for education at the Catholic Conference of Ohio and legislative advocate for 376 Catholic schools enrolling more than 118,000 students.

II. GRF 200 511 (Auxiliary Services) & GRF 200 532 (Administrative Cost Reimbursement)

As each of you may know, Catholic and other chartered nonpublic school students benefit from Auxiliary Services and schools receive Administrative Cost Reimbursement if they hold charters from the State Board of Education and meet Ohio's Operating Standards, as prescribed by the State Board of Education.

Ohio's provision for chartering nonpublic schools is a great example of a quid pro quo: The state holds chartered nonpublic schools accountable to the Operating Standards; schools receive funding and services for their students in the name of the Child Benefit Theory.

Parity Principle – Over the years, the Governor and the General Assembly, as a matter of practice, have increased Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement Services by the same increases for basic aid for public school students.

This is known as the parity principle, though it is not statutorily required.

In the House passed budget, Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement received a slight increase -- .06 percent. The cap in ACR was adjusted from \$399 per pupil to \$405 per pupil to allow schools after filing claims for reimbursement, to access the dollars from the full appropriation.

Recommendation – Maintain House passed funding for both Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement, or increase these line items by the same percentage increase as districts would receive, based on similar enrollment patterns for public school student aid (parity principle).

We also ask that House passed non-budgetary provision be maintained so that Auxiliary Services funds can be utilized for instructional personnel to teach ELL students and for schools to purchase security equipment from AS.

III. Scholarship Programs

As each of you know, a new school-choice scholarship bill (SB 85) is pending in the Senate Education Committee that would provide income-based scholarships for K-12 students.

We believe SB 85 is the next step in Ohio's school choice movement. If approved, it will provide expanded opportunities for low-income and middle families to exercise their parental-choice rights.

The bill would absorb Ed Choice Scholarship students, Ed Choice Expansion students and Cleveland Scholarship students into a single program entitled the Ohio Opportunity Scholarship Program. The Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program and the Autism Scholarship Program are to continue as stand-alone programs.

Its time has arrived!

Sen. Huffman's new school version of parental choice legislation addresses old school concerns. For years, representatives of public schools have complained that programs such as traditional EdChoice are funded on the backs of public school students through a per pupil deduct.

SB 85 and House companion HB 200 are to be funded from a direct payment from Foundation Funding in lieu of extracting dollars from districts through a per-pupil deduction.

SB 85 also addresses a longstanding problem of inconsistencies from one program to another. These inconsistencies occur in requirements for providers, scholarship amounts and student requirements. By consolidating the Cleveland Scholarship Program, traditional EdChoice and EdChoice Expansion, SB 85 provides transparency and consistency in scholarship amounts, requirements, accountability, and a source of funding.

We believe SB 85 is the next step in Ohio's school choice movement and in doing so, will provide new found opportunities for families to exercise their parental-choice rights.

If this bill were to receive favorable passage, it would be established for the 2018-2019 school year. All five of Ohio's current school choice programs will be operational, at least for the 2017-2018 school year.

Working from funding levels in the House passed budget, the following recommendations are to ensure that funding is sufficient for the current school-choice programs at least over the next school year:

Increase the scholarship amounts in the Cleveland Scholarship Program from \$4,250 for K-8 students and \$5,700 for high school students to the levels in the traditional Ed Choice and Ed Choice Expansion programs, which are \$4,650 for K-8 and \$6,000 at the high school level.

Consultation with the ODE leads us to believe that amounts set aside in the House passed budget for the Cleveland Scholarship Program are sufficient to accommodate the increases.

Restore Funding in the EdChoice Expansion Program to the amount in the Executive budget. In the House passed budget, funding for the EdChoice Expansion Program was reduced. In consultation with ODE, we determined that an additional \$1 million is needed to cover entering kindergarten students, as well as students renewing their scholarships – including students moving up to fourth and fifth grades.

We are pleased that the House incorporated an open-enrollment provision for the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program.

As each of you may know, most special needs students are administered state tests or alternative assessments. However, there are special needs students whose test scores do not reflect their cognitive ability because their accommodations do not offset their disability.

We are asking in this limited circumstance that Peterson and Autism Scholarship students be exempt from state testing.

IV. College Credit Plus

There has been an unlevel playing field in respect to textbooks for students who participate in College Credit Plus. The Revised Code (3365.07) states:

(b) The participant's secondary school shall pay for textbooks, and the college shall waive payment of all other fees related to participation in the program.

We recommend a shared-cost approach with the secondary school and the applicable university/college.

IV. Opposing two provisions in the House passed budget

We oppose language in the House passed budget bill that exempts students participating in state-sponsored scholarship programs (such as EdChoice) from taking state assessments required for high school graduation if those students are enrolled in schools accredited by accredited by the Independent Schools Accreditation of Central States (ISACS).

Ohio, like other states, has a longstanding practice of transparency and accountability in school-choice programs.

If this exemption were to be codified in state statute, families of public school students and families of other non-ISACS accredited chartered nonpublic schools would rightfully question the rationale for state testing.

We also oppose the language requiring chartered nonpublic schools to publish on their website student enrollment, policies regarding background checks for employees and volunteers, and curricula and reading lists for each grade level.

We don't believe this provision is needed:

ADM for chartered nonpublic schools is reported annually to the ODE and is a matter of public record;

Ohio law requires that all certified or licensed employees of chartered nonpublic schools comply with existing statutes requiring criminal background checks;

Ohio's Operating standards require all chartered nonpublic schools to have graded courses of study. These are too large to post on a website. Not all chartered nonpublic schools even have reading lists, and in schools that do have them, the lists are usually course specific and often are optional.

And finally, we oppose the Independent Schools' proposal for a two year pilot program in which ISACS accredited schools would receive all of the benefits of chartered status without having to comply with most of the chartering provisions.

We believe this undermines the integrity of the chartering process, which has served well the state of Ohio, chartered nonpublic schools and students.

At this time, I would be pleased to answer any question.