



1500 W. Third Ave. #228
Columbus, OH 43212
Phone: (614) 285-4589
mail@ospaonline.org
www.ospaonline.org

**House Finance Subcommittee on Primary & Secondary Education
March 15, 2023
HB 33, State Operating Budget
Rachel Chilton, Executive Director, Ohio School Psychologists Association**

Chairwoman Richardson and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 33. I am Rachel Chilton, the Executive Director of the Ohio School Psychologists Association and I am here to testify on two issues related specifically to the profession of school psychology. Our association represents more than 700 school psychologists working in Ohio's schools.

Firstly, I would like to thank the governor for including in the state education budget the school psychology intern program special education enhancement funding. This program is vital to the Ohio school psychology profession as it supports the ODE-approved school psychology training programs by funding intern placements in school districts. We continue to experience shortages of school psychologists in many parts of the state. The university training programs address these shortages by working in their geographic regions to determine where the unmet needs are and then working with districts to establish intern placements.

This special education enhancement line item is funded at \$3 million in each fiscal year; however, we know that this amount actually underfunds the intended support to this program. The money in this line goes to school districts to allow them to pay a salary to the school psychologist intern, as has been the practice for more than 60 years. However, the salary was always meant to be based on the teacher minimum salary schedule, but when the legislature increased the schedule a few biennia ago, this line item was overlooked and not increased accordingly. It has therefore been underfunded for the last six years. We hope the legislature can see fit to increase the funding flowing to this program just to bring it up to where it was always meant to be. Doing so would require an increase to \$3.99 million in each year of the biennium.

This intern funding is the lifeblood of the Ohio School Psychology Intern program and is essential to its continuation and our continued efforts to fill the school psychologist shortage. It assures uniform, high quality training experiences. The majority of these interns take jobs in Ohio's schools. For your information I have attached a white paper describing in more depth that historical program as well as the computation that brings us to the \$3.99 million ask.

I would like to take a few moments to share with you what OSPA has done and continues to do, in partnership with others, to address the school psychologist shortage.



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The school psychology shortage has worsened in recent years primarily due to the STRS changes that occurred which encouraged licensed educators, including school psychologists to retire earlier than previously expected. We have nine Ohio and nationally approved school psychology graduate training programs and they collectively place 100 to 105 interns in approved school district intern sites for their last supervised year of training. This supply of school psychologists has until the last decade met the job placement demand for most school districts, except for some in the more remote rural pockets of the state, where recruitment and retention has been more challenging.

Over seven years ago OSPA formed a School Psychologist Shortage Task Force which focused on identifying the problem as well as recommending a multi-layered set of recommendations. I will be happy to make that report available to you. In addition to that report, ODE also facilitated a Related Service Provider Workgroup to Address Related Service Provider Shortages, OSPA had three representatives on that workgroup. Our work ended in February 2019 and the report is available on the ODE website. That report includes substantive recommendations, many of which are similar to the OSPA Task Force report recommendations. Part of the work of this workgroup was to produce a survey for related service providers, asking them certain recruitment and retention questions. The report includes that survey analysis and findings. We also produced helpful, brief, one page descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of each provider and videos of a representative of each profession explaining what services they provide to students, families and schools. Both of these products will be valuable educational and recruitment tools.

One very promising proposal that I would like to discuss with subcommittee members is the concept of a “grow your own” recruitment and retention model program to place school psychologists in the hardest to staff schools. The idea would be to provide incentive funding for the current university training programs to use to partner with ESCs or individual school districts to recruit professionals perhaps already working in the school district for placement in a part-time school psychology program. This training program would need to be part-time and delivered nearer to these shortage areas of the state. Currently, the University of Dayton is the only program that offers a part-time track and is positioned to pilot such work.

The funding sources for this model could perhaps be leveraged from a dedicated state funding pool matched with local school district funds, with the school psychologist interns being placed in these hard to staff schools. The desired outcome would result in the same school district hiring these individuals, where retention would likely occur since these employees already reside in the area where the shortages exist. This source of funding would need to be in addition to the state intern program funding currently in the state budget, as that is needed for the 100+ current interns in each cohort group. Some of the current interns are being placed in under-served school districts through an intentional process, agreed to by the nine approved programs. I would be happy to provide more information about this.



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I would additionally like to acknowledge the university training programs, all of which have expanded their acceptance numbers to the allowable maximum in order to help address the shortage. OSPA works collaboratively with them in our solution-based efforts.

I would like to make note of several other elements of the budget, which OSPA supports. We are pleased to see funding dedicated to supporting the implementation of science of reading-based literacy instruction. The Science of Reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This accounts for 50+ years of study across the world from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties. Science of reading informs us that word identification plus linguistic/language skills yields comprehending text. It is challenging to gain meaning from text without both of those skills.

Additionally, OSPA supports:

- Support for OhioRise, which aids children with the most complex behavioral and mental health needs by providing a more streamlined process to ensure they get continued care and communication across agencies.
- Additional funds for the new 988 suicide prevention line.
- Continued phase in of the Cupp-Patterson school funding formula.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.