



Testimony on HB33 **March 23, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB33. My name is Abbie Sigmon, and I am the incoming executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). (For more information about gifted education, please see the [2022 State of Gifted Education](#)).

Gifted education funding in Ohio has gone through multiple revisions over the last decade. The current formula is based on a 2018 gifted cost study whose recommendations were largely incorporated into the Cupp-Patterson funding bill. The current formula provides allocations for gifted identification, gifted coordinator, gifted intervention specialists, and gifted professional development for general education teachers. This formula provided approximately \$74 million in FY2022 (after caps and guarantees). In addition, \$3.8 million is allocated to ESCs (Educational Service Centers) for gifted coordinator and intervention specialist units. HB110, the last biennial budget bill, also included several provisions to increase gifted accountability and transparency. These provisions are just now being implemented and unfortunately many of the provisions will sunset if HB33 is not amended to ensure that they continue. These provisions are incredibly important as gifted children are the only children not required to be served according to their needs in Ohio. If Ohio policymakers are truly committed to workforce development, requiring gifted services needs to be an integral part of the equation.

Major Concerns Regarding HB33

Before going into our requests for changes to HB33, it is important to take a minute to thank the governor for increasing the ESC gifted unit funding from \$3.8 million to \$5.4 million. This is the first increase in many years. ESCs report spending over \$11 million on gifted staffing and services. Many of these ESCs provide services to smaller, rural districts that would have no services without the support of ESCs. While \$5.4 million is well below the \$8.1 million that ESCs received a decade ago, it is a welcome improvement. ***OAGC believes ESCs supporting smaller, lower-wealth districts should be given priority in funding.***

OAGC also welcomes the governor's merit scholarship which would provide a \$5,000 scholarship to the top 5% of students in each district for those that attend a state-funded college or university. We do believe, however, that this will exacerbate the friction between students taking College Credit Plus courses versus those taking Advanced Placement, IB, and other courses. Weighted grades, already important, will become even more so to students fighting to be in the top 5%. ***OAGC believes it might be useful to incorporate a non-GPA factor in the merit scholarship criteria (e.g., ACT or SAT scores) to ease the inevitable increase in pressure on weighted grades due to the new scholarship.***

Maintain the Accountability and Transparency of Gifted Funds, Services, and Staffing

With regard to improvements to gifted education funding, our main request is to maintain and improve the gifted accountability and transparency measures that were added in the last budget bill. As critical as funding is, accountability for the use of gifted funds is equally as important. The measures in the last

budget bill are just now being implemented. While improving, 270 districts still report spending less state gifted funding than they receive. If these districts are allowed to sunset, districts will go back to spending gifted funds in the formula on anything they want with impunity.

OAGC requests the following provisions be added to HB33 to improve this situation:

- 1. Maintain and improve the level of accountability for gifted funding by strengthening the language that requires all districts to spend state gifted funding on the elements included in the gifted cost study formula.**
- 2. Maintain the requirement for ODE to collect and post data on gifted services offered by each district by grade band as well as the number of licensed gifted personnel employed or contracted by the district. This data is already collected by ODE and would allow parents to determine the types and levels of services provided to gifted students.**
- 3. Maintain the requirement that ODE report the amount of state gifted funds provided to each district in the gifted expenditure report already produced by the ODE.**

Unreasonable Gifted Student to Gifted Intervention Specialist Student Ratio

OAGC would like to see a few changes to the gifted formula such as updated salary figures and coordinator to ADM ratios. However, the major concern OAGC has regarding the gifted formula is the ratio between gifted students to gifted intervention specialists in grades K-6 which is 140:1. This ratio stretches gifted intervention specialists to a level that degrades services to gifted students. While there are many ways to serve gifted students, some of which are lower cost, this ratio goes well above the recommended level in the gifted operating standards at 80:1 for students in self-contained or cluster-group settings. **The 140:1 Gifted Student/Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio needs to be reviewed and reduced to a more reasonable level. OAGC recommends the ratio of 100:1. The approximate cost of this change would be \$15 million when the formula is fully funded. A ratio of 120:1 would cost approximately \$7.5 million.**

ESC Rural Incentive Funding

As part of SB310, ODE commissioned a study on how Ohio could provide incentives to rural districts to better serve gifted students. This report can be accessed at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H0fdljre020GUH6uAACsFkiPBfSQ3YKn/view>. The report's authors recommended that the state provide multi-year incentive grants to rural districts. Unfortunately, it does not appear that these grants are part of HB33. **OAGC recommends that language and funds be included in HB33 to provide incentive grants to rural districts in order to increase gifted services. We believe \$1.5 - \$3 million would allow ODE to begin a rural gifted incentive pilot program.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact OAGC if you have any questions.

For more information, please contact OAGC Executive Director, Ann Sheldon at anngift@aol.com or 614-325-1185 or OAGC Incoming Executive Director, Abbie Sigmon at abbiesigmon@gmail.com.