

May 9, 2023

Dear Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Minority Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on HB 33. I am submitting written testimony on behalf of Ohio's 51 Educational Service Centers to support an amendment to Am. Sub. H.B. 33, which updates educational service center (ESC) funding consistent with all other K-12 educational entities. The requested amendment would benefit all districts, schools, and students served by ESCs.

As you know, Ohio's 51 educational service centers are the central component of the Ohio Educational Regional Service System (ERSS) under Chapter 3312 of the Ohio Revised Code. In this role, ESCs support state and regional education initiatives and efforts to improve school effectiveness and student achievement.

Since 2020, ODE has built knowledge and resource capacity in the ESC network to sustain learning acceleration efforts long-term and improve outcomes for all students regardless of where they live and attend school. A review of ODE personnel data shows the number of unique employee IDs increased over 25% from 2020 to 2022 (12,632 to 15,815) - operational costs increased accordingly from recruiting, onboarding, housing, and supporting these employees. The increased phase-in of state support will provide continuity and stability of service delivery and sustain learning acceleration supports.

ESCs provide coordination of special education services and programs, coordinate ESC business advisory councils (BACs) (approximately 90% of all district BACs), and are required to carry out any activities charged to them by the General Assembly and or the Ohio Department of Education. Among those activities, we have taken on new roles and responsibilities in partnership with the state of Ohio including surveying districts on policies and education delivery models, supporting learning acceleration, providing literacy supports, employment of family and communication engagement liaisons, deployment of professional learning and technical assistance, coordination of prevention education initiatives and threat assessment training (CSTAG), and more. These increased roles and responsibilities have increased ESC-related operational expenses.

In addition to services provided, ESCs are good stewards of the public dollar. Over the past 7 years, according to data from the state's high-performing ESC application process, ESCs have generated an average annual savings of 35.31% in five service areas alone amounting to \$496.8 million in total savings to school districts and the state of Ohio since FY 2016.

To maintain this level of service and meet increasing demand, the operating subsidy needs to be addressed. This includes ensuring ESCs are positioned to carry out work in support of literacy initiatives and other key state level priorities including, importantly, those priorities identified in the 2-year budget.

Today, ESCs serve 6% more districts and 13% more students than in 2008 with the addition of city and exempted village school districts. ESC State Operating Funds had been reduced by - 23% over that same time until HB 110 and adoption of a new ESC funding model. Additionally, ESC lost facilities support and supervisory unit funding. When reductions in the state subsidy and elimination of unit funding are combined, overall funding to ESCs had been reduced 47% between 2008 and 2022 (pre-HB 110 (134<sup>th</sup> GA)).

Unfortunately, in Am. Sub. H.B. 33, ESC funding (unlike funding for traditional public school districts and other entities) was not updated or enhanced over the “as introduced” version of the budget and is not reflective of today’s actual operating costs. To treat ESCs the same as traditional public schools could be accomplished by adopting these amendments. This would produce an \$8.9 million increase over the executive budget in FY 2024 and \$11.9 million above in FY 2025; this is \$20.8 million more over the biennium, which is consistent with increases for other entities.

Consequently, I am asking for your support to make much needed changes to HB 33 before it is finalized.

A copy of the amendment offered in the House is attached for your review and consideration. I appreciate any support you can give us and if you have any questions, I would be more than happy to meet with you at your convenience.

Respectfully,

*Lori Snyder-Lowe*

Lori Snyder-Lowe  
Superintendent