



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

**Senate Finance Committee  
May 31, 2023  
HB 33, State Operating Budget  
Rachel Chilton, Executive Director, Ohio School Psychologists Association**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, 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 issues related specifically to the profession of school psychology. Our association represents more than 800 school psychologists. I am joined today by Jennifer Glenn, a school psychologist and president-elect of our association.

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. Just as House has proposed in this sub bill, the legislature several biennia ago also increased the teacher minimum salary schedule. At that time, however, the school psych intern line item was overlooked and the related funding has not increased accordingly to fulfill the minimum salary standard. Consequently, Ohio's universities have been training the same number of interns but paying them below the intended level. We also know that other states have offered higher salaries to Ohio students to do their internships elsewhere. Michigan, for instance, offers \$40,000 plus tuition reimbursement. With University of Toledo and University of Findlay near the border, this creates a considerable threat to keeping those students in Ohio.

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 \$4.86 million in each year of the biennium if the House version of the teacher schedule is retained. To meet the current teacher salary schedule, the line would need to be funded at \$3.99 million.



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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 and the computation that brings us to the \$4.86 million ask as well as the amount required should the increase to the teacher minimum salary not be included in the final budget.

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. 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. Additionally, OSPA a few years ago formed clubs at universities to expose undergraduates to the field and gain an early commitment to apply to school psych programs.

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.



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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 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:

- Elimination of the retention element of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.
- 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.
- Updates to and 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.



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## Ohio School Psychology Intern Program Funding Information

Historical background: Jointly developed by OSPA, ODE, and the Ohio university training programs over 60 years ago for the purpose of placing highly trained Ohio school psychologists in Ohio's public school districts. It began as a unit-funded type program with ODE administering the funds to school districts based on the number of intern school psychologists placed in approved intern site locations (school districts). Over various school funding formula changes it has evolved into a special education enhancement line item and up until the 2017/18 budget had been flat-funded for several biennium budgets. The 2017-18 budget provided \$3 Million in each of the 2 fiscal years, increasing the total line item by \$500,000. The line item funds interns in their third and final year of training when they are placed in a school setting for that approved, structured, and supervised training year. The funding goes to the school district to pay the interns a salary stipend based on the teacher salary schedule.

It is a collaborative program developed with ODE, OSPA, and the Inter-University Council of School Psychology Training programs (9 approved Ohio programs). The IUC of School Psychology in collaboration with OSPA and ODE has developed an Intern Program Guidance Manual, with uniform training and supervision requirements, as well as a thorough intern program evaluation report, which includes specific student outcome data.

The program has allowed the universities and OSPA to work with ODE on the goals of placing highly trained school psychologists in hard-to-staff schools, those that are experiencing shortages of available school psychologists. This unfortunately is occurring more acutely in recent school years and the universities have made a commitment to recruit more students than they have in the past, so they may better account for attrition rates (students not graduating from the programs). The goal is to have at least 100 interns graduate every year. This number has fluctuated in recent years from the high 80s to the mid-90s. The goal was reached in the 2018-19 school year when 103 interns were placed in Ohio's schools.

School psychologists are essential members of school teams in a variety of areas. School psychologists are highly trained in the multi-layered area of educational assessments, including selecting which diagnostic assessments are best to use to determine a student's academic level and progress, assisting school-based evaluation teams in interpreting assessment results, and using the data gleaned from assessments to both design interventions and monitor the progress students are making during the intervention period. School psychologists also serve on evaluation teams responsible for evaluating students referred to them with a suspected disability, as well as assisting in the development of IEPs. Additionally, they are highly trained in the mental health arena; they frequently serve students and districts in the design and implementation of positive behavioral supports and behavioral interventions. They also serve on school crisis teams responsible for developing plans and delivering mental health services under the most difficult of circumstances. The school psychology intern program is the foundational year of training that prepares future school psychologists to master these competencies.



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The state funding of the intern program assures there will be sufficient numbers of highly trained future school psychologists to serve students and districts. Without the continued state funding we would lose this long history of collaboration between ODE and the university training programs, as there would be no incentive to continue to work together to produce the best school psychology training, which Ohio is well known to provide.

There continues to be a need to increase the number of interns to address statewide shortages. The Ohio IUC of School Psychology program's recent projections indicates there will be 97 interns in the 2023-2024 school year and 110 interns in the 2024-2025 school year. This will require additional funding in the next state biennial budget. Additional funding could also be used to incentivize the development of a targeted "grow your own" program for the areas of the state experiencing the more acute shortages.

**For the upcoming state budget, ODE/OEC and OSPA recommend funding the special education enhancement intern program funding accordingly:**

For both fiscal years: funding for up to 108 interns at a base of \$32,805 plus 12.5% benefits= \$36,956 (based on teacher minimum salary plus benefits in 2023).

This recommendation requires the line item to be funded at **\$3,991,000** for each fiscal year of the biennium.

If the proposed increase in the teacher minimum salary is enacted, for both fiscal years: funding for up to 108 interns at a base of \$40,000 plus 12.5% benefits = \$45,000.

This recommendation requires the line item to be funded at **\$4,860,000**.

Additional funding would be necessary for ODE/OEC to establish a "grow your own" funding initiative to place interns in the hardest to staff schools.

**Other States:** We know that we have lost and are losing some of our students in their intern year to other states offering a better salary. For instance:

Michigan: \$40,000 for internship plus tuition reimbursement (University of Toledo and University of Findlay near the border)

Pennsylvania: Actively recruiting out-of-state interns with a grant from Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Utah, Maryland, North Carolina have in recent years drawn Miami University students out of state because of higher compensation packages.