



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

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OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
House Finance Committee
House Bill 96 – Interested Party Testimony
March 13, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Scott DiMauro. I am in my 34th year in education, which includes 16 years in the classroom as a high school social studies teacher in Worthington City Schools. I currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of the approximately 120,000 members of the OEA, we look forward to working with the members of the Ohio legislature to ensure all of Ohio's public school students have the resources and supports needed to succeed in our schools and in life. The following are some of our positions regarding the governor's proposal in House Bill (HB) 96, the budget bill for Fiscal Years (FY) 2026 and 2027.

School Funding

I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the members of the 134th and 135th General Assemblies who supported, secured passage, and updated the components of the Fair School Funding Plan. This funding model, if implemented as intended, provides a transparent, student-centered formula that is based upon how much it costs to educate a child and how much a local community can afford to contribute to these costs.

The budget proposal before you continues the phase-in (years 5 and 6) of the funding plan. However, the proposal continues to use base cost components from FY 22 data while the local share of funding (property and income values) is based on more current data. This results in a disparity in support, with the local share of funding education increasing and state responsibility decreasing.

Based on initial simulations from the Ohio Legislative Services Commission (LSC), this imbalance is illustrated by traditional district formula funding decreasing over the biennium by approximately \$103 million when compared to FY 25 funding. Approximately 343 school districts (56%) experience a decrease in state formula funding from FY 25 to FY 26 and 360 districts (59%) in state formula funding from FY 26 to FY 27. Of the districts that would see state aid decline over the biennium, 61 districts have seen enrollment growth since FY 22. This is a direct result of updating the local capacity side of the equation but not the base cost inputs.

Further, analysis by the Ohio Education Policy Institute (OEPI) indicates that the statewide average state share percentage decreases from 43.3% in FY 24 to 32.2% in FY 27. This is an 11.1 percentage point decrease in state responsibility to support education. The result is an increase in the burden borne by



local communities and is in opposition to the DeRolph decision that the state should move away from an over-reliance on local property taxes to fund Ohio's schools.

The Executive Budget also proposes to make changes to the school funding guarantee by reducing the funding to 95 percent in FY 26 and 90 percent in FY 27. Under the as-introduced proposal, guarantee funding would still increase from \$285.1 million in FY 25 to \$564.7 million in FY 27. While enrollment is one reason why school districts may be placed on a funding guarantee, enrollment is held constant at FY 25 levels in FY 26 and FY 27 in the LSC simulation and thus enrollment change is not a factor driving the increase in guarantee funding under this proposal. Instead, the increase in guarantee funding can be attributed to the decrease in the state share index caused by not updating the base cost components and local capacity simultaneously.

Lastly, OEA believes strong consideration should be given to the cost study recommendations of students with disabilities and English learners released in December 2022. OEA also looks forward to seeing the recommendations of the economically disadvantaged cost study that was funded in House Bill 33 from the 135th General Assembly. We know that greater resources and support will help increase the educational outcomes for these students. Unfortunately, if the state fails to start implementing these recommendations they will soon be outdated (i.e. students with disabilities and English learners) and would need to be revisited.

OEA believes it's time to fulfill Ohio's commitment to the students who attend public schools and our communities by updating and fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan. Failure to do so will result in consequences at the local level such as larger class sizes, loss of academic programs and supports, and loss of educators. All of this has a harmful effect on Ohio's public school students.

Private School Vouchers

A further area of concern is the continued growth in funding for voucher programs. In the current school year Ohio is spending over \$1 billion on vouchers—using taxpayer money to fund private school tuition. In the proposed budget, this figure is estimated to increase by \$176.8 million (or 16.5%) by FY 2027. In contrast, formula funding for traditional public schools is reduced over the biennium.

Around 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools. We ask you to focus state resources on these students. We acknowledge that voucher programs are not going away and that the overall cost of the programs will increase if student participation increases. However, this should not come at the expense of public-school students as it does in the proposed budget. Further, we call on the legislature to bring much-needed fiscal and academic accountability to private schools that participate in voucher programs. In fact, in a survey recently OEA recently commissioned, Ohioans overwhelmingly support increased academic accountability and fiscal transparency policies for these schools. Our research showed that 80.2 percent of Ohioans surveyed support new accountability measures that would require private schools to meet the same academic accountability and fiscal transparency requirements that are required of local public schools.

Student Assessment

OEA has concerns with language in the bill (Sec. 3301.0715) that removes an exemption from certain diagnostic assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Rather than current law which states the section does not apply to these students, new language requires districts to administer a diagnostic assessment to a student with significant cognitive disabilities in accordance with guidelines adopted by the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW). For a limited number of students with the most severe cognitive disabilities, such assessments may not be academically appropriate. We would like to better understand the reason for this proposed change and what the proposed guidelines would be.

Teacher Assignment

OEA believes it is in the best interests of all students to have a teacher who is licensed, trained, and prepared in the subjects and grade levels they are assigned to teach. OEA opposes budget language that appears to authorize, or encourage, teacher assignment without regard to teacher license qualifications or specific training requirements required by the Ohio General Assembly. For example, the Ohio General Assembly has deemed it to be in the best interests of students to require many teachers to complete professional development training in both the science of reading and instruction to students with dyslexia. Does the teacher assignment language mean a superintendent's conclusion about what is in the "best interests" of students can be made without consideration of any contrary licensure or training requirements established by the Ohio General Assembly? Abandoning objective standards and qualifications to guide teacher assignment makes it less likely that all students will have a trained and prepared educator in every classroom.

Further, reducing clarity and guidance regarding teacher assignment may also complicate compliance with federal laws and funding designed to protect the interests of students, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Limiting the voice of teachers in this process by excluding these issues from the collaborative process of collective bargaining only exacerbates our concerns. OEA requests removal of the teacher assignment language in HB 96.

School Employee Vacancy Survey

OEA supports the school employee vacancy survey contained in HB 96, which will help provide data to guide recruitment and support strategies that will ensure all students have highly trained and prepared school employees. There currently is no central source of information to allow for accurate, real-time tracking of educator shortages or surpluses at the state level. This survey will allow policymakers in the State legislature and DEW to create sound policy to address the educator shortage issues based on data to help pinpoint hard-to-fill positions and monitor the trends to allow for long-term strategic planning to close these staffing gaps. OEA plans to share some suggested amendment language to add some additional positions to the survey.

Elimination of Summative Assessment (Video) of Resident Educator Program

OEA supports elimination of the summative assessment video that has served as the final assessment portion of the resident educator program. While well intended, the requirement for resident educators to submit a video of themselves providing instruction in a classroom setting to obtain full licensure has often created more distractions for educators and classrooms than is necessarily justified for a strong induction program.

However, OEA is requesting an amendment to fix new language related to the elimination of the video that inadvertently entangles teacher evaluations with teacher licensure (resident educator program) by allowing evaluations to be used as part of the teacher residency program. It is important to maintain separation between the requirements for teacher evaluation, which are used for local employment decisions, and requirements for the resident educator licensure program, which is used to transition from a two-year resident educator license to a five-year professional educator license. Maintaining this distinction between the processes for evaluations and licensure recognizes that an educator license is a statewide employment credential granted by the State Board of Education, whereas teacher evaluations are used by schools to make employment decisions regarding licensed educators. OEA has a proposed amendment that deletes language entangling evaluation and licensure and clarifies that completion of the resident educator program be determined by successfully completing two program years, including all mentoring program and professional development requirements.

In conclusion, Ohio must ensure that Ohio's public school students have the resources that allow them to reach their full potential. This concludes my testimony. OEA looks forward to working with this committee and the legislature on making improvements to House Bill 96.