



March 11, 2025

House Finance Testimony

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Abbie Sigmon and I am the executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). With nearly 1,000 members, OAGC promotes and supports the development of gifted students in Ohio by advocating on their behalf. Gifted students, by definition in the Ohio Revised code, are those “students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience, or environment.”

There are more than 225,000 identified gifted students in Ohio (16% of Ohio’s K-12 students). The state of Ohio has a gifted identification mandate with no gifted service mandate. Comparatively, we have fewer than 940 Gifted Intervention Specialists (GISs) and fewer than 1,150 gifted staff - including ESC staff to serve these students. While I will be discussing specific changes to the Operating Budget, it is important to note that these ratios of gifted staff to gifted students are deeply unsatisfactory and directly contribute to the daily burnout, struggles, and exhaustion of gifted staff.

§3317.022 Gifted Professional Development Funds

The 2018 Gifted Cost Study performed by the Ohio Education Research Center under the purview of the then Ohio Department of Education outlined four main gifted cost recommendations: identification, professional development, gifted coordinators, and gifted instructional services. These recommendations from the OERC have shaped gifted funding in this state, however; the gifted cost study inexplicably assumed that professional development for general education educators could be eliminated in four years. Professional development for general education educators is an ongoing cost and should be funded as such.

Gifted services in Ohio have expanded by over 300% in less than a decade. And, as previously mentioned, staff to gifted student ratios are so vast that these students must be served by general education teachers who have the knowledge and understanding of their unique needs, abilities, and capabilities. According to the Gifted Rule (OAC 3301-51-15), general education teachers who are designated service providers and do not otherwise have licensure or endorsement in gifted education must receive professional development in gifted education covering specific competencies from qualifying providers. The removal of this section of the

ORC is not consistent with Ohio's requirements for general education teachers providing gifted services.

Please retain previous budget language: Gifted professional development funds calculated to the following formula: The greater of the number of gifted students enrolled in the district as certified under division (B)(22) of § 3317.03 of the Revised Code and ten per cent of the district's enrolled ADM) X the district's state share percentage X \$1, for fiscal year 2024, or \$28 for fiscal year 2025. The most recent estimates for Fiscal Year 2025 from the School Funding Payment Report (SFPR) estimate that gifted professional development will cost the state of Ohio just over \$2 million a year.

Student:GIS Ratios

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.

Gifted students are frequently presumed to thrive independent of academic intervention or support. This assumption is both misleading and detrimental to a gifted child's development. Gifted children must be provided with challenges that align with their exceptional abilities, or they risk social and emotional struggles, boredom, and chronic underachievement. Ignoring the unique needs of this student population does a disservice to their capabilities. I strongly urge this committee to adequately fund services for these students when considering gifted funding in HB96, ensuring they receive the appropriate resources and opportunities to fulfill their potential.

Thank you to the members of this committee for listening to my testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

For more information, please contact OAGC Executive Director, Abbie Sigmon, at: (330) 495-5230 or executivedirector@oagc.com.