



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  
Senate Education Committee  
Substitute House Bill 96 – Interested Party Testimony  
Wednesday, May 7, 2025**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Scott DiMauro. I am in my 34<sup>th</sup> 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 (OEA). On behalf of the nearly 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 support needed to succeed while in school and in life. The following are some of our positions regarding proposals contained in Substitute House Bill (HB) 96, the budget bill for Fiscal Years (FY) 2026 and 2027.

**School Funding**

There is no greater investment than ensuring Ohio's children have the resources and support needed to succeed. While OEA acknowledges that the House proposed budget includes an increase in public school funding over the next biennium, when compared to FY2025 funding levels, we remain alarmed that the school funding proposal, as passed by the House, falls woefully short of ensuring that the state is adequately and equitably funding public schools and providing needed predictability of state support.

OEA remains supportive of the Fair School Funding formula that was passed in House Bill 110 from the 134th General Assembly and subsequently updated via House Bill 33 in the 135th General Assembly. This funding model, if implemented as intended, provides a stable and consistent student-centered formula focused on how much it costs to educate a child. Finally, we urge the General Assembly to support updating the cost inputs, as this is key to meeting the needs of Ohio's students.

**School District Carryover Balances**

OEA has serious concerns with a newly added provision that would limit a school district's year-over-year carryover fund to 30% of the previous fiscal year's operating expenses. Under the proposal in the bill, funds more than 30% would be used to reduce property taxes. School districts carry over funds for a variety of factors. These include, but are not limited to, planning for the uncertainty of state funding they receive every two years from the state's operating budget, desire to limit levy frequency, funds for programs that previously were funded through federal ESSR dollars, building maintenance and capital improvements, long term planning for purchases and anticipated increases in material and supply costs.



The House's carryover policy would impact approximately 484 school districts resulting in a loss of billions of dollars, forcing school districts to cut student programming while putting them at risk of financial instability. Additionally, this provision will force school districts to return to the ballot more often and lead to voter confusion. While there is a need to address increased property taxes, OEA is opposed to this provision and recommends its removal from the budget bill. This provision, coupled with the lack of a school funding formula that provides sufficient state support, will cripple school districts.

Additionally, the House version of the budget amends the duration for school district operational revenue and expenditure forecasts from five to three years. Cutting the length of the forecast from five to three years reduces the ability of Ohio school districts to engage in fiscally responsible financial planning and be an efficient steward of taxpayer dollars. For this reason, OEA requests that the change to the five-year forecast made by the Ohio House be removed from the budget.

### **Vouchers**

The House version of the budget creates yet another voucher program to use taxpayer money to pay private school tuition. OEA opposes this provision of the bill. The proposal creates an "education savings account" for students who attend non-chartered private schools. These schools eschew the scant state oversight applied to voucher recipient schools and as such are exempt from the state's current voucher programs. Experience from states like Arizona shows that this type of program is ripe for waste, fraud, and abuse. Ohio, with the ECOT scandal in its recent history, would be wise to avoid going down this road.

Additionally, the creation of this program will significantly add to the over \$1 billion a year that the state spends on private school tuition. The explosion of funding for private school vouchers undercuts the ability to fully and adequately fund Ohio's public schools. OEA calls upon the legislature to prioritize funding for public schools that serve around 90% of Ohio's students and are open to all.

OEA is also opposed to the expansion of eligibility for the existing Jon Peterson and Autism voucher programs. The substitute bill expands eligibility to students from age 3 to 22, for non-chartered private school students and those who are home schooled. Additionally, the bill would also allow for services to be provided virtually. These changes both increase the cost and decrease the accountability and oversight of the funds.

### **Teacher Assignment**

OEA requests the removal of budget language that would allow teachers to be assigned without regard to the subject and grades they are licensed in, and without any confirmation that a teacher has completed mandated professional development in areas such as the science of reading or dyslexia instruction. Abandoning objective standards and qualifications to guide teacher assignment shortchanges students and taxpayers by making it less likely that all students will have a trained and prepared educator in every classroom. Further, allowing such a lackadaisical approach to teacher assignment risks lowering student test scores and school report card grades.

OEA believes it is in the best interest of all students to have teachers who are licensed, trained, and prepared in the subjects and grade levels they are assigned to teach. Further, we note that while Ohio law requires school districts to notify parents that they may request information on the professional qualifications of each classroom teacher that instructs their student, it does not mandate notice for when their children have been assigned a teacher who is not licensed in the subject or grades being taught.

### **Teacher Licensure and Evaluation**

OEA requests removal of budget language that would inappropriately entangle the process for earning a statewide teaching license with local processes for evaluating teachers. As a professional issue, it has always been important to maintain separation between teacher licensure and teacher evaluation because they serve very different purposes. A teaching license is a statewide employment credential granted by the State Board of Education that means an individual has met qualifications to teach certain grades and subjects anywhere in the state. By contrast, teacher evaluations are a separate process used by local school districts to inform personnel decisions for teachers who are already licensed and have been employed by a school district.

While we support the elimination of the video requirement of the Resident Educator (RE) program contained in the governor's proposal, OEA requests removal of budget language that would inappropriately mix these two processes together. The entangling of teacher licensure and evaluation programs will cause problems with teacher supply by allowing an individual's statewide license to be revoked based on a local evaluation instead of licensure qualifications. OEA believes the budget language that confuses teacher licensure and evaluation processes may be the result of a drafting error related to the RE budget provision that OEA supports.

### **Testing Provisions**

OEA supports the House's restoration of testing exemptions and alternative assessments in current law for students with severe cognitive disabilities as this restores district flexibility in diagnostic testing.

Further, the bill eliminates the requirement that districts administer the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). The KRA provides useful data about students to educators and policymakers. However, administration of the test is seen by many educators to be onerous and time consuming. It comes early in the school year when students are adjusting to classroom norms and the demands on educators are especially high. Educators can assess the needs and capabilities of their students in other ways. OEA supports this reduction of state-mandated testing to restore time for teaching and learning in the classroom.

### **Financial Literacy Instruction Exemptions**

OEA requests removal of the budget provision allowing a school district to adopt a policy to excuse students from the financial literacy high school graduation requirement if they participate in a financial literacy program offered through the student branch of a credit union or by a bank during

high school. While the policy must require the financial literacy program to meet or exceed the state standards and model curriculum for financial literacy, there is no requirement that instructors be licensed educators nor is there guidance as to how long or where a student would participate in such a program.

OEA also requests adjusting the proposed high school graduation requirements related to “competency-based educational programs” for students aged 18 years or older by removing the option to apply the completion of one-half credit of financial literacy to the requirement to complete three credits of social studies. This effectively reduces the required social studies credits to 2.5 credits. Less time spent on social studies is not in the best interest of students. While financial literacy instruction is important, it should not come at the cost of a comprehensive social studies education.

### **Transportation Workgroup**

The House substitute bill proposes the creation of a transportation workgroup to annually monitor and review the student transportation system and develop recommendations for changes to better meet the transportation needs of Ohio students. OEA supports this recommendation and requests that bus drivers be included in this workgroup.

### **State Board of Education**

OEA opposes a provision in the bill that would silence the voice of the public by removing elected members from the State Board of Education (SBOE). Two years ago, the legislature curtailed the authority of the State Board of Education by removing most of its duties. Now, the House version of the budget bill would remove all elected members from the SBOE and reduce the Board to five members appointed by the governor. OEA’s legislative policies call for a fully elected school board.

Additionally, OEA is concerned with the proposed changes in the House version of HB 96 regarding the way that the SBOE is funded. OEA opposes any increase in teacher licensure fees to pay for any potential gap in funding from the state.

### **School Staffing Survey**

OEA supports the school employee vacancy survey contained in Governor DeWine’s executive budget proposal and asks the Senate to reinstate this provision after it was removed by the House in its version of HB 96. A school employee vacancy survey will help provide data to guide recruitment and support strategies that will ensure all students have highly trained and prepared school employees. There is currently 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 legislature and DEW to create sound policy to address 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.

## **Religious Release Time**

While OEA opposes the religious release time mandate in current law because it causes students to lose valuable instructional time and disrupts school operations, OEA supports the right for local school districts to set limits on the amount of time a student may leave school grounds to attend a religious release time program. OEA recommends removing the religious release time provision proposed by the House version of the budget, permitting local school districts to set the time parameters that best fit their district's needs.

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

Chair Brenner, this concludes my remarks. I stand ready to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.