

May 22nd, 2025

Senate Finance Testimony

Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today. My name is Erica Baer-Woods, Director of Student Achievement and Gifted Learning for the Midwest Regional ESC as well as President of OAGC (the Ohio Association for Gifted Children). I bring to this testimony over 25 years of experience in education, including 10 years as a public school administrator (current role); 15 years of private school teaching at the high school level (Troy Christian, ELA); and 10 years as member of the Board of a prestigious private school in Troy (the Overfield School). Additionally, I represent not only the 11 districts across the three counties I currently serve, but also the over 800 educators and the over 225,000 gifted-identified students in Ohio (16% of Ohio's K-12 students) served by OAGC. It is with these elements in mind that I bring concerns about the implications of HB 96 as it currently stands -- not only for educators and students, but also for Ohio's families.

First and foremost, in looking at the [implications of the budget](#) *as currently proposed* for the counties where I serve (impact estimates, 3/4/25, provided by BASA), the vast majority of districts which will experience a decrease in funding (tan section, yellow highlights) are comprised of *our most vulnerable students* -- students who fall below Federal poverty guidelines, receive free and reduced lunches, and often experience fairly unstable situations, from transience to homelessness. *It is these students and their families who -- when most in need of additional supports such as smaller class sizes; after-school programming (including interventions and enrichment opportunities); and the availability of advanced coursework (for gifted students) -- will be most hurt by these significant reductions.* Additionally, capping the state share at FY 26 levels as well as limiting carryover will likely prove burdensome to smaller communities and detrimental to educational quality. With less available revenue from the state, local communities will be required to rely on levies to supplement the budget. If/ when said levies do not pass, reductions in staff of all types -- aides for struggling learners, special education teachers, classroom teachers, and gifted intervention specialists -- will be required, resulting in larger class sizes and a reduction in both challenging instruction (for gifted students) and specialized supports (for struggling learners).

Again, I reiterate: these cuts will adversely impact our students who are -- already -- the most vulnerable, reducing opportunity for rigor, for challenge, for growth, and for excellence. We simply cannot afford the opportunity cost engendered by this budget: the expedience of short-term cuts may very well result in long-term implications of opportunities lost (for students): with decreased rigor, Ohio's already vulnerable students will be less competitive for both college and careers. With lost opportunity, Ohio's students most in need of our encouragement and support (both in belief and in providing resources) may become least likely to break the cycle of poverty. Providing excellence



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in public education results in additional excellence for our state: It is with this in mind that I respectfully request the following:

1. Remove the FY 26 cap from the state share and revert at least to FY 24 state share percentages.
2. Allow schools to continue having carryover: reward their strong stewardship.
3. Retain the following 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." This will enable classroom teachers who serve gifted identified students to receive the professional development required by law.
4. Align the gifted intervention specialist - to - student caseload ratio to a reasonable number. The current 140:1 ratio is not sustainable (resulting in diluted services and teacher burnout.) A 100:1 ratio would cost just \$15 million (with full foundation funding); a 120:1 ratio would cost \$7.5 million. (Statistics courtesy of Abbie Sigmon, OAGC.)

All of Ohio's students -- from our most vulnerable to our most intelligent -- deserve access to the educational opportunities that will best promote their growth, allowing them to thrive and achieve their fullest potential. It is often erroneously assumed that "gifted" students, because they are "already smart", will "be just fine" no matter their educational circumstances. Yet through providing strong funding; logical and reasonable teacher-to-student ratios; and strong support for professional development, we can not only provide the challenge and encouragement our students (including the gifted) need, but also ensure that these opportunities are available to all of Ohio's families, regardless of their family circumstances or geography.

Thank you, esteemed members, for your attention and consideration. Should you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out via email ([ebaer-woods@mresc.org](mailto:ebaer-woods@mresc.org)) or phone (937) 498-1354, x. 7004.

All the best,

*Erica Baer-Woods*

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