

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Testimony of Terry Graves-Strieter, Superintendent, Greene County ESC
Regarding Educational Service Center (ESC) Funding
May 29, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony on the critical need for adequate and updated funding for Ohio's Educational Service Centers (ESCs) as part of the FY 2026-2027 biennial state operating budget.

My name is Terry Graves-Strieter and I have been Superintendent of the Greene County ESC (GCESC) for ten years, now. Our GCESC serves seven school districts, one career center, as well as private and charter schools. We serve over 23,000 students across Greene County. I would like to ask for support in updating the ESC funding formula so we can continue providing cost-effective, high-quality services to students and schools. This request will help to support the work that ESCs do across our great state of Ohio.

Ohio's ESCs truly are the backbone of our state's educational system. Yet, ESC funding has not kept pace with inflation or our growing responsibilities. This funding gap hinders our ability to meet increasing demands such as expanded services to additional schools and the implementation of statewide initiatives like literacy programs, workforce development, school safety, and upcoming support for math initiatives in schools.

What is the ESC Statewide request?

Ohio's ESCs are requesting that the General Assembly:

- Update the ESC funding formula to reflect FY 2024 costs, including increasing the base funding amount and revising per-pupil funding tiers.
- Add a third tier to the funding model to account for economies of scale and ensure equitable support for ESCs of all sizes.
- Commit to a regular biennial review and recalibration of the ESC funding formula, in line with updates made for traditional school districts.

What is the rationale behind the request?

- In FY 2025, ESCs will receive \$32.36 per student—\$25.81 less than in 2007 when adjusted for inflation (\$58.17 per student).
- ESCs saved Ohio taxpayers \$100 million in 2024 by providing shared services and secured \$317 million in grants for schools, generating \$8.83 in savings and outside funding for every \$1 invested by the state.
- ESCs have increased personnel by 10% since 2020 and expanded services to nonpublic schools by 202% over the past three years.
- Unlike school districts, ESCs lack taxing authority and rely on state funding to operate.

What is the Statewide Impact?

ESCs are the backbone of Ohio's educational regional service system. ESCs provide hands-on support in the following areas:

- Curriculum and instruction support
- School improvement and professional development
- Special education and related services
- Early childhood education and supports
- Cooperative purchasing and fiscal services
- Rapid deployment of state initiatives (e.g., school safety training, pandemic response, literacy programs).

What is the Local Impact in Greene County?

- GCESC serves seven traditional districts, one career center, and three nonpublic schools, and approximately 23,000 students in Greene County.
- In FY 2024, we saved our client districts \$750,000 when compared to third-party providers and in secured funding for grants. Grants the GCESC receive help to support the schools/children in our community
- We have experienced an increase in personnel since 2020 to meet growing demands, including adding Instructional Support Service Staff for Literacy/Science of Reading, expanded services in mental health and prevention, additional services in all areas of special education, and in career connections coordination for our schools.
- In 2024 and in the last 10 years, we have coordinated threat assessment training for staff members who work in Greene County schools.
- The GCESC is the coordinator of the Business Advisory Council (BAC) for all of our school districts. Since we started the BAC, we have grown from about 15 members to over 50 members.
- GCESC works with many of our public agencies around issues that impact children and families. We work closely with Greene County Public Health District, Greene County Jobs & Family Services, the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Clark, Greene and Madison Counties, Greene County Family and Children First Council, Greene County Juvenile Courts, Greene County Board of Developmental Disabilities and other agencies to make a collective impact around key initiatives.
- Our GCESC has brought in many grants over the past 10 years that have helped us to better serve our communities, schools and students. Our organization is considered to be highly collaborative and supportive. We truly do need funds in order for us to continue to do this great work.
- Since ESCs are not eligible for facilities funding, we need more and better facilities in which to serve students with very involved needs. Our GCESC programs are growing but our building capacity is limited.
- The GCESC is highly engaged in our communities and is responsive to the needs in them. By providing adequate funding, we can continue to do current critical work and plan for more in the future.

Why This Matters?

Without adequate funding, our ESC will face challenges in our ability to. . .

- Sustain expanded services to both public and nonpublic schools
- Meet state mandates and support new statewide initiatives
- Offset rising operational and personnel costs
- Ensure equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students regardless of district size or location
- Provide additional services to schools in the county/region

Conclusion and Request:

We respectfully urge the Senate Finance Committee to. . .

- Update the ESC funding formula using the most recent data
- Increase the base and per-pupil funding amounts
- Support a third tier in the funding model for economies of scale
- Ensure ESCs are eligible for state grants, including school safety and facilities funding

Your support will allow ESCs like ours to continue to maximize taxpayer dollars, provide essential services, and ensure Ohio students have access to the resources they need to succeed. ESCs in Ohio are committed to doing impactful work for schools and students. We need your support and appreciate your willingness to listen. Thank you for your time and consideration.