

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Testimony of Andrea Smith, Superintendent, North Point Educational Service Center

Regarding: **Educational Service Center (ESC) Funding**

May 28, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide 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 Andrea Smith, and I serve as Superintendent of the North Point Educational Service Center, which serves 27 school districts and 30,000+ students across Erie, Huron, Ottawa & Sandusky counties.

I am here today to urge your support for updating the ESC funding formula to ensure we can continue providing cost-effective, high-quality services to Ohio's schools and students. 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.

Rationale:

- 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 solely on state funding to operate.

Statewide Impact:

ESCs are the backbone of Ohio's educational regional service system, providing:

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

Local Impact: North Point ESC

- Regional Business Advisory Council with over 140 school, business, & community partners earning the state's highest state designation (4 stars)
- Over 140 professional learning events held annually impacting 3000+ educators
- Facilitation of 19 professional networks for superintendents, curriculum, special education, treasurer, literacy, building administrators, gifted specialists, career coaches, counselors, etc.
- Annually over 71,000 hours of therapy services provided to students in the region
- Over 500 students served in classrooms/buildings operated by the ESC

The North Point ESC serves 27 districts and over 30,000 students in northern Ohio serving Erie, Huron, Ottawa and Sandusky counties. In FY 2024, we secured **\$1,431,775.81** in competitive grants which provided additional services and support for districts in our region. We have experienced a **37% increase** in personnel since June 2020 to meet growing demands, including additional special education teachers & assistants, therapists, literacy specialists, a technology integration specialist, and workforce readiness/career coaches. Our ESC supports **14 nonpublic schools**, an **increase of 180%** over the past three years.

Finding high quality, certified personnel continues to be a big challenge for our center. Ensuring competitive wages to retain talent is a reality and a contributor to rising operating costs. Additionally, the cost for utilities and maintenance for the two buildings we own also continues to increase and put a strain on our annual operating budget.

Why This Matters for Our Region:

Without adequate funding, our ESC will face challenges in:

- Sustaining expanded services to both public and nonpublic schools
- Meeting state mandates and supporting new statewide initiatives

Andrea Smith, Superintendent

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- Offsetting rising operational and personnel costs
- Ensuring equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students, regardless of district size or location

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 facilities funding

Your support will allow ESCs like ours to continue maximizing taxpayer dollars, providing essential services, and ensuring every Ohio student has access to the resources they need to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Andrea Smith, Superintendent