



Ohio School Counselor Association
House Bill 110
Proponent Testimony
May 5, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor and esteemed members of the Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on HB 110, the state operating budget, on behalf of the Ohio School Counselor Association (OSCA). My name is Sara Hoffman, and I am the current President of OSCA.

Student Wellness & Success Funds

First and foremost, OSCA would like to thank the Governor and Legislature for maintaining their generous commitment to the Student Wellness & Success Funds for schools. This historic investment in wraparound services is critically needed and has the potential to make a huge difference in the lives of students we work with every day. However, schools need certainty when it comes to this money. OSCA is concerned about the removal of language requiring ODE to fully fund Student Wellness & Success dollars. We would urge the Legislature to plan for ways to continue this critical investment in future biennia to maximize thoughtful and effective use of this money now. OSCA is also concerned about the net reduction in funding that results from the merging of the funds with disadvantaged pupil aid in the school funding formula. In addition, expanding the uses for this combined money to include disadvantaged aid uses dilutes the success of the wellness dollars, likely reduces the amount of money available for critical mental health services and communicates the assumption that social/emotional and mental health issues are primarily associated with low-income families. OSCA urges the Senate to fully restore the wraparound services funding and create certainty that the money will be used for its intended purposes.

OSCA also has concerns about the amendment the House added to HB 110 that requires all funds to be used in conjunction with an ADAMHS Board, in addition to another community partner. This limits the ability for schools to use the money to support critical in-house staff like school counselors, and restricts funding availability for other valuable community partners who can offer services specifically tailored to local needs. Ohio should not assume that one size fits all when it comes to funding student success. Flexibility should be maintained, as it is part of why the money has been so successful.

School Funding Formula

Besides the mechanics of the wellness dollars, OSCA supports the school funding formula provisions included in HB 110 because we believe the proposed formula provides accurate cost

projections due to its consideration of costs associated with the “whole child.” In particular, OSCA supports HB 1’s allocation of 15% of a school’s funding to “instructional and student supports,” including a 250:1 student-to-staff ratio for social/emotional/security support personnel, which we hope will be a school counselor. School counselors are already spread far too thinly across Ohio’s schools, with an average student-to-school counselor ratio of 453:1. Having to manage the academic, social/emotional and career development needs of 453 students every day becomes an unsustainable triage situation. School counselors are the ones tying all the pieces of the educational support spectrum together – often the one trusted adult advocating for all students across every area of education. Our intimate knowledge of students’ personal circumstances, level of academic progress and emotional wellbeing make us a critical tier in that support system. Thus, OSCA would urge the Senate to retain the 250:1 ratio in the HB 1 portions of the state budget bill.

FAFSA Provisions

OSCA is supportive of budget provisions that help bolster state efforts to increase Ohio’s FAFSA completion rate, including language in HB 110 that would encourage better tracking and sharing of FAFSA data. School counselors find that the current FAFSA tracking system is overly clunky and inaccessible. It limits sign in to one user, with that designated user usually being an assistant principal, despite the fact that school counselors desperately need ready access to this information to assist students with their applications. Thus, we are especially appreciative of the budget provision requiring schools to give school counselors access to this system, and applaud ODHE and the Chancellor’s work on FAFSA data improvements in general.

Provisions on School Employee Conduct

OSCA echoes OEA’s opposition to budget language that would allow the state board of education to take action against a license without considering whether the individual’s act in question is connected to or unbecoming of the individual’s position. The expansive scope of the judgement allowed under this provision could easily lead to inappropriate and inconsistent discipline. OSCA also supports OEA’s suggested amendment to ensure employees can maintain their salary and benefits during any pending action or investigation in which a license is inactivated. We have serious concerns about the way the proposed language denies us of due process. Teachers and school counselors should not be financially penalized before actual evidence is presented that proves there was a violation warranting license revocation.

Voluntary ACT

OSCA supports the incorporation of HB 82 into the state budget bill. School counselors are often the go-to testing administrators for schools, so we are very familiar with the toll tests like the ACT have on the students we serve. School counselors exist to ensure students succeed, and forcing a student who has already committed to a career tech or vocational pathway to spend a whole day sitting for a test whose score will not be of use to them is not in line with that goal. In fact, instead of pulling those students away from work or lab time, we should be further encouraging their pursuit of pathways that are well-suited to their skillset and interests.

In addition, requiring the ACT only further perpetuates the outdated narrative that college is the best path for all students, a narrative that school counselors are consistently working to dispel with parents. As the state and Legislature continue to work to fill in-demand jobs and address workforce gaps, continuing to require the ACT for all juniors will be in conflict with those objectives.

Finally, of particular concern to school counselors is the time it takes to administer these college admission assessments. It not only cuts into learning time, which has become a far more precious resource as we emerge from the pandemic, but also staff time, including school counselors' availability to meet with and serve students. Schools should be doing more to support already overwhelmed school counselors in their critical roles, and making one more test voluntary will help work towards that goal.

One suggestion we would offer the Senate on this language is to consider the implications of requiring parental or guardian approval for opting out of the ACT. This may further empower parents to control decision-making on postsecondary options and prevent students whose time would be better spent from having the opportunity to opt out.

Miscellaneous Provisions

Finally, OSCA has no concerns about the provision that would add to school counselor standards knowledge relating to transferring career tech education to a higher education institution. We also believe the earlier timeframe proposed for diagnostic tests is merited and will allow for earlier identification of issues and implementation of accommodations. We support the addition of another science seal option for earning a B in a science course or CCP course in lieu of the science exam. With respect to other graduation requirement changes, we are generally neutral on those provisions given they appear to be mostly clarifying in nature. And last but not least, we are very supportive of language allowing the Superintendent to enter into partnerships with the business community to increase student engagement and job readiness through internships and other site-based opportunities. OSCA believes the state has much room to grow when it comes to embracing and investing in outside-of-the-classroom learning opportunities for high school students.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for considering OSCA's perspective. I would welcome any questions you may have.