



Testimony on Substitute HB110
May 6, 2021

Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute HB110 (HB110). My name is Ann Sheldon, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC).

Gifted education funding in Ohio has gone through multiple revisions over the last decade or so. After the gifted unit funding system was dismantled in 2009, gifted education funding operated under a “maintenance of effort” provision until 2014. This provided absolute flexibility for districts to use state gifted funding to meet the needs of gifted children as they wished. This approach resulted in huge decreases in gifted identification, service, and staffing levels. The current gifted funding component, which has been in place since 2014 provides, at least on paper, about \$74 million in district funding through a formula that is calculated inside the foundation funding formula. (In the old gifted unit funding system, gifted funds were allocated outside the formula.) No state share is applied to the current gifted funding formula. In addition, **\$3.8** million is allocated to ESCs (Educational Service Centers) for gifted coordinator and intervention specialist units. In previous budgets, the gifted funds were broken out district-by-district in payment reports. However, in the current FY2020/FY2021 budget, gifted funds are incorporated as part of the foundation formula total, effectively leaving districts total discretion to use state gifted funds on gifted students or not. The new gifted funding accountability provisions included in HB110 would rectify that situation. These provisions:

- 1. Increase the level of accountability for gifted funding by strengthening the language that requires all districts to spend state gifted funding on the elements included in the gifted cost study formula.***
- 2. Require ODE to collect and post data on gifted services offered by each district by grade band as well as the number of licensed gifted personnel employed or contracted by the district. ODE already collects this data, and it would allow parents to see the types and levels of services provided to gifted students.***
- 3. Report the amount of state gifted funds provided to each district in the gifted expenditure report already produced by the ODE.***

OAGC strongly supports these new gifted funding accountability provisions regardless of the funding system ultimately implemented in this budget.

Gifted Cost Study/HB110

In HB49, the 2018/2019 budget bill, ODE was required to conduct a gifted cost study. This study was completed in May of 2018. Unfortunately, it was released around the time of the last meeting of the Fair School Funding subcommittee that was working on special education, gifted and English learner funding. There was virtually no subcommittee discussion about the gifted cost study. OAGC did outline a list of our concerns regarding the cost study, which were not incorporated into the Fair School Funding plan or HB110. My discussions with the Fair School Funding leaders indicated a support for categorical funding accountability. When fully funded, the proposed gifted formula under HB110 will ultimately provide more

gifted funding to districts than the current formula as the plan uses up-to-date salary figures for gifted coordinators and intervention specialists. It is unclear how much funding will be provided in the FY2022/FY2023 as those amounts have not been broken out in any publicly-provided documents.

Unlike the current formula, the HB110 funding formula would apply state share to the gifted component, which results in a formula where much of the burden for providing funding to serve gifted students is shifted to local districts. Or it would, if gifted services were mandated, which they are not. This makes the issue of funding accountability of the state share for gifted funding especially important. The formula would also shift funds from wealthier districts that are largely spending more gifted funding than provided by the state to less wealthy districts that in many cases spend less on gifted than provided by the state. ***This is another reason why the accountability provisions included in HB110 are critically important.*** We are also concerned that as the formula is phased-in, it is entirely possible that the level of overall gifted funding will drop below current levels in this upcoming biennium. Again, we don't know as there are no public documents that outline the specific components of the funding formula.

Concerns Regarding Gifted Provisions in HB110

Increased Accountability and Transparency of Gifted Funds, Services, and Staffing

Despite the fact that ORC 3317.40 states that districts are intended to use student sub-group funding for that specific sub-group, **283** districts are spending below their allocated gifted funding formula amount. **Seventy-seven** districts report serving no gifted students or too few to report. Licensed gifted staff employed by districts and ESCs has declined **36%** since 2009. Only **61%** of Ohio's gifted students are reported as provided some level of service.

HB110 recommends a study committee composed largely of treasurers and EMIS coordinators to develop gifted funding transparency recommendations. OAGC supports this study committee ***but only if there is gifted representation.*** However, we also strongly believe there is no reason to wait to require districts to spend state gifted funds on gifted students. There are five accounting codes that adequately cover the gifted funding formula elements. ODE has required districts to submit gifted funding expenditure data since 2014. While OAGC would prefer that districts be required to serve gifted students, we believe, at a minimum, it is reasonable to request that state gifted funds be spent on gifted students without further study. *Therefore, OAGC supports the gifted funding accountability provisions included in HB110 that we believe should be implemented regardless of the funding system.*

Unreasonable Gifted Student to Gifted Intervention Specialist Student Ratio

The major concern OAGC has regarding the HB110 gifted formula is the ratio between gifted students to gifted intervention specialists in grades K-6 which is 140:1. This ratio stretches gifted intervention specialists to a level that will degrade services to gifted students. While there are many ways to serve gifted students, some of which are lower cost, this ratio goes well above the recommended level in the gifted operating standards at 80:1 for students in self-contained or cluster-group settings. ***The 140:1 Gifted Student/Gifted Intervention Specialist ratio needs to be reviewed and reduced to a more reasonable level. OAGC recommends the ratio of 100:1. The approximate cost of this change would be \$14.7 million when the formula is fully funded. A ratio of 120:1 would cost \$6.1 million.***

Assuming that Gifted Professional Development for General Education Teachers is Temporary

HB110 calculates a level of funding for professional development for classroom teachers based on the gifted cost study. The study and HB110 inexplicably assumes that the funding can be eliminated in four years. This

is not realistic nor is this best practice. Classroom teachers serving gifted students will need to have sustained levels of professional development beyond the minimal levels for four years. Additionally, there will always be teacher turnover in districts – especially in terms of which teachers will have gifted students placed in their classrooms. Gifted professional development is an on-going cost and should be funded as such. *The approximate cost of this change is \$1.4 million per year in 2026 when the formula is fully funded.*

Rural Gifted Incentive Study

Ohio, in general, has an excellence gap between gifted students who are economically disadvantaged versus those who are not. While urban districts appear to be increasing efforts to address this issue, Ohio's gifted rural students on almost every measure are falling behind. ***OAGC supports the provision in HB110 that requires ODE to determine how an incentive program can be created to address some of the issues unique to rural gifted students. We also support the inclusion of under-represented student populations in this study that was including in HB110.***

Other Concerns with HB110

OAGC has a few other concerns regarding the ratios and minimums used in HB110. These include:

1. The School Funding Oversight Committee has no Student Sub-Group Representation

While the school funding oversight committee created in HB110 includes representation geographically and demographically, there are no specific representation for students in the categorical areas: students with disabilities, gifted students, economically disadvantaged, and English language learners. The committee membership needs to include members representing these student populations to ensure that their needs are specifically represented.

2. Using a 3300:1 ADM/Coordinator Ratio & Imposing a Funding Cap on the Number of Coordinators

The use of the 3300: 1 ratio of ADM to coordinators comes from the current funding formula. The formula was based on the 2008 operating standards which called for a 3000:1 ratio. The formula uses 3300:1 merely to reduce the funding level for coordinators. Capping the number of coordinators at eight merely serves to hurt our largest districts. There is no basis for the cap. The ADM to coordinator ratio should be restored to 3000:1 and no cap on the number of coordinators should be applied. *The additional cost for these changes is approximately \$1.8 million.*

3. Allowing Non-Public Secondary Schools to Opt Out of Allowing Students to Access College Credit Plus

College Credit Plus has allowed students from all walks of life to gain college credit in high school. Allowing a non-public school to opt out of this program is not in the best interest of Ohio's students. Nor is it in the best interest of general public, who can only benefit from a higher-educated work force. This opt out provision should be removed from the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

For more information, please contact OAGC Executive Director, Ann Sheldon at anngift@aol.com or 614-325-1185.