



**House Education Committee
House Bill 96
Ohio School Boards Association
February 25, 2025**

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on House Bill (HB) 96, the biennial budget. I'm Jennifer Hogue with the Ohio School Boards Association. We represent boards of education for public school districts, career technical education centers and educational service centers.

Investing in Ohio's public school students

The future of Ohio depends on how well we support and invest in our students today. We appreciate that Governor DeWine chose to include the next two years of the phase-in as a part of his budget proposal. However, our members are very concerned about the funding reductions in the current version of the bill. The costs of goods and services are rising for all Ohioans, the same is true of the resources needed to educate students. While costs are increasing, students in 343 districts are projected to receive less funding in FY 26 and students in 360 districts will receive less funding in FY 27. This reduction in funding is accompanied by a declining state share for 87% of districts. Under this proposal, by the end of the biennium the state's share of funding will be 32.2%. This results in a shifting of the responsibility of meeting student needs to local taxpayers who are already feeling the economic pressures on their household budgets. This imbalance is due in part to the automatic updates of property valuations and income by the formula without reflecting inflationary factors within the base cost calculation. ***We request that HB 96 be amended to use FY 24 data for inputs to the formula.***

When we invest in education, we're not just helping students in the classroom—we're helping to equip them with skills and knowledge they need to contribute to Ohio's economy, workforce, and society. These students will become the future leaders, workers, and citizens who will shape our state. ***We strongly urge you to prioritize funding for public education students in this budget.***

Career Technical Education

Ohio is blessed to have amazing career technical education opportunities that provide

students a pathway for lifelong success. Many of these programs are experiencing waitlists because they do not have the capacity necessary to serve all the students interested in enrolling in their programs. ***We support the request made by the Ohio Association of Career Technical Superintendents and the Ohio Association for Career Technical Education to create a study committee to look at career technical education facilities and make recommendations on facilities investments to serve additional students.***

Educational Service Centers

Educational Service Centers (ESCs) serve as a vital link and partner in the educational process. ESCs provide a wide variety of direct and support services, including curriculum development, staff development, technology assistance and special education services to the public school districts they serve. ***We request that you include an updated three-tiered funding model to ensure that ESCs of all sizes have an adequate base funding level to operate their organizations and provide the required services to students.***

We are supportive of Governor DeWine's proposal to provide funding for school bus safety enhancements. Student safety is extremely important to our members and this investment will help districts increase the safety of our school buses. ***We are requesting an amendment to add educational service centers to the list of eligible applicants to receive funding under the grant program.***

Transportation

Pupil transportation presents a significant challenge for many districts. From the challenges of finding drivers to rising fuels costs, districts find themselves needing to pivot and be creative as they work to ensure safe delivery of students to and from school each day. ***We request an amendment to create a pupil transportation workgroup that will review the current transportation system and recommend changes to better meet the needs of all Ohio students.*** The workgroup should be formed by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) and include representatives from public school districts, career technical education centers, educational service centers, community/charter schools and chartered nonpublic schools.

As it relates to funding of the minimum state share for transportation, we appreciate Governor DeWine increasing the minimum state share to 45.83% in FY 2026 and 50% in FY 2027. However, funding continues to be a challenge especially when meeting the transportation needs of students attending schools outside of the district. Ohio is one of the only states requiring public school districts to transport these students and data collected by ODEW shows it costs more to transport community and private school

riders. ***We are requesting that the weights provided for these students be increased to more closely reflect the actual costs.***

Given the time limit today, I am unable to go into detail about other provisions of the bill. At the end of this testimony, I have provided an overview of those issues and included suggestions for improvement on the items with which we have concerns.

Chair Fowler Arthur and members of the committee thank you for your time and attention. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Additional Areas of Concern

Literacy

The bill removes the exemption from annual reading assessments for students with significant cognitive disability or other disabilities as authorized by ODEW on a case-by-case basis. This will have an impact on students who previously would have qualified for these long standing exemptions. ***We request that you restore these exemptions to the law and continue to allow students to have these exemptions.***

Diagnostic assessments

The bill removes the ability of districts to select their own diagnostic assessments and instead would require districts to use a state mandated assessment. ***We request that this language be reinstated to allow districts to select the diagnostic assessment that best meets the needs of their students.***

Report cards

The bill removes the inclusion of students being promoted to fourth grade from the early literacy measure on the report card. This measure was included to ensure that districts were recognized for the students that are reading at grade level and are promoted to fourth grade. With the change in the promotion requirements for the third grade reading guarantee, it is worth exploring how to accurately reflect these students, but eliminating the measurement of this group of students is not the answer. ***We instead request that you amend the measure to count students that are promoted to fourth grade based on state assessment and alternative assessment scores.***

DPIA spending requirements

The bill requires each district with a required reading improvement plan to spend 50% of their disadvantaged pupil impact aid (DPIA) on either reading improvement and intervention aligned with the science of reading and evidence-based strategies for effective literacy instruction or professional development in the science of reading and evidence-based strategies for effective literacy instruction for teachers of students in grades K-3. All other districts would be required to spend 25% of their DPIA on those two initiatives. ***We request that this requirement be removed from the bill. This requirement will lead to the reduction of other services being provided with this funding that are benefiting economically disadvantaged students with specialized needs. No spending requirements should be considered until the DPIA funding study is released and recommended funding levels are provided.***

Regional support system

The bill proposes major changes to Ohio's regional support system. These changes will have a direct impact on student services throughout the state. A shift of this magnitude requires careful consideration and deliberation. ***We request that these changes be removed from the bill and that standalone legislation be introduced to properly consider the proposal and its impact on students.***

Unused school facilities

The bill would make changes to the definition of unused school facility to include any building that has been used for direct academic instruction and the building's student enrollment is less than 60% of either the OFCC maximum enrollment, or the highest student enrollment over the last ten years. Each district's situation and facilities plans are different. This type of change could have unintended consequences for many districts. For example, a district might have full buildings except for one building and be projected to experience growth based on new economic development in the state. Under this definition, the district could be forced to close the school without the capacity to place students in another building. As the district realizes that projected growth, they would need to construct additions to existing buildings or construct new facilities at an increased cost to local taxpayers. Additionally, this change could hamper the creation of school-based health centers by closing buildings rather than allowing schools to use available space to house these centers and increase services provided to their students. ***We ask that this change be removed from the bill and considered as standalone legislation to allow for thorough discussion and understanding of the impact.***

Cell phone policy

The bill would require that all districts adopt a policy prohibiting the use of phones by students during the instructional day. Based on the last budget, districts have engaged in a process with their communities, parents and students to design cell phone policies that are locally tailored and meet the needs of their schools and students. ***We request that this provision be removed and that districts be allowed to make changes to their policies based on the wants and needs of their communities.***