



The OHIO 8

Chairman Amstutz, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Extended Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, my name is Dr. David James. I am Superintendent of Akron Public Schools (APS) and I am here today on behalf of my district and The Ohio 8.

The Ohio 8 is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown, which represents 12% of Ohio's K-12 student population. The Ohio 8 Coalition's mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to help shape state education policy and practice, the only one of its kind in the country.

The purpose of my testimony is to 1) provide recommendations on how to shape the school funding system to better address the needs of school districts across the state; 2) outline how The Ohio 8 is already implementing some of these recommendations and policy concerns related to them; and to 3) request that any additional funds that become available in the upcoming budget process be used in a strategic manner for maximum impact. The issues that frame my testimony are as follows:

- Classroom expenditures
- Shared services
- Implementation implications of the 3rd grade guarantee
- Blended learning
- Use of anticipated tax revenue surplus
- A-F accountability system

Classroom vs. non-classroom expenditures

There are different philosophies and assumptions around what is considered a classroom expenditure and a non-classroom expenditure. Classroom expenditures are those costs directly related to the successful instruction of a student - for example, books, desks, and equipment; while non-classroom expenditures are often categorized as things like operations, utilities, and professional development. Many districts with broad economic, racial, and geographic diversity, however, may experience a demand for what has been traditionally considered a non-classroom expenditure but is absolutely critical to the effective instruction of a student – and therefore must be considered an appropriate classroom expenditure. Since this seems to be an issue that the Governor will insert into the upcoming school funding formula, The Ohio 8 wanted to provide some context

around the matter to illustrate how sometimes standard descriptions of certain expenditures might not also apply.

Transportation

Bus transportation is critical for children who would otherwise have to walk through unsafe neighborhoods to get to school. School buses or bus passes are critical for students whose families do not have another mode of transportation.

Quite simply, if students can't get to school, we can't educate them and as a result, transportation is critical to the educational success of many children.

Compounding the need to transport students is the average mobility rate among the Ohio 8 districts, which is about 20%. In a district like Columbus, that means about 10,000 students move within the district, out of the district or back into the district at least once within one school year. Let me repeat that: 10,000 students on average move to another school building every year. And in some buildings the mobility rate is can be 50%, 70% or even 100%. The cost of tracking students, revising busing routes, confirming new addresses, assisting students who become homeless or involved in the child welfare system all impact the operational costs around transportation.

Food service

Another example of a necessary expenditure is based on the number of children who participate in our free and reduced lunch program. Across The Ohio 8 districts, the number of children who participate range from 70% of all children in a school building to 100% of all children in a building. These rates indicate a real need of our students that is directly related to their ability to learn. The only regular meals many of our students receive are during the school year. In fact, in Akron, we have a weekend food program, filling backpacks so that students and their siblings have something to eat when they are away from school. We all know that a child cannot learn if they are too hungry to focus. As a result, our food service program is critical to the instructional success of each student.

Safety & Security

CMSD provides a full police and safety force to keep students safe coming to school, during school, and leaving school. This portion of their operation is critical to the best learning environment possible.

Each of our districts is in large supply of such examples and so when you consider defining classroom expenditures, please consider that transportation, food service, and security are critical to the success of our classrooms. And please know that most districts (urban, suburban, or rural) deal with one or more of these issues and would be negatively impacted by a funding formula that did not take this into consideration.

Shared services

The Ohio 8 was recently awarded a grant from Ohio's Local Government Innovation Fund to help develop a system among our districts for a shared teacher recruitment process for all 8 urban districts. Employing a shared recruiter for the Ohio 8 reduces costs and creates efficiencies over time. By sharing a recruiter districts will save at least

\$70,000 a year for each district in salary and benefits. But the largest savings will come from investing in quality staff, dedicated to urban districts.

This is one of many collaborations that we are already undertaking or are in the planning stages for that can help our districts find efficiencies among common operational needs. The Local Government Innovation Fund is an important part of this effort. Without those funds, it would have taken much longer for the Ohio 8 to implement this effort.

The Ohio 8 regularly seeks out opportunities to leverage the combined budgets, capacity, and knowledge of our districts. We strongly urge that the Local Government Innovation Fund be further supported with additional funds in the upcoming budget. As with our teacher recruitment concept, it helped to expedite the concept and we hope, its success.

Implementation implications of the 3rd grade reading guarantee

This policy is poised for implementation during this upcoming school year. Below is a list of concerns we have around this policy. It is our hope and request that they can be addressed in both the funding formula and upcoming operating budget discussions.

- It requires districts to evaluate students by October 31, 2012 but if no existing instrument exists, a district must submit its instrument to ODE for evaluation and approval. This provides about 60 days for a district to submit the instrument, receive approval (or not) from ODE and conduct an evaluation. That is not realistic.
- Each student identified as needing remediation must be assigned to a teacher that has a passing score on a “rigorous test of principles of scientifically based reading instruction or has reading endorsement on a teaching license”. We agree with this concept but it should be noted that it is difficult to recruit such teachers and certainly even more difficult to recruit the number needed for implementation of this policy in a realistic time frame.
- The policy allows for mid year promotion if the student demonstrates proficiency in reading but does not take into account what is required from that student to be proficient in other subjects for which they have missed a half year of instruction.
- The \$13 million competitive funding appropriated, while appreciated, is insufficient to properly support such a critical policy. It should be noted that Florida and Arizona spent \$100 million and \$40 million respectively, for the first year of implementation on similar policies.
- You may have been told that the third grade reading guarantee can be financially supported through certain federal funds. It should be noted that states can ask the federal government for more flexibility in how those funds are spent (such as Supplemental Education Services and Title I), but states cannot direct the use of those funds as they are sent directly to school districts. In addition, Title I funds in particular already are in short supply and high demand for older children and in other critical subject areas such as math and science.

Blended learning

There are certainly various ways in which to define and implement the concept of blended learning. Some school districts utilize mobile technology such as iPads or tablets, some use distance learning via electronic media including inter district or intra district options. A few examples of what The Ohio 8 districts have either implemented are:

Cleveland: A small pilot involving 25 elementary, middle and high schools students and 11 teachers will allow for all schoolwork to be done via iPads. Online curriculum and educational applications, all quizzes, homework, and lessons will be conducted through the iPad. In addition, students at two middle schools use Nook tablets for e-book readers in and out of their classrooms, thus replacing worn, outdated textbooks.

Dayton: Boasts a technology infrastructure that has been able to broadcast 1) a district-wide convocation 2) used Interactive Video Distance Learning for professional development for teachers, 3) provided our students opportunities to communicate with peer buildings and students around the world, 4) provided higher level courses, Calculus, utilizing one teacher between two buildings and 5) provide a blended credit recovery program for the past 8 years.

Cincinnati: Although usually related to student learning, CPS has established a distance learning system for their teachers within their administrative headquarters.

The Ohio 8 members have heard many ideas around blended learning, such as utilizing Youtube videos and replacing textbooks with iPads. It should be noted, however, that such efforts are appropriate for certain schools and certain students with certain needs. And implementation planning and costs related to making the shift towards more blended learning opportunities is significant.

In other words, comprehensive application of such technology might not be possible as some students are best suited in environments that aren't exclusively virtual or electronic. In addition, certain non-academic issues such as lack of Internet access, electricity or even homelessness might make these options difficult to implement across the board. Having said this, The Ohio 8 is always looking for ways to create exciting and new ways to learn while at the same time gaining efficiencies through technology.

Use of anticipated tax revenue surplus and lottery surplus

As conversations about the upcoming biennial budget and funding formula advance, The Ohio 8 strongly urges the strategic use of any increased tax revenue, casino profits or lottery surplus to support PreK-12 education.

Increasing the per pupil share by a few dollars; or focusing on one program; or dedicating resources to a particular pocket of districts will not have the impact of a having an appropriate funding system.

Recent news reports tout the influx of casino profits (\$10 million), racinos (\$3.7 million), and increased state tax collections. But to put that in perspective, Akron, for example, received about \$236,000 in casino profits for the quarter. But the city expects to lose about \$4 million in local government funds for the year and school funding was cut in the past two-year state budget by \$1.8 billion.

As more resources become available we urge these funds not be exclusively reserved for a tax refund and instead be part of the education funding discussion. And if there are concerns about sustainability then “extra” funds should be utilized to help support and/or incent the issues I’ve outlined today.

A-F accountability system

The purpose of building an accountability system is to help ensure K-12 students are college and career ready. Shifting from our existing accountability system to a new system requires consideration of pending policy discussions/decisions, preparation for transition and implementation, providing transparent methodologies, and securing appropriate data pools. Without consideration of all of these components, building a complete and comprehensive accountability system that works will not be possible. As a result, The Ohio 8’s recommendations will be limited in nature and scope as with some components of Ohio’s accountability system, we are being asked to provide suggestions on *how* to measure performance when in some very critical cases, the state has not defined *what* is being measured or what the measures being developed should be measuring. Another way of expressing our concern is that in some key areas, *we are developing policy prior to the science being available that should drive that policy*. The good thing is that in about another year or so we will have a majority of the needed science (common core and new assessments). The following provides the rationale behind our concerns:

a) Determination of whether a student is “college and career ready”: This question is the focus of work being done around the new Common Core standards, which Ohio and 40 states have adopted. Those higher standards are considered by many to represent college and career readiness. However, the *assessments* of student progress towards those standards are still being developed by two consortia. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) of which Ohio is a member recently advised Ohio stakeholders that its assessments won’t be completed for another year, though preliminary drafts of elements of those assessments in English/Language Arts and math are developed for comment (See link here <http://www.parcconline.org/crd-pld-survey>) Thus, the development of the A to F rating system at this time cannot incorporate these higher standards of college and career readiness that will be implemented no later than the 2014-15 school year.

b) Assessments: Existing policy discussions suggest that Ohio plans on constructing an A-F reporting system on the current assessment for one year, then in the year following that, replacing the test/assessments thereby changing what the A-F reporting system is based upon. With any re-norming districts ratings are likely to significantly decline, which is normal, but two unnecessary re-norming processes within two school years will likely produce multiple downgrades in ratings for no other reason than the assessment has changed. So let’s have a one-time change in one year so districts experience only one re-norming of their rating..

c) Methodologies: When basic methodology isn’t defined, you are left to design a reporting system *before* you’ve made decisions about what that reporting system is intended to assess or measure. Right now, ODE has not provided transparent

methodologies with regard to how districts progress/growth (value-added) is measured. In other words, presently we cannot predict where we will land so we can measure ourselves during the year. The decisions about what we want to know and report are driven by the ability of the assessments to do it. Without knowing what the new assessments are designed to measure, it is difficult to design a reporting system that will accurately report those measures. You can't report what you do not know. As a result, we cannot make recommendations regarding how performance and growth (value-added) is measured because decisions around those measurements have not been yet made. For example, if the new assessments are designed to differentiate levels of performance (e.g., 0-20%=limited, 21-40%=basic, 41-60%=proficient, 61-80%=accelerated, 81-100%=advanced), then the state could choose to continue reporting Performance Index Scores for districts. However, if the new assessments focus solely on proficiency as opposed to levels of performance, (e.g., 0-80% and 90-100%=proficient) then the state cannot include a Performance Index measure. As this example shows, if the state does not yet know what the assessment is designed to measure (various levels of performance vs. a single measure of proficiency) than you cannot design a report about those measures.

d) Lack of data: The value added system Ohio uses depends upon a large data pool of past performance on state assessments. Since new assessments will be implemented in 2013-14 (and therefore there will not be an existing data pool of past performance on those assessments), it will be extremely difficult to include value added performance measures on the new report card. To put this differently, the current value added system compares the performance of today's students to the performance of similar students on past assessments. If there are no data about past performance available, you cannot make a valid comparison. This is a perfect example of placing policy before the science.

e) Clarity between House Bill 555 and Federal Waiver: The language in House Bill 555 mandates the Ohio General Assembly to "revise the current academic performance rating system for school districts, individual buildings of districts, community schools, and STEM schools and to implement a rating system using letter grades". The Ohio Department of Education, however, submitted its No Child Left Behind waiver and established a fairly detailed structure and process to build an accountability system. A brief background paragraph regarding concerns around the waiver is provided at the close of this memo. It is safe to say, however, that the waiver and HB 555 do not coincide in approach and content related to Ohio's accountability system.

Although I will not go through the balance of my testimony in detail (as that is provided in the memo attached to my testimony), I want to highlight that regardless of our concerns, there are some items that can be tackled right now. These are:

Graduation rates: they should stand alone and not be diluted among other measurements.
Over counting of students: there is a way to properly track the achievement gap without gratuitous penalties to districts with diverse populations and we've outlined an option
Timing and communication: For this system to work, the community, parents, teachers, administrators and students must have the appropriate preparation and time to implement. We outline a refreshed timeline and rationale as mentioned earlier in my testimony.

Graduation Rates

This is a clear measure of achievement and growth (value-added). It sets a goal line and a clear expectation for not only students but parents and the community regarding where a district stands in its effort to ensure students have the ability to be college and career ready. Ohio's Accountability System must prioritize graduation rates as its own separate indicator. The graduation rate should not be embedded or diluted among other indicators. Establishing the graduation rate as an indicator on equal footing with the other indicators demonstrates the most transparent measure of a district's success and encourages districts to ensure that no student exits the school system prematurely.

Achievement measures vs. Growth (value-added) measures

This is a recommendation that cannot be reasonably fleshed out in detail until common core and new assessments are completed as described above. The Ohio 8 will state, however, that any proposals should weigh "achievement" and "growth (value-added)" evenly. If a student makes more than a year's worth of academic gain (or more) yet does not meet an established indicator, absolutely credit should be provided to the district for that growth (value-added). Districts, parents and communities must be able to clearly understand the growth (value-added) made by students and school districts to meet that indicator and must receive credit for that growth (value-added). We suggest a 2:2 ratio for performance versus progress with additional weight given to value-added and student growth (value-added) measures throughout an accountability system. Again, this component of an accountability system cannot be completed until the common core standards, assessments, and report cards are developed.

Counting At Risk Students

For accountability purposes, the current measures (as described in the Ohio Department of Education No Child Left Behind waiver and the as introduced version Senate Bill 316) biases the impact of a single student's test score either favorably or unfavorably depending upon the size and diversity of the school district that child happens to attend.

The Ohio 8 suggests for accountability purposes, each student's test score should be counted in the "All Students" category and counted a second time in the appropriate ethnicity disaggregation, ensuring that attention remains focused on the performance expectations for all children regardless of their ethnicity, yet limiting the bias inherent in the current measurement. In order to assure appropriate attention to the additional learning needs of students, The Ohio 8 would recommend that each category then be further disaggregated within category to report the impact of economically disadvantaged and student learning needs on that particular group (as outlined in the memo attached to my testimony). We believe that, in doing so, Ohio's school districts will remain accountable for addressing the specific learning needs of our children, including English Language Learner needs, the needs of Students with Disabilities, and the academic, social and emotional needs of Economically Disadvantaged students specifically so that each student group's aggregate score can meet the appropriate Annual Measurable Objective. The Ohio 8 believes in the importance of an achievement gap measure that fairly and accurately measures all students evenly. Under the current *Adequate Yearly Progress* measure, the test scores of some students are counted only one time while the test scores

of other students are counted as frequently as five times on the same measure. Again, this concept is outlined in the memo included with my testimony.

Timing & Communication

We suggest a phase in of a new ranking system beginning in 2013 with full and exclusive implementation of the new accountability system during the 2015-2016 school year. This would allow for enough time to conduct outreach to the community and to coordinate alignment with the implementation of the common core, new assessments and new report cards. In addition, we strongly recommend that no new accountability system be implemented mid school year. The proper training of staff and outreach to the public takes time and must be coordinated based on the school year schedule not a legislative schedule (many legislative decisions are made effective July 1st when students and teachers are gone and families are more difficult to engage). Our suggested schedule is as follows:

2012-2013: communicate changes

2013-2014 school year: continue to communicate change/differences to the public.

2014-2015 school year: post and utilize both old and new accountability systems and integrate changes to common core standards.

2015-2016 school year: implement new accountability system exclusively

Conclusion

As mentioned, the purpose of my testimony today was three fold. To shed some light on how to shape school funding to better address the needs of school districts across the state; outline best practices and concerns about existing and future policy; and to request that any additional funds put before you in the upcoming budget process help to support these particular ideas. As outlined, many good ideas are already proven to work and require additional support to make them even better. Others are motivated by the appropriate sentiment but require some changes to ensure success.

Although we have been meeting with Members and staff on a regular basis, we are available should you need additional information. I want to thank this Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak. I am happy to answer any questions.