



OAGC Response to Jack Pierson Memo on Gifted and ELL Issues
Updated May 21, 2010

On January 27, 2010, Jack Pierson, Treasurer for Akron Public Schools, submitted a memo to the Ohio School Funding Advisory Council Special Needs Subcommittee members. His memo outlined concerns regarding Gifted and English Language Learners (ELL). The purpose of this document is to respond to Mr. Pierson's comments and concerns regarding gifted funding in the OEBM (Ohio Evidenced Based Model) school funding formula. While Mr. Pierson makes some valid observations, some of his points are not entirely accurate. Also, there are several points he did not make that are necessary to understand the entire gifted funding and service scenario for Akron Public Schools:

- 1) **Akron Serves Fewer Gifted Students on Percentage Basis than the State Average** -- Akron currently identifies 2402 gifted students but only serves 242 or approximately 10%. This level is far lower than the state average of 21%.
- 2) **Akron Identifies Fewer Gifted Students than the State Average** -- Akron identifies significantly fewer gifted students (10.78%) than the state average of approximately 16%.
- 3) **The Number of Minority Gifted Students Identified in Akron Appears to be Under-represented.** The percentage of minority students identified in Akron is as follows: 4 % of the African American student population is identified as gifted, 6% of the Hispanic student population is identified as gifted, 19% of the white student is identified as gifted, 3.66% of the ELL population is identified as gifted. This situation is not necessarily unique to Akron. A new study from the University of Indiana indicates that Ohio's minority, ELL, and low wealth students are underperforming at the advanced levels in Ohio. A key to this under-performance is likely the under-identification and under-service of these populations across the state.
- 4) **The Low Gifted Service Percentage in Akron Indicates that Gifted Services have been Chronically Underfunded and Understaffed in Akron.** In his memo, Mr. Pierson neglected to report the number of gifted students in his district compared with the number of ELL students. According to EMIS, Akron has reported 2402 students identified as gifted. Using Mr. Pierson's figures, with 802 ELL students, his district currently spends almost \$2000 per ELL student. With the \$951,000 in state gifted funds Akron currently receives through the formula and considering that 2402 students are identified as gifted, the district would spend about \$396 per gifted student. In FY2009, the amount spent on gifted was \$307,000, or not quite \$130 per gifted student. It is quite evident the gifted spending in Akron has been inadequate to meet the needs of the district's gifted students. Gifted services appear to have been sacrificed to support other services in the district.

Mr. Pierson raises serious concerns about the gifted education formula that deserve a full response and clarification:

Pierson Concern 1: Gifted is Over Funded in the OEBM Formula -- Funding nearly triples for gifted education for Akron under the OEBM. Mr. Pierson feels the funding for gifted is too “generous” compared to other components. The district receives \$61,000 more in FY2010 than it will spend.

OAGC Response: The Gifted Education Formula is Not Over Funded in the OEBM Formula – Gifted education in Ohio has been seriously underfunded for decades. The level of state funding provided funding for less than 20% of the gifted student population in Ohio and has remained stagnant for almost a decade. Worse, through the prior system of gifted units, state gifted funding was sporadic across the state. While one district would receive state gifted unit funds, the district beside it would not. This type of funding system created huge inequities in access to service across the state. These inadequacies are keenly felt in some urban and rural areas. At the very least, the gifted formula in the OEBM is an acknowledgement of the inequities and chronic underfunding of the education for Ohio’s gifted children.

Akron has a low level of gifted service and a sole, overworked gifted coordinator. Is it unreasonable to expect the district to spend additional gifted funds provided in the OEBM formula to more adequately support gifted students in the district? It should be noted however that Akron is not expected to spend to the level of the gifted formula until FY2012.

It is important to note that one of the reasons that Akron is receiving more generous gifted funding from the state is due to the fact that funding is automatic. In the past, Akron received only the funding for the state gifted units that it requested. The new formula flows the funding based on district size, organizational units, and wealth. State share is now applied to the gifted formula whereas in the past gifted unit and identification funds did not have state share applied. Therefore, Akron receives a good deal more funding for gifted services through the OEBM formula while many wealthier districts receive far less than their FY2009 level. Approximately 60 districts with the state share of zero receive no gifted funding through the formula. This is problematic if the gifted maintenance of effort requirement to 2009 state funding levels is phased out. And, in fact, it is a problem now as gifted identification funds were not included in transitional aid. Many wealthier districts would be grateful for the additional gifted funding Akron is receiving. The Special Needs Subcommittee will need to seriously examine how to keep “wealthy” district funding whole as the formula is phased in to ensure gifted students are appropriately identified and served in all districts. Districts that have not done a good job identifying and serving gifted students will need to overhaul their gifted student services in their districts.

Pierson Concern 2: Gifted Coordinator Component is Overfunded and Possibly Unnecessary – Mr. Pierson believes the coordinator funding is too high and that the ADM/coordinator ratio is too low. He does not believe the coordinator ratio should be tied to ADM and, in fact, does not understand why gifted coordinators are funded at all. Mr. Pierson indicates that no other area (e.g. special education) provides for supervisors.

OAGC Response: The Gifted Coordinator Funding Formula May Need to be Adjusted in the OEBM but the Basis for the Calculation was Sound. -- The basis for the gifted coordinator formula was from the current gifted operating standards adopted in 2008 by the State Board of Education as well as the State

Board of Education School Funding Subcommittee Report released in 2009. In fact, the ADM/Coordinator ratio of 2500:1 is taken directly from the gifted operating standards adopted by the State Board of Education in 2008. Previously, the ratio was 5000:1, which provided too little coordination services, particularly in smaller districts. It should be noted that the State Board of Education School Funding Subcommittee Report released in 2009 recommended a weighted funding formula for gifted students based on coordinators, gifted intervention specialists, and identification. The weight for coordinators was based on the 2500:1 ratio. The subcommittee recommended that the system be phased in with the coordinator weight funded first as coordinators are responsible for identification of gifted students and developing gifted services. The subcommittee believed that coordinators needed to be funded first to ensure that services were developed and implemented with integrity throughout the phase-in. The subcommittee recommended that the weight for gifted coordination and identification should not have state share applied. In addition, the subcommittee set minimum and maximum levels of coordination to ensure that small districts were not underfunded and large districts were not overfunded.

Before determining an appropriate formula for gifted coordination services, it is worthwhile to examine what a gifted coordinator does and how the gifted coordinator role is different from that of a special education supervisor. As is the case in Akron, in fact, many gifted coordinators do *not* evaluate staff, a typical duty of a supervisor. Relating the number of gifted coordinators to gifted intervention specialists as one might for special education supervisors is not appropriate. The gifted coordinator role is broad and not related to just gifted students identified in the districts. In Akron, the gifted coordinator is responsible for the following related gifted activities:

- Gifted identification process including referrals, scoring, notification, record-keeping, actual testing, and communication
- Gifted service and curriculum development
- Professional Development
- Gifted EMIS data
- ODE reporting and compliance
- Supervising the development of Written Education Plans
- Implementing and development of Written Acceleration Plans
- Communicating with parents and community
- Acting as a liaison with curriculum coordinators, principals, and classroom teachers

In addition, gifted coordinators are often responsible for activities outside of gifted education. In Akron, the gifted coordinator also serves as:

- The Instructional Rounds Facilitator for external and internal rounds with Cohorts 1-2 with Cohort 3-4 being added next year
- AP Syllabus Coordinator
- Instructional Framework Originator, writer, steering committee
- Math Pyramid—Elementary member
- Literacy Pyramid—Elementary member

- School Improvement Planning team member and presenter to staffs and principals

It is difficult to compare the gifted funding formula with the special education formula as the special education formula is based on weights. The special education weights include funding for supervision as the weights were developed based on the elements of the operating standards for students with disabilities. Ohio's special education operating standards require special education supervisors. So, in fact, while the funding formula for special education does not have an explicit factor for special education supervisors, the factor is implicit within the weights.

Based on the district ADM and the number of gifted students identified, it is clear that Akron does not have a sufficient number of coordinators to handle the current workload. The one coordinator employed in Akron is stretched very thinly. While the number of coordinators under the OEBM formula may not be the perfect number, one coordinator is certainly insufficient for a district of almost 25,000 students. The current Akron coordinator believes that three to four gifted coordinators would be the ideal number.

Pierson Concern 3: Other Services will be “Sacrificed” to Support the Gifted Funding Formula under the OEBM.

OAGC Response: It is Highly Unlikely that other Districts Services will be Cut to Support Gifted Services

-- Rarely, in Ohio, have any services been cut to support gifted education services. Very often, gifted funding is one of the first items on the district chopping block when budgets are tight. Gifted services are being cut now across the state even while many districts are getting the same or more funds through the gifted formula and transitional aid. Without accountability for the gifted funds under the OEBM formula, districts will continue to under serve the gifted student population. It is time that gifted students have equal footing with other students in districts. District staff has almost ten years to determine a plan to fully implement the new gifted funding formula to ensure that gifted students are not the least and last fed academically. District staff should use that time to thoughtfully consider how best to implement the formula to best serve the needs of gifted students in their districts.

The OAGC Governing Board does Believe Some Changes should be Considered to the Overall Gifted Formula Including the Coordinator Factor – In order to better implement the formula, OAGC believes that the gifted formula under the OEBM could be changed in the following manner:

- 1) Services for gifted students must be mandated to ensure proper accountability for state and local funding. The mandate may be phased-in over the next eight years.
- 2) In order to maintain consistency in the funding model, the gifted coordinator formula should be changed from ADM to the organizational unit basis. The optimal number can be developed through district cost surveys, gifted self-reports, or through analysis of current staffing data with input from the field. Small and large districts should be reviewed in detail to determine appropriate levels of minimum and maximum funding/staffing.

- 3) The salary levels for gifted coordinators and gifted intervention specialists may be insufficient. These salaries should be evaluated based on district cost surveys and salary data already captured by ODE.
- 4) Funding for gifted intervention specialists should be tied to adequate coordination services. Districts have always been required to have adequate levels of coordinator services. Districts now believe they can cut coordinators and still receive gifted funds with impunity. Districts should not be allowed to use unqualified staff to provide coordinator services.
- 5) Transitional aid needs to be changed to ensure that districts using coordinator services through the ESCs aren't unduly penalized when transitional aid is phased out. Also, gifted identification funds should be included in gifted transitional aid.
- 6) The coordinator factor and the Identification factor should not have state share applied.
- 7) Support for ESC gifted services in future biennia should be tied to gifted units as in FY2009.

These changes, along with Mr. Pierson's concerns, should all be discussed in the Ohio School Funding Advisory Council Special Needs Subcommittee.

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