

## Ohio Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee

Testimony of Sally Roberts

May 14, 2009

Chairman Carey, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today. My name is Sally Roberts. I am the gifted services supervisor for the Huber Heights City Schools, and Ohio Association for Gifted Children president.

I am here today with concern that districts rated as “effective” or “excellent” may be exempt from many mandates in HB1. I think that would be a mistake.

Even the rating “excellent with distinction” really has nothing to do with children receiving an excellent education in a school district providing excellent educational opportunities. The rating is about districts getting the majority of their students to the level of “proficient”. Proficiency is the competency level expected of **all** children. While that may be a high bar for some students, for others, it is a very low hurdle.

Not every district rated as “excellent with distinction” is truly excellent when one digs deeper into the data. Of the seventy-four districts with this rating:

- Five served no gifted students
- Forty-eight served less than 25% of their identified gifted students
- Fourteen districts have no subject or grade level accelerated students
- Six districts have an average ACT score of “21”, barely the state average
- Six districts offer no AP courses
- Thirty six districts have no students participating in PSEO
- Fourteen districts have college remediation rates of higher than 40%, one above 60%
- Forty-three districts had at least one building with negative value-added growth; one had seven buildings with negative growth.
- Fifty-two districts had at least one building with negative value-added growth in reading.

As we look at districts that are “effective” or “excellent”, the statistics are even more appalling. Recently, a superintendent from an excellent school district testified before the Senate Education Committee. He complained that, as an excellent rated district, there should be much more flexibility on how state funding is spent. On the surface this makes sense, but a look into the statistics behind the excellent rating reveals an ugly truth. In terms of performance indicators met, the district met only 21 out of 30, a number which would put them at the continuous improvement rating. Through a bump due to their performance index, the district rating increased to “effective”. As another sweet bonus, even though the district had **negative** value added growth in **both** math and reading in two of

five grade levels, their rating was inexplicably boosted to “excellent” due to their value added growth performance. Look a little further and it is clear that there are other issues:

- the district has missed AYP for special education students.
- less than one third of the gifted population is served and the number of identified students is well under the state average.
- no Advanced Placement courses are offered.
- only 1 student has been accelerated.
- the average ACT score of the student population is less than the average state score.
- 42% of the students were required to take remedial college courses.

Would a parent want to send their gifted child to this district to this “excellent” rated district? Should state laws and policies let these districts off the hook for ensuring that **all** children receive adequate and appropriate opportunities for growth? The answer to both questions is a resounding, NO!”

In Ohio’s Local Report Card accountability rating system, there are no measures of AP or PSEO involvement, level of gifted services, numbers of students who are subject or grade level accelerated, college remediation rates, or average ACT or SAT scores. These are the measures that are most important to families of gifted and high achieving students.

There are many districts that are doing good things for gifted students. An example of a district with the “excellent with distinction” rating that could serve as a model is Lakota Local in Butler County. Lakota:

- identifies and serves students in grades K -12.
- offers 16 AP courses.
- regularly accelerates students.
- offers multiple honors classes in grades 7-12.
- takes steps to find and serve special populations.

Lakota’s lead coordinator, Dr. Nell Petry, knows that even Lakota’s services aren’t perfect. While Lakota Local’s record is not perfect, Dr. Petry and her staff work tirelessly at taking already good gifted services to an even higher level in order to meet the needs of Lakota’s gifted students.

None of Ohio’s districts should be exempt from accountability measures. Funding must be tied to licensed gifted staff, so that coordinators like Dr. Petry can ensure that services are provided for all Ohio’s gifted students and that those students are afforded access to appropriate strategies and curriculum.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.