



A message from Governor Ted Strickland and State Superintendent Deb Delisle

We hope this letter finds your school year progressing smoothly.

This letter is intended to provide you with an update on HB1 and the education reform included in the bill. This is an exciting time to be involved in education and we have an opportunity to reform our education organizations to better meet the demands of an increasingly global economy. There is no doubt that our world is changing at an alarming rate and our children will face a future whose parameters have yet to be defined. The time to address our educational system together is upon us.

The conversation about educational reform has now begun in earnest in the General Assembly as part of HB1. It is important to keep in mind that our legislative process is one which invites, encourages, and results in proposals being changed – and hopefully improved – before they ever become law. Understandably, this conversation will result in some modifications to the proposals as meaningful suggestions come along or unintended consequences are revealed. However, we are committed to achieving the best future for Ohio's children.

Since the introduction of the reform plan, we have listened to the feedback of a wide range of stakeholders regarding the proposal. As a result of these critical conversations, we are aware of concerns about issues such as funding for certain low wealth districts and for programs for gifted students; the importance of balancing accountability with flexibility; and the practical reality that districts will need time to develop and implement changes ultimately enacted by the General Assembly. These concerns, along with others, are being reviewed and analyzed so that modifications are considered in a thoughtful manner.

Additionally, continuing guidance from the federal government about the permissible and appropriate uses of stimulus bill funding may require additional adjustments and modifications to the proposal before it becomes law. We remain deeply grateful to Congress and the President for making federal stimulus funds – in the form of stabilization funds, IDEA and Title I – available to Ohio and for allowing us to use them to advance educational reform objectives. Stabilization funds will allow us to prevent many cuts in education spending which otherwise would have been unavoidable. Title I and IDEA stimulus funds will assist in efforts to provide quality education to special needs students and students disadvantaged by poverty.

It is our intent and expectation that districts will receive the amount of Title I and IDEA federal stimulus money that federally established laws and formulas provide. Although districts will be allowed to spend these resources for permissible Title I and IDEA purposes, respectively, districts will be held accountable for spending these resources in compliance with the requirements of the federal stimulus bill itself – requirements which expressly include a demonstration that they are advancing educational reforms and having an impact on enhancing student achievement. The U.S. Department of Education has reminded us on

many occasions that they view the purpose of the stimulus monies as “reform not conform”. As more details become available from the federal government, we will share these with you in order for you to plan for the most effective use of these monies in your districts.

We are in regular consultation with the U.S. Department of Education to assure that we are complying with “maintenance of effort” and “non-supplanting” requirements. Even during this time of economic crisis, we are intent on maintaining Ohio's commitment to public education.

The education reform proposal calls for the state and local share of funds to cover the costs of implementing the Ohio Evidence Based Model (OEBM). However, we do not expect that this new system can or should be implemented overnight. Indeed, we believe that the 2009-2010 school year should be viewed as a year to begin planning for those reform components which will begin for the first time in August 2010. We will ask the legislature to make it clear that the Ohio Department of Education may, and should, establish, by Administrative Rule, the phase-in schedule for all of the various components of the model. In this way, the Department can continually receive input and feedback about implementation from you and others, making appropriate adjustments throughout the multi-year implementation schedule. This transition will also allow for the Department to assist districts in building capacity for modifying current practices. Additional details about the phase-in of specific components will be shared in the near future.

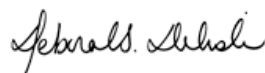
Federal stimulus IDEA and Title I funds will be made available to districts as soon as they are received and can be properly distributed in accordance with the many accounting requirements attached to them. Districts will be strongly encouraged to use these funds for permissible IDEA and Title I purposes that advance elements of the OEBM which may not yet be required in FY2011, but which will be on the near term horizon. In this way, districts can accomplish another of the federal stimulus fund requirements – that they avoid spending these funds on operational activities that are unsustainable. Since the reform proposal contemplates increasing state funding over time, more funds will be available to the districts as more components of the OEBM are phased-in. Targeted expenditures of Title I and IDEA funds can begin district efforts on future requirements of the OEBM – with those costs picked up by increased state funding which will be available after the federal stimulus funds are gone.

Our students need us now more than ever. Bringing about the education reforms for which we have all hoped will not be easy. However, we are convinced that our collective focus on the needs of Ohio's students and your daily dedication to bettering Ohio's education system will assist us as this process continues to unfold. Please know that we appreciate your dedication to Ohio's children. Together we can strengthen the future of Ohio.

Sincerely,



Ted Strickland
Governor



Deborah S. Delisle
Superintendent of Public Instruction