

Testimony to the House Finance Primary and Secondary Subcommittee on HB 64

March 19, 2015

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, members of the subcommittee:

I am Karla Shockley McCarthy, a native Ohioan and a seventeen year resident of Licking County, with the last six years in Granville. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on HB 64.

Perhaps the standardization of public education has resulted in raising the educational level for lower level learners? Although I haven't seen the evidence to support that, I am not here to debate that issue. I am here to tell you about my gifted children's educational experience thus far, the problems these students face, and possible solutions. We must understand that there is a significant cost to our international competitiveness if our gifted students continue to be under supported and ignored while other nations invest in their own intellectual and creative resources.

Like many parents, we figured our son was bright. We have been constantly told by others who meet him how amazingly smart he is. In 2014, when he was eight years old, he started this conversation after seeing a report announcing the Russian Crimea invasion on the news:

"Mom, Russia just held the Olympics and Hitler also held the Olympics."

Me: "Yes." (Thinking oh no! I know where this is headed...)

"Putin just invaded the Crimea... Hitler rearmed the Rhineland, took Austria and invaded Czechoslovakia."

Me: "That's true."

"Should I be worried?"

... thus the mind and thinking of a very sensitive child with superior cognitive ability. Most of his world is black and white, lacking shades of gray, so why wouldn't he think that an autocrat such as Putin wouldn't follow in Hitler's footsteps? His concern was real, he was terrified, and it was not something we could lightly dismiss.

My son is now nine years old and in fourth grade. He is in a fourth grade gifted language arts program where the material is on an accelerated sixth grade level. He is subject accelerated to enriched fifth grade math. He told us that he hadn't learned anything since first grade and how wonderful it is to finally be challenged. His school was not able to offer him science or social studies acceleration, so, while his education experience is much improved it is still less than perfect, but so much more than similar students get in other districts.

My daughter absolutely loves school, but struggles with not being challenged and being different from her same age peers. She is such a fast learner that much of kindergarten was spent helping other students and running errands, both of which she enjoyed. Although she did have other advanced learners in her first grade class, she began to outpace them. As a first grader she began to deliberately perform poorly on standardized tests; she rationalized that by scoring at a more normal range that she would become more like her friends. Her wonderful teacher caught on and convinced her to do her best. She is now in second grade and has another great, dedicated teacher. The problem she is encountering here is that the academic span of students is very broad, and much of the teacher's time is absorbed by students with learning disabilities and other lower achieving students leaving little time for enrichment. She is pulled out for accelerated reading and math, but is quickly learning the material here as well. She feels like she is learning nothing as has asked me to

“home school” her on the weekends. Feelings of being academically and socially isolated have increased, and she has asked us to consider accelerating her into third grade.

We deliberately moved to Granville so our children would be in a school district where they would have a better opportunity to be appropriately educated. Granville is a district that has made a concerted effort to better accommodate the needs of gifted children with flexible intervention for second and third grade, gifted language arts class for fourth through sixth grade, subject and whole grade acceleration, and eighteen Advanced Placement class offerings. Even with this effort, many are still under or not served due to budgetary constraints and the focus on raising the performance of lower achieving students.

Last year, almost half of the students at Granville Schools were identified as gifted, yet, even at this high performing district, less than thirty percent of identified students are considered served. There is a sentiment that gifted children can fend for themselves, this belief is horribly wrong, but pervasive. Anyone who believes that does not understand the very real social and emotional needs these fast learners have. Their intense drive to learn is palatable, and they are as frustrated when they are unable to learn as any child with a learning disability. Many of these children realize at a very early age that they are different, not understood by other children their same age. Many have an emotional intensity that matches their academic drive and a very sensitive nature. When the needed support socially, emotionally and academically is not provided, these children are at risk to not realize their potential and, possibly, worse.

Compared to identification, service percentages and expenditures for other districts in Licking County, Granville is far ahead. I’ve been to county meetings with parents for gifted in other districts where the only service received is a gifted identification letter – that is a travesty and such a waste of potential. Education seems to be the only entity where the highest achieving population is left to fend for him/herself. People who are gifted in athletics and the arts are acclaimed and encouraged – you’d never see a coach bench the best players when the game is on the line, yet that is what often happens to the brightest students.

Since the move to standardize the public education opportunity for all students began in 2001, there has been a shift to pull the bottom up in education, often resulting in a regression to the mean. The recent addition of a measurement for gifted education to the State Report Card should serve as a means of motivation for school districts that have left the gifted to fend for his or herself to formulate interest and strategies to promote the growth of high academic achievers. However, more could be done. I would like to request that the following be considered:

- Requiring all districts to spend all gifted funding on gifted services and to provide line item accounting for the disbursement of these funds
- Increase funding for licensed gifted staffing at all levels including the Ohio Department of Education. ESC funding has been drastically decreased and that decrease is very impactful to smaller districts as these districts are dependent on ESCs for gifted coordinators and intervention specialists; at a minimum, reinstatement of the 2011/2012 level of \$8.1 million.
- Require all districts to treat gifted children as the special needs exceptional children that they are. The Written Educational Plan (WEP) should be expanded to address every area where a child is exceptional including social and emotional health. There ought to be an annual review of the WEP inclusive of all interested parties, similar to that of the IEP. State funding provided for gifted students should be

increased to reflect the broadened burden on districts to provide an appropriate education for gifted students in the least restrictive environment.

- Require all districts to remove artificial boundaries that impede the academic growth of gifted students – every student should have the right, and the districts the responsibility, to be in an academically appropriate environment (e.g., fully contained gifted program and/or subject specific classroom, ability grouping, subject and whole grade acceleration, access to AP and CC+ courses, etc.).
- Ensure that College Credit Plus is available to all students, free of charge, at public institutions of higher learning and at private colleges and universities (inclusive of online options) if an equitable course is not available at a reasonably located public option. Adding a free/reduced lunch proviso for free CC+ discourages all but the most economically disadvantaged and advantaged to be able to utilize this option – isn't equitable access to appropriate education what started the entire standardization movement? Why are barriers to success for middle class students being added?
- Fund a mandate that all teachers are provided with sufficient training in gifted education to address the legal requirements for gifted identification; knowledge about the nature and needs of gifted children; strategies to recognize signs of potential giftedness in less identified populations; understanding common myths and misconceptions concerning gifted children; pedagogical strategies to adjust aspects of curricula including depth, pace, breadth, student grouping, etc.; understand when a gifted intervention specialist or coordinator should be consulted when a student's needs exceed the boundaries of the regular classroom.
- Ohio began a charter school system in 1998, adding vouchers in 2005 with large expansions to include students at more underperforming public schools.
 - The December 2014 Ohio Charter School Performance Report from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) shows the overall failure of charter school to provide the much promised improved education, with the exception of a handful of charters in Cleveland. The report stated that as of 2011-12, 44% and 48% of the charter schools have both low growth and low achievement in reading and math, respectively, with students at these schools falling further and further behind their traditional public school (TPS) peers. The current budget proposal delineates increasing the charter school funding to almost \$1 billion. With almost half of charter schools harming students' educational attainment, does it seem reasonable to continue to throw good money at these schools at the detriment of performing schools?
 - Parents should have choice, but the alternative has to be better than what is traditionally publically offered, or can at least show it is on par with the traditional public school and making continued improvement, in order to justify diversion of precious funding. How many of the 123,000 students currently enrolled in charter options are receiving at least an equal, but hopefully better, education? As reported on Cleveland.com, Ohio's charter school program and oversight is a subject of ridicule for its "Wild, Wild West" free for all with little oversight and accountability. Auditor Dave Yost's reports of charter school fraud are also very troubling.
 - How much effort has been made to look at high performing TPS and school districts to determine the factors of success and work to apply those to underperforming TPS, or the few high performing charters? Granville has a lot of success with a low per pupil expenditure (175th per 2011-12 data). Why? Students here start school with the majority having had a preschool experience that provided a sound educational foundation; the majority of the students are not

chronically hungry; the community tends to be positive and supportive of education; teachers and school administration are normally available to address parent concerns about students. Would a better practice be to close the 40+ percent of charter schools that are chronically failing (the CREDO report covered six years with many of the schools around longer than that – successful businesses would have cut the loss of those failures by now), and direct some of that funding to providing Head Start, preschools, meal assistance, and help (mentors, public programs, etc.) with parenting for educational success to families in TPS districts that are failing? Some of that money could also be used to help adequately fund gifted education at all schools.

- Granville is a small district lacking a business base to provide adequate funding for the school district. The current proposed budget's school funding formula will result in Granville losing approximately \$4 million dollars over the projected time frame. With only a third of the residents of Granville having children in the schools, continued public support for additional personal tax burden to pay for the schools will be difficult to sustain. How much of that \$4 million dollars our children could potentially be losing, and the resulting reduction in services, is going to fund failing charter schools? Accountability matters, and where's the data to support that more money given to a failing enterprise results in success?
- School districts can only be inventive for so long before less money results in a lessor education. Gifted education is often the first area to see reductions when money is scarce (recent example is New Albany cutting gifted education due to a recent levy failure), and these children need the same protection given to other exceptional children.

Gifted is not a dirty word and we parents of gifted children should not be ashamed of our children's intellectual abilities, nor should these children be embarrassed and hide part of who they are. We need these children to do more than survive through school. We need these children for their future innovation and problem solving abilities to keep us the productive, forward thinking world leaders that we've been throughout the last century. So, why are we not supporting and protecting the gifted as we do other exceptional students? They cannot be left to fend for themselves.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and provide personal experience of the special difficulties encountered by these exceptional learners. When my son asked what I was working on and I told him I was going to present testimony on the need to adequately support gifted students and fund gifted education, he was dumbfounded and stated, "Why wouldn't they already know that we have a need to learn and to be allowed to be who we are? Why don't they care?"

I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Background Summary for March 19, 2015
Testimony to the House Finance Primary and Secondary Subcommittee on HB 64

I am Karla Shockley McCarthy, a native Ohioan and a seventeen year resident of Licking County, with the last six years in Granville. I am hereby providing a background summary about my educational experience decades ago (just realized my senior prom dress is thirty years old!), my varied professional work experience, and my children's (and their peers) ongoing educational experience. I will testify March 19, 2015 on HB 64.

My mother grew up in the last log cabin in a holler in Pike County, and my father in Columbus with alcoholic parents. Because of the limitations of their humble beginnings, education was valued by my parents. I was the first in my family to graduate from college, followed over time by my four siblings. Throughout my working career, I have worked for the Nuclear Navy during the First Gulf War, as a technical trainer, consultant and process developer for various Fortune 500 companies, and as a certified secondary social studies teacher in a rural Ohio district. I was a literacy tutor and academic tutor, and currently lead a parent academic advocacy group in Granville. I am also a founding board member and treasurer of a humane society, and sit on the board of a non-profit educational art studio, both in Licking County.

Why tell you about me? My life experience makes me particularly qualified to discuss the power of education, and also the limitations when a child does not receive an appropriate challenging education. Although some may consider me to be successful as my academic and financial success exceeds that of my parents, I would argue that my early potential was stunted as I was not appropriately educated. You see, I have an academic exceptionality resulting in my "checking out" starting in eighth grade. My children are also exceptional, and the standardization of education that began with the implementation of No Child Left Behind has only exasperated the inadequate educational experience. How are we academically exceptional? We are cognitively gifted, exceedingly so.

Licking County is a wonderful place to live, a nice balance of rural tranquility and urban opportunity. We were perfectly content with our thirty acre farm until our children were born and education became a concern. We are very fortunate that we can afford to explore options: Do we spend a large sum of money for a private education? Do we give up our wonderful lifestyle and move to a better school district? Do we stick it out and try to make up for the lack of educational opportunity? Full time homeschooling was not an option for our very social kids. Two events happened that made our decision for us – our local school district's emergency levy passed by a mere twelve votes, and it became readily apparent that our children were socially and academic well ahead of their age peers. We had the kids in a preschool in Granville and realized how education is valued there, and that our children would, hopefully, have same age academic peers in Granville, so we made the move.

My son was so excited to start kindergarten, however, during October he told his sister that she'd better enjoy preschool because kindergarten wasn't any fun. He had already been reading from an early age and knew how to add, subtract and multiply, and he quickly mastered anything new. His teacher recognized his need for more and was able to get him occasional pull out services for advanced reading. He was so lucky that his first

grade teacher is gifted and understood his need for more; she taught him parenthetical math and allowed him to deeply explore topics while getting him pull out services for advanced reading and math.

Second grade was his lost year. His teacher was very concerned about his terrible handwriting (a common trait for the exceptionally gifted boy) and this challenge replaced the academic challenging environment in which he flourished the previous year. He told me he was now known as “the kid with the horrible handwriting.” He began to have these intense emotional outbreaks at home but could not articulate to me what was wrong as he was only seven years old. Then, it happened – he completely shut down at school and told his teacher he would no longer do work that was “not on his level.” Part of me was so proud of him for finally understanding what was wrong and doing something about it, and the other part of me knew that he had to continue to play the game of school. You see, that is what school becomes for these underserved kids, a sea of mind numbing monotony to be endured. His teacher never intended for my son to feel so frustrated and isolated, and she was wonderful for most students, but she seemed to not understand the supportive and academic needs of the gifted student.

His first grade teacher had moved to third grade and our son begged us to make sure he had her the following year because he “felt safe with her.” Talk about a punch to the gut! Our very kind, generous, polite boy had completely lost his confidence in himself and his joy in life to the extent that he didn’t feel safe at school. We knew his happiness had steadily eroded, but had no idea why or to what extent he was feeling academically and socially isolated. Luckily, he had continued to be pulled out for advanced reading and math and felt secure in that environment.

For most students, third grade is a year to be endured as it is the beginning of the march of high stakes testing; for our son, with the support of his amazing teacher, he spent the year regaining his confidence. We knew he was very strong academically, consistently scoring in the gifted range on nationally normed tests, but it wasn’t until he hit the ceiling on a test for cognitive abilities that we realized the extent of his potential.