

## Testimony on the Straight A Program Governing Board

Sunset Review Committee

Senator Kris Jordan, Chair

April 12, 2016

Chairman Jordan and members of the Sunset Review Committee, I am Jessica Voltolini, director of the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs at the Ohio Department of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to present you with information regarding the Straight A Program Governing Board.

House Bill 59 of the 130<sup>th</sup> General Assembly established the Straight A Program and its Governing Board. The board awards competitive grants to implement innovative ideas to improve education. These grants fund projects are designed to increase student achievement, reduce spending, direct more resources to the classroom and create efficiencies through shared services. Eligible grantees include school districts and public schools, educational service centers, education consortia, institutions of higher education, and partnering private or governmental organizations.

The nine-member Governing Board consists of the superintendent of public instruction, four appointees of the governor, and two appointees each of the House and Senate. The board uses independent scorers to evaluate grant proposals. It then consults with grant advisors with financial and education expertise to rank the applications for consideration by the board. The board's selections go to the Controlling Board for final approval. During grant application periods, four full-time Ohio Department of Education employees support the board's work, spending 15-20 hours per week collecting and analyzing data for the board. Six other department staff and two consultants contribute as needed.

In FY 2014 and FY 2015, the Straight A Program Governing Board awarded 61 grants totaling \$233 million. These grants impact 350 school districts, community schools and partnering organizations. H.B. 64 appropriated an additional \$15 million in each of FY 2016 and FY 2017 for grants. Twenty grants have been awarded for FY 2016, representing 86 educational entities and totaling \$14.6 million. While the grants are important in getting innovative programs underway, the Governing Board emphasizes making these programs financially sustainable and prioritizes proposals that can be maintained over time. We believe that the Straight A grants are generating positive, creative changes in education that will have longevity and can serve as models for other districts and schools.

We respectfully recommend that the Straight A Program Governing Board be continued.

Thank you for your consideration. I'd be happy to address any questions that the committee may have.