

ANALYZING AUTISM VOUCHERS IN OHIO

A REPORT FROM
POLICY MATTERS OHIO

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POLICY MATTERS OHIO, the publisher of this study, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute dedicated to researching an economy that works for Ohio. Policy Matters seeks to broaden debate about economic and education policy by doing research on issues that matter to working people and their families. With better information, we can achieve more just and efficient policies. Areas of inquiry for Policy Matters include work, wages, education, housing, energy, tax and budget policy, and economic development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ohio's Autism Scholarship Program allows parents whose children are considered to have an autism spectrum disorder to use public funds of up to \$20,000 per year to purchase education or treatment at private schools or other approved facilities.

During fiscal year 2007, which ended June 30, approximately 734 children aged 3 to 21 were enrolled in the program for at least part of the year. To pay for the vouchers that year, the state deducted \$10,872,770 from state foundation funds flowing to the 209 Ohio school districts with residents enrolled in the program. The average voucher amount was just under \$15,000.

Families of all income levels are eligible and can choose from a list of providers approved by Ohio's education department. In October, that list included some 200 providers in 32 of Ohio's 88 counties.

FINDINGS

For this project, we interviewed parents seeking the best education and services for their children, district officials who said the program drains needed resources, and private providers offering services ranging from all-day academic programs to speech therapy. We also consulted advocates with expertise in the education of children with autism. This study is timely because the Ohio legislature is working to create a voucher for all special needs children and Ohio's autism voucher is being viewed as a model for other states. Policy Matters Ohio found the following:

Selective admission: All but three of the 40 private schools or school-like providers with claims for payment in the first quarter of fiscal year 2008 have criteria that restrict or discourage enrollment. Only 15 accept children with more severe disabilities, while 14 charge fees above the voucher cap. Many require religious instruction, discouraging enrollment of eligible children. Only 100 of the 880 first-quarter claims were for school settings that did not exclude on the basis of one of these criteria.

Majority of agencies don't offer school setting: The 87 other providers with first-quarter claims – two-thirds of active providers – offered services such as tutoring or therapy that are not comparable to class time mandated in Ohio's public schools. Nearly 40 percent of first-quarter claims were made for these private providers that did not offer a classroom setting.

Greater use by wealthier Ohioans: Families from relatively affluent Ohio communities are using the autism voucher more than families from poorer communities, according to a district-by-district comparison of median resident income and deductions from state aid to pay for the vouchers.

Few providers in rural areas: Approved providers in the program are concentrated in Ohio's urban areas, excluding many Ohioans not within reasonable driving distance. Last year, 37 counties had no voucher participants, while districts in Ohio's three largest counties accounted for nearly half of all voucher spending, despite enrolling only a quarter of the state's public students.

Oversight and accountability lacking: The state provides minimal oversight of services. Parents are largely responsible for holding providers accountable for services which they, as private entities with no obligation to serve or enroll all children who apply, are not legally required to provide.

Voucher students in restrictive settings: Fully 75 percent of first-quarter claims were made for providers created to primarily or exclusively serve disabled students. As a result, the program undercuts decades of advocacy for the inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream of education.

Education guarantee: Parents surrender the right to a free appropriate public education when using the voucher. Lack of oversight and contentious relationships between voucher providers and districts can weaken the protection ostensibly provided by a child's Individualized Education Program.

Financial impact unclear: Many factors influence the voucher's impact on public schools, including costs to educate autistic children and district property wealth. ODE maintains that only state funds are used for the voucher; district officials say the program drains local money from their coffers.

Disconnect between costs, disability: Children with more severe needs may be shut out of the program by the lack of a consistent relationship between costs for services and severity of disability. This disconnect also allows some providers to charge significantly higher tuition to voucher students than they charge non-disabled students. At least two private schools charge children the full \$20,000 covered by the voucher, almost five times the tuition the same schools charge non-disabled students.

Parental satisfaction: Despite the above issues, parents interviewed for this study using the voucher tended to express more satisfaction with services than parents in district schools.

As state policy, this program is problematic particularly because it excludes children based on severity of disability, on ability to pay costs above the voucher amount, and because of their religion. It is also failing, in many cases, to provide an environment that allows disabled children to interact with non-disabled peers. This type of exclusion clashes with the idea of a public education system that seeks to draw a diverse group of children to learn together and to begin to create a common civic culture.

For these reasons, Policy Matters considers the autism program a poor model for a broader special education voucher under consideration by the Ohio General Assembly; it is not a model that should be emulated by other states. At the same time, we recognize that many families depend on the voucher, and we do not advocate ending the program in a way that would disrupt their education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rather than supporting a system that exacerbates inequity, public resources should be directed toward strengthening services for all. To this end, Policy Matters recommends that policy makers:

- Create incentives to serve autistic children through collaboration among schools, other public agencies, regional service centers, higher education institutions and private providers;
- Create new opportunities for job-embedded professional development for teachers and aides who regularly work with children on the autism spectrum;
- Establish incentives for institutions of higher education to develop programs and curricula that lead to certification in the teaching of children with autism;

We recommend these concrete reforms to improve education for children with autism. Broader reforms include: ensuring that Ohio's special education funding formula for school-age children and unit funding for preschoolers are up-to-date and fully funded; and passing the bill currently before the Ohio legislature to prohibit health insurers from excluding coverage for autism spectrum disorders, as 19 other states have done with similar legislation.

INTRODUCTION

Ohio's Autism Scholarship Program, one of only four state-sponsored, publicly funded special education voucher programs in the United States, started as a pilot in fiscal year 2004. The program has grown quickly and is being viewed as a model for others around the country. In its first year – a partial year from March through June 2004 – it granted vouchers to 70 families; in fiscal year 2007, which ended June 30, the program granted vouchers to approximately 734 families. It has grown by more than 50 percent each year, and that growth is expected to continue.¹ There is no cap on the number of vouchers that can be awarded under the program. (See Figure 1)

The voucher program has given some families education options they may otherwise not have been able to access for children who can be challenging to educate. However, all but three of the schools or centers with academic programs reviewed for this study limit participation based on severity of disability, ability to pay beyond available voucher funds, or religion. The concentration of voucher providers in metropolitan areas further limits who can take part. Thus the program is, almost by definition, not truly accessible to the public.

In fact, it seems inevitable that the program will damage Ohio's public system, which is already weakened by the inequity inherent in school funding. Participating private schools, by excluding those without the financial means to supplement the voucher or with more severe disabilities, are likely to attract parents with more resources, leaving more disadvantaged students in the public system. This type of exclusion clashes with the idea of a public education system that seeks to draw a diverse group of children to learn together and to begin to create a common civic culture. By focusing on benefits for the relatively few families able to participate, the program ignores and undermines a fundamental purpose of public education.

School year (fiscal year)	Number of participants
2003-04 (2004)	70
2004-05 (2005)	300
2005-06 (2006)	475
2006-07 (2007)	734

Source: Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education. No participant count available for fiscal year 2008.

FAMILY ELIGIBILITY

Parents with children who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or have the disorder in their Individualized Education Program must apply to the Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education. To be eligible for the voucher, children must be age 3 through 21 and be enrolled or eligible to enroll in their school district of residence at any level from preschool through 12th grade, according to Ohio Revised Code.

¹ Interview with staff at the Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education, which is responsible for administering the program. October 24, 2007.

Preschool-age children must be evaluated by a physician or psychologist using criteria for autism spectrum disorder in the 4th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,² and must have deficits in communication and adaptive behavior and “at least three observations that document behavior consistent with autism” conducted by a non-family member who is knowledgeable about autism.³

The voucher applicant must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that has been finalized. Once the voucher has been granted, parents can use it on a reimbursement basis to pay for education or treatment services at nonpublic schools, private treatment centers, hospitals, therapists and other approved agencies or companies for services included in their child’s IEP. The voucher amount for each individual is capped at \$20,000 per year, with a limit of \$7,000 per quarter.

Approximately 50 percent of all program participants in fiscal year 2007, or some 350 children, were preschoolers, age 3 through 5, according to staff who administer the program at the Office for Exceptional Children. That year children using the voucher came from 51 counties and approximately 209 school districts.

Payments for the program are deducted from state foundation funds designated for each school district. As of November 2007, the state had subtracted a total of \$10,872,770 for fiscal year 2007, which ended June 30. Total deductions by district for the year ranged from \$626,943 subtracted from state foundation aid designated for the Columbus City School District to pay for 44 participants to \$950 from the Mount Healthy City School District near Cincinnati for one participant.⁴ (See Appendix A.)

Families of all income levels are eligible to participate, since the program is not means-tested. Admission into the program is not based on the severity of the disability, nor are there criteria related to services available at school districts of residence or any evaluation or assessment of those services.⁵ This stands in contrast with state assistance in general, which is usually focused on lower-income residents, as well as Ohio’s other school voucher programs. The Cleveland voucher program is intended to primarily benefit lower-income children, while the newer Educational Choice voucher is available only to public or charter students who attend or would be assigned to public schools that have been rated in academic emergency or academic watch for two of the past three years.

² Published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994 and revised in 2000.

³ Ohio Administrative Code 3301-103-03, Application for Program Participation
<http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-103>

⁴ From data provided by the Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, for fiscal year 2007 as of November 2007.

⁵ Complete Autism Scholarship Program guidelines available at:
www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=968&ContentID=14635&Content=37087

PRIVATE PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY

Private schools and other providers wishing to offer services to children through the autism program must apply to the Office for Exceptional Children at ODE each year for approval or re-approval. Provider applicants are required to sign a notarized affidavit affirming that they meet certain standards, including health and safety conditions, confidentiality of records, staff background checks, nondiscrimination, staff licensure, insurance and compliance with state and federal disability laws. (See Appendix B.)

As part of the application process, providers must list staff names with relevant certificates and/or licenses. In addition to the affidavit, approval or rejection of private provider applicants is based entirely on credential checks by staff at the Office for Exceptional Children. Applicants can be approved as long as they have just one staff member with the appropriate credentials to provide services the agency or school will offer children under the program. According to interviews with staff who administer the program, relevant credentials include, but are not limited to, ODE licenses for special education teachers (intervention specialists), and state or ODE licenses for speech language pathologists and physical and occupational therapists. Properly credentialed psychologists and applied behavior analysts⁶ are also considered in the granting of approval.

Providers in the voucher program must submit quarterly “statement of cost” forms to the Office for Exceptional Children at ODE to generate payment for each participating child. Checks are mailed to providers, but addressed to both the parent and the provider. Parents sign the checks over to the providers.⁷

PURPOSE/SCOPE OF STUDY

This study seeks to increase overall understanding of the autism voucher program. We began the study asking the following questions:

- Who is using the program?
- What kind of services are provided?
- Who is providing these services?
- How does the program affect school districts and the education they provide?

This study is not meant as an evaluation of the quality of services available at the schools, agencies or individual providers offering services under the program. We encourage researchers to conduct evaluations examining outcomes for children in public schools and in

⁶ The required credential is provided by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, a national nonprofit corporation.

⁷ According to program guidelines, funds are to be issued within 30 days of receipt of the claim, which must include student, parent and provider information, along with a description of IEP services provided, beginning and end service dates and cost of the services. Both a parent and the provider must sign the form. Guidelines include a payment schedule. For the 2007-08 school year, cost statements are due in the first week of October, January, April and July. The maximum amount per quarter is \$7,000, but total costs for a fiscal year (July 1 to June 30) cannot exceed \$20,000 per child.

the program, as well as the quality of services and training for teachers and others who work with children on the autism spectrum.

Beyond simply providing a much-needed look at the program, this report is timely and relevant for two additional reasons. In 2007, the Ohio General Assembly passed a bill creating a much broader program that would have offered vouchers to all public special education students in the state. Gov. Ted Strickland vetoed the bill, but lawmakers are proposing similar legislation that could affect as many as 240,000 students in district schools and others attending nonpublic schools.⁸ This study of the autism program will inform that debate, and influence the proposed creation of a broader special education voucher.

Furthermore, special education voucher programs are under consideration in other states, and Ohio's autism voucher is being viewed as a model. Solid information about Ohio's program will help other states make good decisions that best serve children with special needs.

The only previous study of the program was a formative evaluation released in May 2005 by the since-disbanded Legislative Office of Education Oversight. This study by Policy Matters builds upon the previous report by providing an update and a more comprehensive examination of the program. For information on the methodology used for this study, see Appendix C.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism spectrum disorders occur in an estimated 1 out of every 150 children in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁹

Autism spectrum disorders encompass a wide range of disabilities from the most severe forms of autistic disorder to relatively milder disorders such as Asperger Syndrome. To different degrees, such disorders impair an individual's ability to interact socially and make communication through spoken language difficult. They can also cause repetitive behaviors and interests. Individuals with autism often have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, and reacting to different sensations.

Autism is four times more likely to affect boys than girls, and occurs across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

⁸ HB 348 would limit the voucher amount to the lesser of either the amount of state and local funding spent on educating the disabled pupil in public school or the private provider's tuition, but the total would be capped at \$20,000; in the Senate, SB 57 proposes a six-year pilot program and limits the \$20,000 voucher to 3 percent of the statewide total of disabled students. (from Gongwer News Service, Gongwer Ohio Report, October 16, 2007, Volume: #76 Report: #204.)

⁹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network released data in 2007 that found about 1 in 150 8-year-old children in multiple areas of the United States had an autism spectrum disorder. www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/overview.htm

There is no medical test for autism spectrum disorders. Rather, evaluations that include clinical observations, parent interviews, developmental histories and other assessments typically lead to a diagnosis.

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.¹⁰ Less than 20 years ago, the Autism Society of America (ASA) reported the incidence of autism at 1 in 10,000; as recently as 2004, ASA put that number at 1 in 250, while the CDC put the rate at 1 in 166 that same year.¹¹

Federal special education law defines an autism spectrum disorder as a “developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.¹²

The level of disability and the needs of individuals on the spectrum can vary greatly. A child with classic autism, for example, may be uncommunicative and very limited in his or her ability to learn skills or advance academically; this level of the disorder is often marked by self-stimulating behaviors such as repeated flapping of arms, spinning and rocking, or flipping a light switch on and off repeatedly.

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome or Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), on the other hand, tend to be higher functioning and in some cases may be considered academically gifted. Even at this end of the autism spectrum, however, social interaction and communication can be significantly impaired, and without adequate support the behavior of some affected children can make participation in a regular education classroom challenging for the affected child, fellow students and teachers.

While autism has almost certainly affected people throughout history, it was first identified and named in the 1940s.¹³ Since then, the criteria used to diagnose autism have changed repeatedly. In 1980, autism was first identified as a developmental disorder as opposed to a

¹⁰ From www.autism-help.org/autism-incidence-increase.htm: “Estimates of the prevalence of autism vary widely depending on diagnostic criteria, age of children screened, and geographical location. Most recent reviews tend to estimate a prevalence of 1–2 per 1,000 for autism and close to 6 per 1,000 for Autism Spectrum Disorder; PDD-NOS is the vast majority of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger is about 0.3 per 1,000 and the atypical forms childhood disintegrative disorder and Rett Syndrome are much rarer. A 2006 study of nearly 57,000 British nine- and ten-year-olds reported a prevalence of 3.89 per 1,000 for autism and 11.61 per 1,000 for Autism Spectrum Disorder; these higher figures could be associated with broadening diagnostic criteria.”

¹¹ Ohio Autism Task Force, Treatment Services Workgroup Final Report, November 2004.

¹² The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004).

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Autism Spectrum Overview*, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/overview.htm#when>

psychiatric disorder. Most recently, in 1994 and 2000, revisions in the 4th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders expanded the definition of pervasive developmental disorder.

The expansion of criteria for diagnosis is almost certainly responsible for at least part of the increase in the population living with autism in the United States. But there is no consensus on the reason for the increasing rate of incidence, nor has a definitive cause of autism been proven. Genes and environment are often cited. Research indicates that children are either born with the disorder or with the potential to develop it, refuting early theories that parenting style played a fundamental role in a child's development of the disorder. Debate about links between vaccines and autism continues; research has shown no connection but advocates continue to raise concerns and call for further study.

OHIO CONTEXT

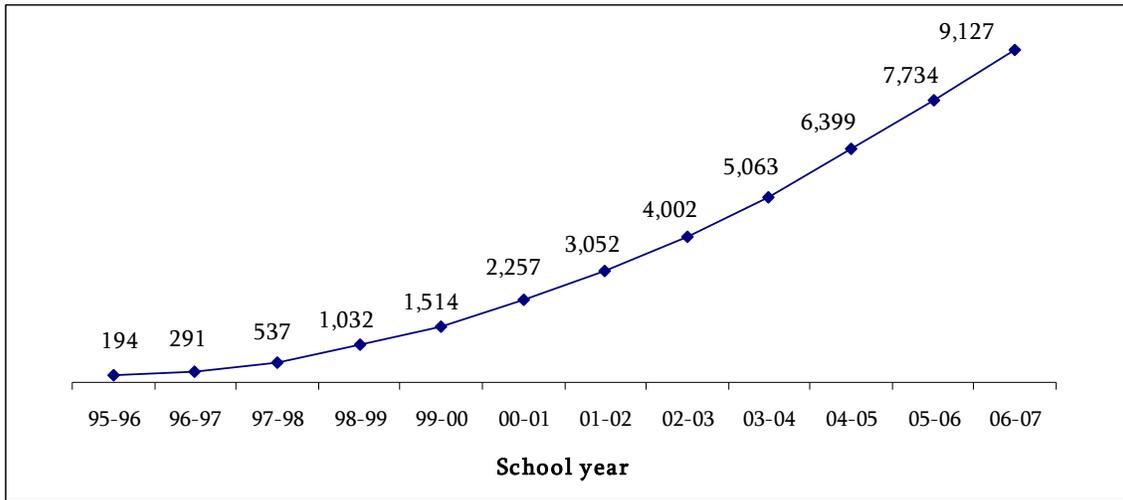
The number of K-12 students counted by Ohio school districts and the ODE as autistic has risen exponentially over the past dozen years, to 9,127 last year from 2,257 in 2000-01, an increase of 304 percent. This is an increase of 4,605 percent since the 1995-96 school year, when only 195 K-12 students were classified as autistic, according to average daily membership numbers available on the ODE website. Annual percentage increases of 50 percent and more in the late 1990s have given way to increases of 20 to 25 percent in recent years. (see figure 2)

These figures exclude preschoolers with autism being served by school districts, who are categorized by general disability unless they are enrolled in the autism voucher program.

ODE does not keep a precise count of how many of the children using a voucher are preschoolers, either; staff at the Office for Exceptional Children estimate that number at about 50 percent of the total of 734 for fiscal year 2007. This means that at least half of the participants in the voucher program may never have used services available through their public school.

Because there is no accurate count of preschoolers with autism either in the program or in the state as a whole, Policy Matters could not calculate a percentage of all autistic children in Ohio school districts who participated in the voucher program in fiscal year 2007. Some estimates put the number of students enrolled in the program at about 5 percent of all autistic children in the public system.

Figure 2
Over 12 years, a 4,605 percent increase of children with autism



Average daily membership (ADM) of children with an Individualized Education Plan that includes autism has risen to 9,127 in the 2006-07 school year from 194 in 1995, an increase of 4,605 percent. ADM is based on a headcount of children in kindergarten through grade 12 in Ohio’s public and charter schools.

Source: Ohio Department of Education

RAPID RISE PRESENTS CHALLENGES

The rapidly rising number of children diagnosed with autism has taken its toll on the ability of districts to respond effectively to their needs, in part because of evolving diagnoses and changing understanding of the disorder.

Federal special education law continues to evolve as well, with new rules for the education of students with disabilities in both the No Child Left Behind law, passed in 2002, and IDEA.

One former district special education director who continues to represent the interests of school districts put it this way: “Think about the thousands of educators [in public schools]. You can’t pass a law and expect [services] to change overnight.” This former district official said the same holds true for the need to constantly update teacher training so they can stay current with new methodologies and approaches.

The widely differing needs of children on the autism spectrum also present a challenge to the philosophy of equity and access for all disabled children that has come to define federal special education law.

Nevertheless, improving services for children with autism should be a priority for school districts and the state as strong public programs at the district level are “the exception and not the rule,” according to a task force formed by the state legislature and Gov. Bob Taft in 2003.¹⁴

School districts sometimes have difficulty consistently providing effective services to children with autism and convincing parents that everything possible is being done. As one superintendent said: “A school district can’t be all things to all people.” Parents of a particular child may want to try a teaching method highlighted by new research that differs from what other parents want. It can be hard to justify that effort for one student, said this superintendent. Even if a decision to proceed is made, it takes time for districts to train staff in new approaches.

One teacher who worked as an autism specialist for two years in her urban district called the vast majority of teachers in Ohio “woefully unprepared” to work with children on the autism spectrum. This teacher estimated that as few as a “couple hundred” teachers in public schools around Ohio understand how to work with autistic children and stressed the need for increased training to better prepare more teachers.

As a whole, Ohio agencies that serve children with disabilities, including the state’s school districts, ODE, the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD) and others have adjusted poorly to the rapid increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism, and have been slow in planning a coordinated response.

SELECTIVE ADMISSION

Policy Matters interviewed representatives of 18 private providers approved by the Office for Exceptional Children to offer services under the autism voucher. We called ten additional providers for basic information on tuition and services; for all providers, including those not interviewed or called, we gathered information from internet sources.

Our review determined that just 40 out of the 127 providers submitting claims for payment in the first quarter of fiscal year 2008 offered a classroom setting. Only 15 of these 40 agencies – just over 10 percent of the 127 providers with first-quarter claims – offer a school-like environment for children with the most severe needs.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ohio Autism Task Force, Treatment Services Workgroup Final Report, November 2004.

¹⁵ Other providers offer tutoring, therapy, or other services outside of a school setting. Although the Office for Exceptional Children at ODE posted a list in October with some 200 approved private providers, not all had claims for payment during the first quarter. Data showing the number of claims per provider for fiscal year 2007 were not available.

Overall, these 40 providers were responsible for 61.4 percent of all claims for payment (541 out of 880) made under the program in the first quarter, which ran from July 1, 2007, to September 30, 2007.¹⁶ These 40 providers averaged 13.5 claims each; 24 had fewer than 10 claims.¹⁷ (For a list with detailed information on these providers, see Appendix D.)

A Policy Matters review of these 40 providers found that all but three (accounting for 100 of all 880 first-quarter claims) have admissions criteria that restrict or discourage enrollment of autistic children using vouchers in one or more of the following ways:¹⁸

- 1) They accept only children with less severe disabilities, excluding, for example, children with autism disorders that make communication or language extremely difficult or those with more severe behavioral problems;
- 2) They charge tuition or fees that exceed the \$20,000 voucher limit, potentially requiring parents to cover the difference with their own funds;
- 3) They require regular religious instruction or instruction in a religious environment, in some cases requiring parents to agree to a statement of religious faith.

Schools and agencies that set such criteria are allowed under federal and state law to limit enrollment based on these factors. Many of the programs, for example, are not designed to educate severely disabled children, even if reasonable accommodations were to be made.

But the issue here is not about individual providers. The question raised by this review, rather, is one of the effectiveness of the voucher program as a whole. Is it sound policy to have a program that excludes such a high percentage of the population it purportedly intends to serve? (see figure 3)

¹⁶ One provider with 18 first-quarter claims, Matalyn Enterprises LLC, doing business as Ace Academy in Wickliffe (Lake County), closed in November. Claims made and reimbursed for this provider are not included in these calculations. Nine claims in the data file provided by ODE did not have a corresponding provider listed; these claims are not included in calculations either.

¹⁷ The number of claims should not be understood to represent a head count of children enrolled in the voucher program; one student may have multiple claims, either for one provider or multiple providers. A count of participants like the one included for previous years in the introduction was not yet available for fiscal year 2008.

¹⁸ The three with no apparent restrictions are: Haugland Consulting, LLC in Columbus with 47 first-quarter claims in fiscal year 2008; the Rich Center for Autism at Youngstown State University with 42 claims; and Sandy Cay, Inc., in Bryan (Williams County), with 11 claims.

Figure 3

Analysis of claims for voucher providers by enrollment criteria

In the first quarter of fiscal year 2008, providers with classroom settings made a total of 541 claims for payment. This breakdown of claims show the extent to which these providers limit enrollment based on three criteria: degree of disability, cost and religion.

Disability	31 percent for providers that accept only less severely disabled children (166 claims)
	69 percent for providers that accept more severely disabled children (375 claims)
Cost	53 percent for providers that charge more than \$20,000 (285 claims)
	47 percent for providers that provide services for less than \$20,000 (256 claims)
Religion	22 percent for providers with a religious orientation (117 claims)
	78 percent for providers with no religious orientation (424 claims)
Overall	18 percent for providers with no apparent restrictions (100 claims)
	82 percent for providers with at least one restriction (441 claims)

Source: Number of claims from the Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, fiscal year 2008. Information on restrictions from provider interviews and websites.

DEGREE OF DISABILITY

- Of the 40 with first-quarter claims, 25 accept primarily or only children with less severe needs (a total of 166 claims, or 31 percent of the 541 first-quarter claims for schools or centers with classroom settings).
- Just 15 of these 40 providers accept children with severe needs (375 claims were made for these providers, or 69 percent of first-quarter claims for schools or centers with classroom settings).¹⁹

One provider, the Lawrence School in the Cleveland suburb of Broadview Heights, “does not accept students for whom the lead diagnosis is Autism,” according to its website. The school bills itself as a “college preparatory, coeducational day school for bright students with learning disabilities and attention deficits in grades 1-12.”²⁰

If a child has a primary diagnosis of dyslexia and a secondary diagnosis of autism, for example, the school may enroll the student, according to a school official.²¹ A child with a severe lack of social skills common to many with autism spectrum disorders may be excluded, however. Lawrence applied to become a provider for the voucher program because families who knew the school asked it to seek approval so they could receive financial assistance to enroll or stay

¹⁹ Details about the dollar amounts of each claim were not available from the Office for Exceptional Children. Amounts likely vary widely, as some may pay for a full-year of tuition at a less expensive school, while others may cover only an installment for a higher tuition. Many others are claims to cover speech, occupational or physical therapy sessions provided by individual therapists or treatment centers.

²⁰ The Lawrence School website: www.lawrenceschool.org/

²¹ Interview, December 12, 2007.

enrolled, this official said. “We get phone calls from the complete spectrum, but we stick close to our mission.” According to data provided by the Office for Exceptional Children, Lawrence School made 33 claims for payment in the first quarter of fiscal year 2008.

The website of one Columbus provider, the Marburn Academy, says the private school’s “programs are not designed to be appropriate for children with learning obstacles such as autism, PDD, or developmental delays.”²²

“Most kids on the scholarship [at Marburn] are what we would consider more high-functioning, Asperger Syndrome students,” said a school official, acknowledging that not all children with Asperger Syndrome are accepted, since that diagnosis can include a broad range of abilities.²³ The majority of the children enrolled at Marburn have conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or problems with language decoding and comprehension, said this official. Marburn provides intensive individual attention and individual remedial plans for all students. The school made 11 first-quarter claims for payment.

The 375 claims listed above for schools that accept more severely impaired students does not mean that all of these students have more severe needs, as many schools accept students with a range of disabilities. A close examination at the needs of children actually enrolled would be required to determine the extent to which these providers select higher-functioning students who may require less intensive services.

Of the 15 school districts participating in this study, seven said the majority of voucher participants from their schools were higher functioning. Three said participants included a mix of higher- and lower-functioning children, while one said the majority were lower-functioning. (The remaining districts were unable to provide an answer to this question.)

COST

- Fourteen of these 40 providers charge more than the \$20,000 amount provided by the voucher for the basic services they provide. (285 claims, or 53 percent of first-quarter claims for schools or centers with classroom settings.) Most of these providers accepted either a full range of children on the autism spectrum or focused primarily on more severely disabled children for whom education and treatment costs tend to be higher. In some cases, a school’s half-day preschool tuition, for example, may be under the \$20,000 voucher cap, while its full-day fees exceed the cap.

²² Marburn Academy website: www.marburnacademy.org/

²³ Interview, January 3, 2008.

- The remaining 26 providers charge tuition or fees ranging from \$1,200²⁴ to \$20,000. (256 claims, or 47 percent of first-quarter claims for schools or centers with classroom settings.) It is unclear how many providers in this group set tuition below the voucher limit but charge for other services, such as speech or occupational therapy, which may put the bill for an individual child's education and treatment over \$20,000. Parents also may opt to enroll their children in one of these programs and use other providers for additional services, paying either with reimbursement from the voucher or with their own funds. Parents with children in public schools often pay for extra services out of their own pocket as well.

Saint William School, a Catholic pre-K to 8th-grade parochial school in Cincinnati, established an autism program in 2005 and charges the full \$20,000 covered by the voucher plus a tuition fee of \$1,675. Other students at the school pay \$4,070 a year.²⁵ The school's autism program accepts a full range of children across the spectrum and is staffed by a coordinator, four behavior therapists, a speech therapist and two teacher aides. It offers "a private, faith based educational option for students with Autism or Asperger Syndrome."²⁶ St. William made 22 first-quarter claims for payment.

Applied Behavioral Services in Cincinnati charges \$24,000 for its year-round half-day program and \$48,000 for a full day, according to an ABS official.²⁷ About 65 percent of the children enrolled there are preschoolers. "All parents would prefer the all-day program, but they can't do it on \$20,000," said this official. ABS provides a range of instruction models in its day program that focuses on children's Individualized Education Programs, and accepts children across the autism spectrum, including those with severe disabilities. A range of approaches with different student-teacher ratios includes an intensive one-to-one program and an eight-to-two group setting for children ready to work on social skills, said the official. ABS made 56 first-quarter claims for payment, the second highest number of claims among all providers.

Monarch School, part of the Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau in the Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights, charges \$25,000 for its 11-month half-day preschool program, \$50,000 for a full-day and \$68,500 for its school-age program. The preschool also provides home-based services averaging about \$105 an hour, according to Monarch staff.²⁸ The school accepts

²⁴ St. Lawrence School in Cincinnati, with two first-quarter claims in fiscal year 2008, charges \$1,200 tuition for parishioners and \$4,000 for non-parishioners, whether or not children are on the autism spectrum. The school gives enrollment priority to parishioners and screens for academic ability. Information from phone interview, February 13, 2008, and website:

www.stlawrenceparish.org/school.htm

²⁵ Staff interviews, February 25 and 26, 2008.

²⁶ Quote about school from an online bulletin for St. Antoninus, a nearby Catholic church, found at www.saintantoninus.org. Staffing information is available on school website:

www.saintwilliam.com/schoolstaff.shtml

²⁷ Interview, December 6, 2007.

²⁸ Interviews, December 2007.

children from across the autism spectrum, including children with severe disabilities, and provides intensive remediation. Monarch made 17 first-quarter claims for payment.

RELIGION

- Eighteen of these 40 providers are private religious schools. (117 claims, or 22 percent of first-quarter claims for schools or school-like settings.)
- These providers range from Catholic parochial schools that accept non-Catholics to evangelical Christian schools that require parents to agree to a statement of faith as a condition of enrollment for their children.
- Also included in this count is a Jewish college preparatory academy in Columbus that educates children in “a modern Orthodox Zionist framework.”

Mary Immaculate School in Toledo provides an atmosphere “animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity which will develop in the child knowledge, skills, habits, understandings, attitudes, and ideals which are essential for a mature witnessing of Christ....” The school requires all students, including non-Catholics, to participate in religion classes, liturgies, prayer services, and prayer before and after classes and at meals.²⁹ Mary Immaculate has two state-licensed special education teachers on staff. It made eight first-quarter claims for payment under the voucher program.

The Sisters of Notre Dame religious order founded Julie Billiart, a Catholic K-8 school located in the Cleveland suburb of Lyndhurst. The school is “committed to the education of children of any faith who experience special learning needs” and helps students “grow in witnessing Gospel values.” The school offers programs for moderate to mild autistic and/or developmentally handicapped children on a case-by-case basis, according to the school’s website.³⁰

The school employs two full-time speech therapists and contracts with an occupational therapist to work with teachers and students one-on-one. Also provided are reading intervention and all normal special education interventions, according to a school official.³¹ The school made 33 first-quarter claims for payment.

Such schools are allowed by law to offer religious instruction and limit enrollment. Further, even though a majority of private providers in Cleveland’s general education voucher program are religious schools, a 5-4 decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002) found no violation of the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Then-Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote in the majority opinion that since parents decide where to use vouchers, the program does not violate the U.S. Constitution’s Establishment clause. “State aid reaches religious schools solely as a result of the numerous

²⁹ School website at: www.maryimmaculate.tld.pvt.k12.oh.us/Site/School%20Handbook.html

³⁰ Julie Billiart School website: www.juliebilliartschool.org/

³¹ Interview, December 7, 2007.

independent decisions of private individuals," wrote Rehnquist. The case divided the court deeply, however. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Stephen Breyer wrote that the program directs public money to "a core function of the church: the teaching of religious truths to young children." Justice David Souter, also in dissent, wrote that "every objective underlying the prohibition of religious establishment is betrayed by this scheme."³²

Nevertheless, this controversial decision set a precedent for Ohio's autism program, which, like the Cleveland program, gives parents a choice on where to use the voucher.³³

OTHER PROVIDERS OFFER LIMITED SERVICES

The 87 agencies, hospitals and individuals that do not offer classroom settings and that made claims in the first quarter of fiscal year 2008 accounted for 339 claims, or 38.5 percent, of the first-quarter total of 880. The average number of claims per provider was 3.9, with a median of two. Only nine of these 87 providers made 10 or more claims; 57 had only one or two claims.

A number of families using the voucher at these providers are receiving in-home tutoring in academic areas. A significant majority of these non-school providers, however, are not offering an education program in the same sense that a public school does.

The largest of the non-school providers is North Coast Tutoring Services, Inc., with 56 first-quarter claims. North Coast's offices are located in Solon (Cuyahoga), but it can train tutors in any part of the state to work with children at home, according to the agency's director.³⁴ The program specializes in children with disabilities, both preschool and school-age.

It is likely that at least some families using these providers are combining services. For example, they may use the voucher to pay for a home-based tutoring program as well as a speech or occupational therapist. The Office for Exceptional Children was not able to provide this kind of detailed information on use of the voucher.

The other providers in this category with the most claims include: Capable Kids LLC, in suburban Toledo, which provides consulting services, with 18 first-quarter claims; Steps Behavioral Consulting Services, in suburban Cleveland, provides treatment and educational consulting to home or school programs, with 16 first-quarter claims; Step by Step Academy, Inc., a mental health agency based at Ohio State University's Harding Hospital Campus in suburban Columbus, with 14 claims.

³² Quotes from the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* opinion taken from the Freedom Forum, June 28, 2002. Available online at www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=16487

³³ According to Ohio law and autism program guidelines, the voucher is only supposed to pay for education and services that help children achieve goals written in their IEPs. Religion cannot be included in IEPs; however, it is clear that at schools where religious instruction is infused into daily academics, voucher students will be receiving religious instruction at public expense.

³⁴ Interview, December 13, 2007.

PRIVATE PROVIDER ANALYSIS

The majority of the 40 schools or school-like providers reviewed for this study charge less than the weighted amount guaranteed under state law for children on the autism spectrum, \$29,276 in fiscal year 2008. This raises the question: Leaving aside the quality of the services they provide, how are these private schools able to educate children for less than school districts?

First and foremost, since preschoolers make up an estimated 50 percent of all voucher participants, it is likely that many providers serve students for a significantly shorter number of hours than the full school day provided in Ohio's public schools.

Further, many of the providers interviewed for this study said that the \$20,000 voucher is not enough to cover services needed by many children with autism. Some providers stressed tight budgets and low salaries, the need to raise other funds (in the case of nonprofits) or to rely on other sources of public funding such as Medicaid.³⁵ A significant number also charge parents for costs exceeding the voucher cap.

At the same time, 25 of the 40 providers enroll only higher functioning children, who are likely to require less intensive, and less expensive, services. Providers are also able to reject harder-to-educate students from within the subset of children with less-severe needs.

In many cases, services provided by the private schools and agencies reviewed here are not as extensive as those being offered by school districts. Many either do not offer services such as speech or occupational therapy, or contract those services out.

PROVIDERS OFFER VASTLY DIFFERENT SERVICES AT SAME COST

Within the voucher program, there is a wide variety of services offered, even among providers that charge the same tuition. A private religious school in Akron that serves only higher functioning children, for example, charges the same tuition – the voucher limit of \$20,000 – as a Youngstown provider that accepts even the most severely disabled children.

The Rich Center for Autism at Youngstown State University, recognized for its autism expertise, offers comprehensive services through a full school-year program and a summer program. Operated with non-university funds, the center provides specialized instruction and intervention for children with autism that includes a focus on academics, behavior, communication and social skills development as needed. The voucher is accepted to cover all

³⁵ An example is the Step by Step Academy, an approved provider in the voucher program that has been highlighted in recent news stories about Medicaid reimbursements to autism providers. The Worthington-based provider received more than \$2.6 million of the \$5.3 million spent on community psychiatric treatment, according to Gongwer News Service, Gongwer Ohio Report, Volume #77, Report #29, Article #04, February 12, 2008.

costs.³⁶ The center is also a training ground for teachers, teacher aides and education-school students who seek specialized training to serve children with autism. The Rich Center submitted 42 claims for the first quarter of 2008.

At the same time, the Emmanuel Christian Academy in Akron enrolls only higher-functioning students with autism in a school that serves mostly typically developing children in preschool through 8th grade. Like the Rich Center, ECA's tuition for children with autism is \$20,000, even though tuition for non-disabled children at the religious school is only \$4,050. Overall school enrollment in fiscal year 2008 is about 130 students, four of whom have autism spectrum disorders.³⁷ ECA submitted 2 claims for the first quarter.

GREATER VOUCHER USE BY WEALTHIER OHIOANS

A Policy Matters analysis of autism voucher use reveals that Ohioans in relatively affluent communities tend to take advantage of the autism voucher to a greater extent than do families in less affluent communities, even though autism spectrum disorders affect children equally across socioeconomic lines.

Because income data are not collected by the state on families using the autism voucher, a direct analysis of voucher use by income was not possible. Instead, Policy Matters combined data from the following sources:

- Dollar amounts deducted in fiscal year 2007 from state foundation funding for each school district where residents enrolled in the voucher program;³⁸
- Median resident federal adjusted gross income for each Ohio school district;³⁹
- Fiscal year 2007 total enrollment numbers for each school district.⁴⁰

This analysis reveals that voucher recipients living in the wealthiest 10 percent of all Ohio public school districts, as measured by residents' median income, account for 35 percent of deductions made for the autism voucher program while these districts enroll 17 percent of Ohio's public school students. The poorest 10 percent of districts, by the same measure, enroll 14 percent of the state's public school district students but account for only 7 percent of spending in the program.⁴¹ (See figure 4)

³⁶ Information from Rich Center for Autism website at www.richcenter.org. A request to interview the Rich Center's director for this study was turned down.

³⁷ Interview, February 11, 2008.

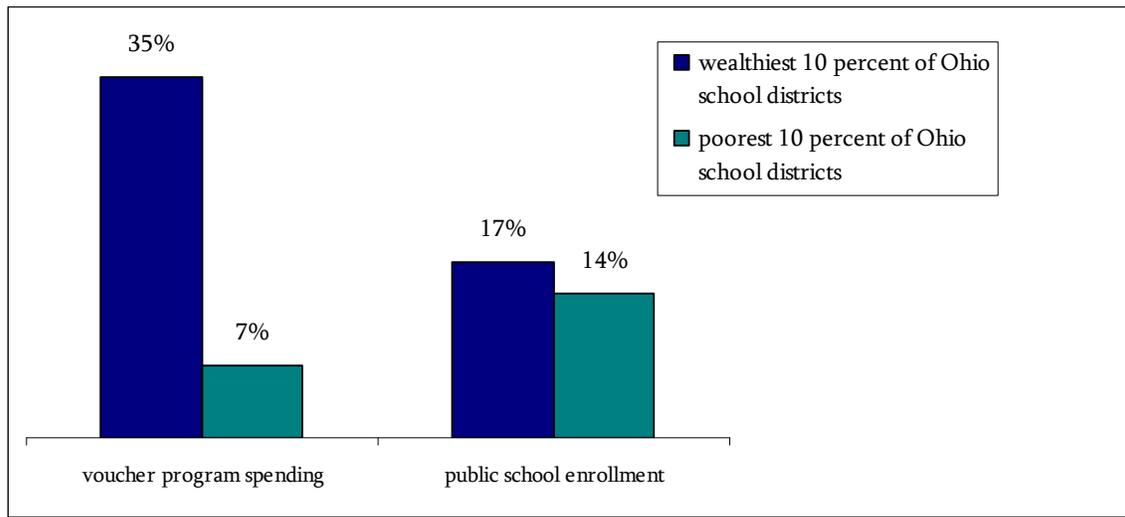
³⁸ Fiscal year 2007 data on district-by-district deductions for the Autism Scholarship Program provided by the Office for Exceptional Children of ODE.

³⁹ Median federal adjusted gross income for 2005 as reported by Ohioans on income tax returns and summarized by the Ohio Department of Taxation, Table Y-2, 2005 Summary of Income Tax Returns by School District (most recent year available).

⁴⁰ Fiscal year 2007 enrollment numbers available on Ohio Department of Education website.

⁴¹ Median income in the wealthiest 10 percent of districts ranged from \$41,913 to \$69,743; median income in the poorest 10 percent of districts ranged from \$17,291 to \$25,343.

Figure 4
Residents of wealthiest districts account for 35 percent of voucher spending



Voucher use by residents of Ohio’s wealthiest districts account for 35 percent of spending on the voucher program, while these districts enroll only 17 percent of Ohio’s public school students; residents of the state’s poorest districts enroll 14 percent of the state’s students but account for only 7 percent of spending in the program.

Sources: Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education; Ohio Department of Taxation

There are a number of reasons for this disproportionately higher use by Ohioans in wealthier communities, among them:

- At least 14 schools or centers with academic day programs charge more than the \$20,000 voucher limit, which means parents have to pick up the difference with their own funds.
- Many services offered in the program, especially for preschoolers, are home-based, requiring a parent to stay home with children during the day; this may be more difficult for lower-income parents.
- Approved private providers in the voucher program are concentrated in wealthier metropolitan areas, leaving poorer, rural Ohioans less able to access the voucher.

- Research suggests that poverty is one of the biggest barriers to parental involvement in a child's education.⁴² As is the case with other school-choice programs, parents who are more involved are more likely to take an active role in applying for the voucher and finding a private program.⁴³ Research similarly suggests that wealthier parents are more likely to know about available options and to serve as informed, assertive advocates for their children.

EXTRA COSTS FOR SERVICES

Many parents interviewed for this study spoke of the need to supplement services provided in the chosen school setting with outside therapy or other activities.

The small sample of parents (21) makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions about services being provided in various settings, but parents using the autism voucher and one former voucher user whose child is now enrolled in a charter school reported spending more of their own money on additional services than did those who kept their children in public schools.

Among the costs cited by these parents were transportation and speech and occupational therapy, with costs not covered by the voucher ranging as high as \$8,000. Only one public school parent reported such significant costs; this parent said additional speech therapy, occupational therapy and behavior analysis bills for her child ran up to \$25,000 a year.

Public school districts often offer a wider array of services from classroom support to speech, physical and occupational therapy to transportation. This may explain why public school parents reported lower outside expenses. While the voucher pays for many of these services, a private school or center may or may not include all the needed services to voucher students in basic tuition, and the services a particular child needs may cost more than the \$20,000 limit.

Transportation is only provided under the program if it is included in a child's IEP. In some cases, families using the voucher at nonpublic schools are "entitled to the same transportation being offered by the resident district to regular education students attending that nonpublic school."⁴⁴

⁴² National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2002-03, Table 3*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005 <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005043>

⁴³ Factors such as race, income and involvement that affect decision-making are examined in a broad range of research, including an interview project of African-American students and their parents in St. Louis who either chose to stay in local schools or transfer to white county schools, as described by Amy Stuart Wells and Robert Crain in "Stepping Over the Color Line: African American Students in White Suburban Schools." Yale University Press, 1997.

⁴⁴ Ohio Department of Education ASP guidelines, 2007-2008.

FEW PROVIDERS IN RURAL AREAS

Approved private providers in the voucher program are concentrated in metropolitan areas, leaving poorer, rural Ohioans less able to access the voucher.

Only 32 of Ohio's 88 counties have ODE-approved private providers within their boundaries, as figure 5 shows.⁴⁵ (These 32 counties account for 77 percent of Ohio's population.)

Furthermore, all but 10 providers are in Ohio's eight major metropolitan areas, defined as counties with urban centers (Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Summit, and Stark counties) and immediately surrounding counties.⁴⁶

Despite this distribution of private providers, residents of 51 counties participated in the voucher program in fiscal year 2007; in the remaining 37 counties where no providers are located, no residents participated in the program.

Since autism spectrum disorders affect children equally across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, comparing voucher use (as measured by deductions from state foundation aid to pay for the vouchers) to overall district enrollment provides a meaningful, albeit rough, means of comparison.⁴⁷

In terms of voucher use, this comparison shows that:

- Ohio's three largest counties (Cuyahoga, Franklin and Hamilton) account for nearly half of all spending in the program (47 percent) but account for only a quarter (26 percent) of the state's overall public school enrollment.
- For the two counties with the most voucher use, ODE deducted \$2,709,416 from state foundation aid for Franklin County's 15 school districts with

⁴⁵ At least one provider, North Coast Tutoring Services, Inc., says it can provide its services in any part of the state by training local tutors. According to its website (www.northcoasted.com) the agency runs trainings for tutors to work with higher-functioning children in academic content areas. For more severely impaired children, North Coast says it seeks tutors with a minimum of two years college with a preference for students majoring in "education, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, sociology, nursing, etc." to work with children using specific behavioral methodologies. Although the agency does not provide trainings for these approaches, the website says parents "may be willing" to provide on-the-job training for the positions, which pay \$10 to \$15 or more per hour, depending on experience.

⁴⁶ From the October 29, 2007 list of approved private providers posted on the website of the Office for Exceptional Children at ODE www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=967&Content=39417

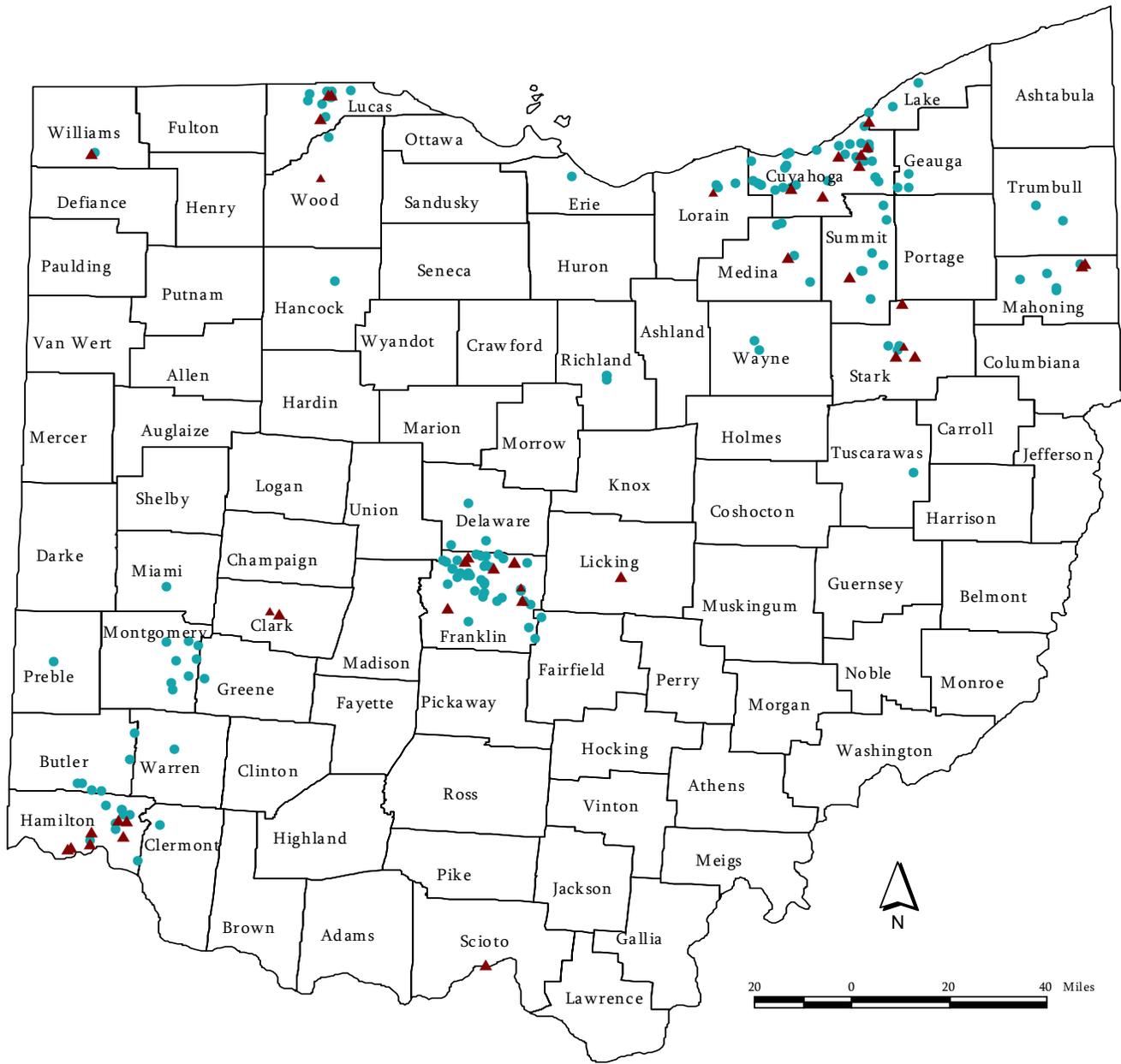
⁴⁷ The Ohio Department of Education does not require a count of preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders. Preschool children with disabilities are all included in a general category of children with disabilities, unlike school-age children, who are identified with specific disabilities. This lack of clear enrollment numbers makes it impossible to come up with a district-by-district number of children with autism that would enable a more precise comparison of voucher use by district against overall autism enrollment.

participating students to pay for the voucher in fiscal year 2007, but only \$1,311,393 from Cuyahoga's 27 affected districts, despite the fact that the affected Cuyahoga districts enroll nearly 9,000 more students overall. Each county had roughly the same number of providers in the program – 45 in Franklin and 42 in Cuyahoga.

- ODE deducted \$8.2 million from foundation aid designated for districts in the ten Ohio counties with the highest resident participation in the program, as measured by foundation aid deductions in fiscal year 2007 (school year 2006-07). This figure represents 75 percent of all spending on the program. These are either counties where one of the state's eight large urban school districts is located, or suburban counties that neighbor urbanized counties. (See figure 6)

Figure 5
Distribution of approved private providers in Ohio’s autism voucher program

Just 32 of Ohio’s 88 counties have providers within their boundaries. Of those, 15 counties are home to the 40 providers with first-quarter claims in fiscal year 2008 that are schools or have academic day programs (triangles). The other providers shown here (circles) either did not provide a school-like program or did not have first-quarter claims for payment. At least one provider offers tutoring services statewide.



▲ Schools or school-like providers with first-quarter claims in 2008
 ● Other providers with or without first-quarter claims

Source: Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children; ESR1/U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 6
Ten counties with the highest deductions for the autism voucher program, fiscal year 2007

County	Deduction	Public school enrollment	Voucher students
Franklin	\$2,709,416	163,231	180
Cuyahoga	\$1,311,394	171,863	92
Hamilton	\$1,114,727	103,886	70
Mahoning	\$650,405	34,011	37
Delaware	\$548,628	21,096	34
Summit	\$483,705	77,849	28
Lucas	\$462,187	58,007	37
Lake	\$320,491	33,694	23
Trumbull	\$316,784	32,559	17
Warren	\$282,410	33,214	18

Source: Ohio Department of Education, all data fiscal year 2007 (school year 2006-07).

Although at least one provider, North Coast Tutoring Services, offers services statewide, it is likely that many families in counties where no providers are located accessed services with the voucher by driving long distances, thus incurring costs for transportation that are not covered by the voucher. (Providers interviewed for this study cited cases of parents driving as much as an hour-and-a-half one way to bring their children to school; some parents interviewed also mentioned long travel times and high transportation costs.)

Parents from unserved counties in southeast Ohio said in interviews that no appropriate services are available for many children there outside of the public sector, with or without the voucher program.

“We’re kind of out of luck,” said one parent in Gallia County, noting that the closest voucher provider offering services appropriate for her child is located two hours away in Columbus. Even if parents can pay with their own funds, private providers who offer appropriate autism-related services are “very, very scarce” in southeast Ohio counties, confirmed one Athens County resident.

This geographic inequity in the availability of services for Ohio children with autism predates the establishment of the voucher program. Creation of the program has not reduced that inequity, and does not invest money in training public school teachers who do serve autistic children throughout the state.

URBAN PARTICIPATION VARIES

While many rural counties have no appropriate services available and no children enrolled in the program, children living in four of Ohio’s eight urban centers also have significantly lower levels of participation (as measured by deductions) in the voucher program than would be predicted by overall district enrollment. The Columbus district, for example, enrolls 33

percent of Franklin County’s public school students, but accounts for only 23 percent of county districts’ deductions for the program. These districts, which also include Canton, Cleveland, and Dayton, have large concentrations of poverty. But three of Ohio’s urban districts – Cincinnati, Toledo and Youngstown – have higher levels of participation than their enrollment would predict. Deductions for residents of the Akron school district are very close to the level predicted by enrollment. (See figure 7)

Figure 7

Residents of urban districts tend to use the autism voucher less than suburban residents

Each urban district’s enrollment is shown here as a percentage of all public school enrollment in the county in which the district is located. Similarly, each urban district’s voucher deduction is shown as a percent of deductions for all districts in the county. Since autism affects children equally across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, this analysis suggests that four urban districts have significantly lower participation than their enrollment would predict, while three have higher participation.

	Total public school enrollment	Urban district enrollment	City percent of county enrollment	Voucher deduction total for all county districts	Voucher deduction for urban district	City percent of deduction
Cuyahoga (Cleveland)	171,863	52,769	31%	\$ 1,311,393.64	\$113,092.22	9%
Franklin (Columbus)	163,231	53,674	33%	\$ 2,709,416.43	\$626,943.91	23%
Hamilton (Cincinnati)	103,886	33,881	33%	\$ 1,114,727.11	\$479,066.50	43%
Montgomery (Dayton)	70,778	15,825	22%	\$ 134,405.59	\$21,088.75	16%
Mahoning (Youngstown)	34,011	7,693	23%	\$ 650,405.09	\$323,483.51	50%
Lucas (Toledo)	58,007	27,984	48%	\$ 462,186.72	\$260,346.24	56%
Summit (Akron)	77,849	25,758	33%	\$ 483,704.86	\$153,951.50	32%
Stark (Canton)	61,210	10,474	17%	\$ 255,998.47	\$0.00	0%
totals	740,835	228,058	31%	\$ 7,122,237.91	\$1,977,972.63	28%

Source: Ohio Department of Education, fiscal year 2007

It is not clear why participation rates. One explanation might be the availability of more affordable private providers in some cities. In Youngstown, for example, there are two larger centers serving children with a full range of disabilities that cost \$20,000 or only slightly more. This could explain higher participation rates of Youngstown residents as compared to the rest of Mahoning County. In Cleveland, by contrast, providers that similarly serve children across the autism spectrum are priced \$15,000 to \$50,000 above the voucher limit, thus requiring significant payment by families and likely reducing the ability of many parents to enroll their children.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Serving school-age children with a full-range of abilities in Youngstown: the Potential Development Program charges \$22,000 and had 20 first-quarter claims in fiscal year 2008; The Rich Center for Autism at Youngstown State University charges \$20,000 and had 42 first-quarter claims. In Cleveland, also serving a full-range of school-age children: The Achievement Centers for Children, charging \$57,000 with two claims; Monarch School, charging \$68,500 with 17 claims; the Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism, charging \$65,000 with 12 claims.

Transportation also may play a role. Since the autism voucher does not pay for transportation unless it is in a child's IEP, poorer families in urban areas may struggle to get to suburban providers. In Cleveland, for example, only 14 percent of all providers listed for Cuyahoga County are in Cleveland proper, while in Toledo and Cincinnati, more than 90 percent of providers listed for those counties are within the center city limits. While only 43 percent of Mahoning County's providers are located in Youngstown proper, the county's two largest, as measured by 2008 first-quarter claims, are in the city.

Varying levels of awareness of the voucher program in larger districts may also play a role, although this study did not attempt to measure this awareness. Interviews with parents and observers suggest that some districts are more likely to let parents know about the voucher. Some districts also may have a faster process for getting students into the program, for example by more quickly finalizing a child's IEP.

VOUCHER STUDENTS IN MORE RESTRICTIVE SETTINGS

A Policy Matters analysis of fiscal year 2008 first-quarter claims for payment in the autism voucher program shows that a large majority of children enrolled in the program are likely being served in an environment that limits their interactions with non-disabled peers.

The "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE) provision of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act holds that: "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are [1] educated with children who are not disabled, and [2] special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."⁴⁹

According to the National Council on Disability, "learning in less restrictive environments benefits students with and without disabilities in so much as all children are more likely to improve their academic performance, and increase their communication and socialization skills."⁵⁰

Any study of a program like this one must consider its impact on the federal LRE mandate, which was a hard-won victory for advocates and parents of special education students. Before federal law began to address the education and rights of special needs students in the 1970s, many were segregated in special classrooms or allowed to skip school entirely.

While the data available for this study do not allow a conclusive determination as to how many students are being educated in an appropriate LRE under the voucher program, Policy

⁴⁹ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

⁵⁰ *School Vouchers and Students with Disabilities*, Policy Paper, National Council on Disability, Washington D.C., April 15, 2003.

Matters analysis suggests that a significant majority of voucher students do not have access to such an environment at their private providers. According to the Office for Exceptional Children, no complaints have been filed on this issue. Experts consulted for this study said that clarity on this issue could likely come only from a court challenge to the program.

Fully 75 percent of the 880 first-quarter claims were for providers created to primarily or exclusively serve disabled students and therefore unlikely to offer regular interaction with typically developing peers. (See figure 8)

- Of the 166 claims for schools and other providers with center-based education settings that serve only students with less-severe needs, 113 were made for five schools that serve only children with disabilities.⁵¹ Although they serve children with a range of disabilities other than autism, in many cases these schools may not meet the definition of LRE under IDEA.
- Four providers of the 15 that serve more severely impaired children, and highlight their efforts to include typical peers in the classroom, made a total of 164 first-quarter claims.⁵² The other 11 providers had 211 first-quarter claims made for settings less likely to provide regular opportunities to interact with typical peers.
- The services offered by the 87 agencies and individual therapists that are not classroom environments further deviates from a least restrictive environment. These providers – with 339 first-quarter claims – are unlikely to offer opportunities for interaction with typical peers, since they offer primarily tutoring, consulting and therapy services rather than education in a classroom setting.

⁵¹ Julie Billiard School in Lyndhurst (Cuyahoga), with 33 claims; Marburn Academy in Columbus, with 11 claims; Linden Grove School in Cincinnati, with 28 claims; Mary Immaculate School in Toledo, with 8 claims; and The Lawrence School in Broadview Heights (Cuyahoga), with 33 claims.

⁵² Helping Hands Center for Special Needs in Worthington (Franklin), with 81 claims; Middleburg Early Education Center in Middleburg Heights (Cuyahoga), with 18 claims; the Children's Center for Developmental Enrichment/Oakstone in Columbus, with 23 claims; and the Rich Center at Youngstown State University, with 42 claims. These providers enroll children who are not developmentally disabled or work to include them in programming with the specific intent to allow at least some children on the autism spectrum the opportunity to interact with typical peers on a regular basis.

Figure 8

Majority of claims for providers that serve only disabled students

An analysis of provider claims suggests that as many as 75 percent of 880 first-quarter claims were for providers created to primarily or exclusively serve disabled students and therefore unlikely to offer voucher students the opportunity for regular interaction with typically developing peers.

	Claims for providers that serve children with less severe needs	Claims for providers that serve children with more severe needs	Claims for Non-school providers	Totals	Percent
Segregation more likely	113	211	339	663	75%
Segregation less likely	53	164	--	217	25%
Totals	166	375	339	880	100%

Source: Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, claims per provider first quarter fiscal year 2008

Providers are following the law in limiting enrollment in this way, even if students are segregated by ability. And individual parents may care more about the services their children are receiving than about how integrated they are with classmates of different abilities.

The broader question is about the program as a whole. Given the importance society, including advocates for special-needs children, has placed on including such children in education settings with non-disabled peers, the fact that this taxpayer-funded program is so skewed toward segregation of special-needs children raises concerns.

SOCIALIZATION A PRIORITY FOR PARENTS

The importance of this question – whether or not the autism voucher program provides an appropriate least restrictive environment – is further highlighted by the priority parents interviewed for this study placed on finding an environment that allows their children to interact regularly with non-disabled peers who can model appropriate behaviors. Settings that include non-disabled peers also provide children on the autism spectrum much-needed opportunities to practice social interaction. The sample of parents interviewed (21) is too small to draw broad conclusions about the program, but the universal nature of this concern was evident.

This issue surfaced in virtually every parent interview. In many cases, this was a primary factor in decisions parents made on where to place their children, and even whether or not to enroll them in the program. Only two parents did not mention socialization with typical peers, and these parents lived in southeast Ohio counties that have no providers approved under the program and few, if any, nonpublic options.

Many of the parents who have kept their children in a public setting cited inclusive settings that allowed opportunities for socialization as a primary reason for their decision. Those with children in the voucher program either mentioned a lack of opportunity for their children to interact with typical peers as a reservation they had about their decision or noted what they or their primary provider was doing to provide that opportunity in a private setting.

One parent, whose higher-functioning 11-year-old with limited social skills and difficult behavior issues is enrolled in the local public elementary school, said keeping her son in a regular school environment has been a top priority. The payoff has been that everyone at school and in the neighborhood knows the child and looks out for him.

At school, “teachers are setting an extremely good example with inclusion,” added this mother, and other children follow that model. If this kind of awareness among her son’s non-disabled peers carries over into the workplace in later life, “it would be just utopia,” she continued.

Another parent, whose child graduated from public schools in a suburban district and is now in his 20s, also said strengthened ties to the community are a benefit of attending school with non-disabled children in a neighborhood school. Her son is now more connected to others in his neighborhood than he would have been had he attended a school outside the area, this mother said.

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Policy Matters interviewed 21 parents with children on the autism spectrum to better understand the concerns and issues such parents face. This sample is not large enough to be a meaningful measure of satisfaction or quality of services provided; rather, it is meant to add context to the other elements of this study.

Six of the parents were using the autism voucher at the time of the interviews or had used it in the past; 13 had their children enrolled in a public school or public preschool setting; one had children who went through public schools but had graduated; and one was paying for a private school without the voucher after having used district preschool services.

The parents interviewed lived in 11 Ohio counties, including urban, suburban and rural: Athens, Cuyahoga, Delaware, Franklin, Gallia, Hamilton, Lawrence, Logan, Lorain, Portage and Summit.

RESPONSIVE TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS

The parents interviewed who had children in the voucher program expressed satisfaction across the board. These parents highlighted good communication with teachers and administrators about their child’s progress as a key element of this satisfaction.⁵³

In contrast, many of the public school parents expressed at least some level of dissatisfaction with the public school in which their child was enrolled.

⁵³ Most of the parents using vouchers who were interviewed for this study were contacted through the list-serve of an autism advocacy group. These parents’ responses may have been skewed by emails sent by a list-serve member who encouraged anyone who responded to the request to be interviewed by Policy Matters to be positive about the program. One email, forwarded to Policy Matters by another list-serve member, read in part: “If you talk to them [Policy Matters] we need to be very positive on the Scholarship, why you needed it and why we need it.”

The factor that seemed to separate satisfied public school parents from those with children in public schools who were unhappy was the quality of interaction with teachers and administrators. Those who said their school district's educators were "responsive" or "willing to help" expressed a higher degree of satisfaction.

"There is a certain humility that ... both parents and the school" need to have to create and maintain an effective, non-blaming working relationship, said one parent.

EDUCATOR TRAINING

Eight of the 13 respondents who reported that their children were enrolled in a district school stressed the need for more and better training for teachers, aides and therapists who work with children on the autism spectrum.

In a number of cases, parents said a much needed one-on-one aide was provided by a school district for their child, but that the aide had no training in autism spectrum disorders. Parents mentioned that they often seemed to know more than teachers about autism and helped train the teachers; one parent said a teacher ended up "learning along with us." This need for training can recur as children move from grade to grade.

Parents said teachers often seemed to lack the patience or ability to deal with the behavior problems of children on the autism spectrum.

Educator training was not mentioned as a problem by parents with children in the voucher program.

UNSERVED AREAS

An effort was made to reach parents in rural parts of the state where no children are enrolled and where no private providers have been approved under the program.

Although other parts of the state are unserved, the parents in unserved areas interviewed for this study live in Athens, Gallia and Lawrence counties in southeast Ohio.

The parents contacted in these areas were involved in local autism support groups, and had contact with significant numbers of other parents in the region. While negative experiences were not universal, these parents reported a high level of dissatisfaction with school district services among parents with whom they have contact, but also a lack of meaningful options outside of services provided by school districts or county boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. This scarcity included services more available in urbanized areas of the state, such as speech and occupational therapists and applied behavior analysts.

ACCOUNTABILITY/OVERSIGHT

The primary oversight of providers in the voucher program consists of a credential check carried out by a two-person staff at the Office for Exceptional Children at ODE.

Each year, providers must send in an application including one page of instructions, a half-page form where the provider is asked to enter name, address and contact information, a one-and-a-half-page affidavit and a page providing space to list names of staff and their relevant credentials for serving children with autism. (See Appendix B.)

The affidavit requires a notarized signature by a representative authorized to agree to a list of 13 statements. The list includes assurances that the provider has:

- written policies and procedures addressing program and administrative services;
- a current copy of criminal backgrounds checks for owners, employees, contractors and volunteers;
- copies of required licenses for staff who will be providing specialized services;
- adequate insurance;
- sufficient capital or credit to operate during the upcoming school year; and
- has been in operation for at least one full school year prior to enrolling children with the voucher program.

“I don’t believe we’ve discontinued anyone for doing something wrong,” said one of the two staffers running the program at the Office for Exceptional Children.⁵⁴ The staff does not get involved in how a particular program is operating, rather, they check to ensure credentials listed on the application are current and make sure providers have filled out necessary paperwork, said this staffer.

Providers are rejected upon reapplication if they only had one person with the required credentials and that person has left, for example.

IEPs and progress reports required by program rules are not sent to the Office for Exceptional Children; only parents and staff at private providers and school districts see them.

“This is not the public education system,” said this staffer. “Parents now have more responsibility; they now have to ensure that the IEP gets implemented.” Onsite visits by ODE staff to audit records and practices at private voucher providers are also rare.

Several school district officials interviewed for this study raised concerns about weak oversight of private providers, asserting that some agencies provide poor or inadequate services or don’t provide services required by a child’s IEP.

⁵⁴ Interview, October 24, 2007.

District representatives also pointed to mandates under both federal and state law that require heavy oversight for district special education programs, in contrast to minimal private provider accountability in the voucher program.

LACK OF ACCESSIBLE RECORDS HAMPERS EVALUATION

Staff at the Office for Exceptional Children were very helpful in providing relevant data, context and background on the voucher program for this study.

However, two issues concerning records raise questions about ODE's ability to operate the program as transparently as possible.

First, the office's reliance on paper records made responding to some requests unnecessarily difficult. For example, a Policy Matters' request for data on the number of claims for payment made by each voucher provider for fiscal year 2007 would have required staff at the Office for Exceptional Children to tally claims from thousands of pieces of paper in their files. The office is just now in the process of switching from paper records to electronic data collection and storage. Fiscal year 2008 is the first year for which provider claims are being kept electronically, so only claims from the first quarter of 2008 were made available for this study. We recommend a complete transition from paper to electronic record keeping, which is currently planned.

The second issue is a lack of data collection that should be part of every ODE program. Beyond names and addresses, little is known about the families and children who apply for vouchers. Of primary concern is that no information is requested of families about their level of income or about the severity of their child's disability. Answers to these questions would allow for a better understanding of who is being served by the program. Similarly, including requests on provider applications for more information about services offered would facilitate evaluation.

Also missing are records that would facilitate tracking of who is leaving the program and why. Even the ability to track a simple attrition rate would serve as an indicator of the program's success in meeting the needs of those it serves.

The voucher program's overall lack of oversight and accountability is cause for concern, and does not appear to be compatible with the current emphasis on evaluation, oversight and accountability that predominates in education policy.

SCHOOL CLOSING DISRUPTS EDUCATION

In at least one case, the voucher program's low level of oversight left some families in the lurch. In November 2007, ACE Academy in the Cleveland suburb of Wickliffe unexpectedly closed.

Even though the Office for Exceptional Students approved the school on July 5 for the 2007-08 school year, financial troubles shut the school down after it lost staff and most of its

students since the beginning of the school year. A school representative had signed the affidavit swearing, among other provisions, that the school had “sufficient capital or credit to operate during the 2007-2008 school year.”

But the school was already plagued by financial problems by July, according to an online article in the *Lake County News Herald*.⁵⁵ “The people running ACE were depending on an increase (in the voucher amount) to stay afloat,” said the article. The school’s director, the father of an autistic child who had volunteered at the school, was part of a group of investors that took over the school in June. The school’s \$25,000-per-year tuition included a summer program.

At the beginning of the school year, 20 students were enrolled, including those receiving tutoring. By mid-November, that number had dropped to five, with two of those ready to re-enroll in their district schools, according to the article. The news story was the only source of information found on this school, aside from the school’s approved application released by the Office for Exceptional Children.

Parents started withdrawing after the school’s clinical director left. Two teacher aides were let go in October, and “as enrollment dropped to the current three students, more and more staff were let go,” according to the news article.

One parent interviewed for the story was distraught, because her four-year-old son had been making progress at the school. She planned to return her child to a school in his district of residence, Richmond Heights.

EDUCATION GUARANTEE

Federal special education and disability law requires that children receive a “free and appropriate public education” or FAPE, but parents who enroll their children in the autism voucher program give up rights to FAPE.

As a result, if parents using the voucher are dissatisfied with services their children are receiving, their only options are to shop around for another provider who accepts the voucher, pay with their own funds at another private school or agency, or return to their district school. Individualized Education Plans written by school district staff, in theory, provide a guarantee that children’s needs will be met. But lack of oversight and potentially contentious relationships between private providers and district staff can weaken this protection.

Under FAPE, a public school district must provide special education and related services to a child at no cost, whether in a regular education classroom, in a classroom with assistance, or in separate classes for all or part of the school day. This can include instruction at home, in

⁵⁵ *School for children with autism to close*, November 15, 2007, by Deborah Lowers, The Lake County News Herald (www.news-herald.com).

non-school private or public institutions, and may also includes services such as speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological counseling and medical diagnostic services necessary to a child's education.⁵⁶

Districts are no longer required to provide FAPE for children using the voucher, according to program guidelines.⁵⁷ But each year, district staff must continue to write each voucher participant's IEP, based on reports from private providers, even if the child has never enrolled in a district school.

This process is often complicated by lack of reporting from private providers, according to school district officials interviewed. Six districts said at least some of the providers they had to work with did not do an adequate job of providing information so district staff could write IEPs. Similarly, providers in the voucher program noted difficult relationships and interactions in dealing with district staff around the annual IEP process. Both districts and voucher providers said collaboration has tended to improve over time.

But writing IEPs for voucher students can drain staff time, according to district officials. In a more complex case, this can mean up to 25 hours to chase down reports from providers and write one IEP, according to one district estimate.

Since providers in the voucher program are supposed to implement each student's IEP as written, and IEPs are supposed to provide FAPE, "the FAPE requirement is kind of built in," notes a staffer with legal expertise at the Office for Exceptional Children.⁵⁸

Parents with children at district schools have certain procedural rights to challenge the services their children are receiving. Once they are in the voucher program, however, their only option if they are dissatisfied is to find another provider. Parents can switch providers, but can't demand services a provider is unwilling or unable to offer. Providers can pick and choose whom they will admit, denying enrollment or even kicking a student out – cause for concern, since even many higher-functioning children with autism spectrum disorders have behavioral issues. At least some providers also have waiting lists, some of them longer than a year, making it harder for parents to enroll children in their provider of choice.

In the end, once a child is enrolled in the voucher program, it is up to that child's parents to ensure that the child's needs are being met and that he or she is receiving the services written into the IEP. The state has no role in overseeing whether or not IEP services are being provided.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Education website: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html

⁵⁷ Ohio Administrative Code Section 3301-103-04, *Requirements to Provide a Free Appropriate Public Education*.

⁵⁸ Interview, January 2008.

Parents do retain the right to file a complaint or to file for a due process hearing against their district of residence for all violations of federal special education law except those dealing with the implementation of the IEP and the conferring of FAPE.

Once parents decide to leave the voucher program and return their children to a district school, then the district is once again required to guarantee a free and appropriate public education.

WHAT DOES IT COST TO EDUCATE A CHILD ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?

Costs to educate autistic children vary, in part because of the wide range of needs such children have. Children with disorders that leave them with little or no spoken language and stuck in repetitive behavior patterns are among those most in need of high-cost services. The brightest individuals with PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified) may require few extra services beyond what general education students receive, or they may need intensive assistance as they struggle to develop skills in areas such as organization, self-advocacy or abstract thinking.

One rural school district estimated it spends about \$37,000, on average, to educate each of its autistic students. A suburban district described the average of \$58,000 per child it is paying an outside agency to work with 11 of its autistic children.

In the voucher program, one of the least expensive providers is St. Lawrence School, a Cincinnati parochial school that accepts only higher-functioning students and charges \$1,200 tuition for parishioners and \$4,000 for non-parishioners. The school has one speech and language pathologist, according to its application for approval as a voucher provider, but no other staffers whose credentials would qualify it as a provider according to ODE criteria.⁵⁹

At the other end of the tuition scale is Monarch School, part of the Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau in Shaker Heights, which focuses services on severely impaired children with autism and charges \$68,500 for its school-age program. Staff members whose credentials qualify Monarch for approval include nine special education teachers, three occupational therapists and eight speech and language pathologists.

STATE FUNDING FORMULAS

The public school funding system in Ohio guarantees a minimum “base cost” for each regular education student; several categories of special education funding “weights” guarantee an extra amount above the base cost for students with disabilities. These guarantees are calculations of revenue that should be generated by each student, but are not what is spent on each student. IEPs, which outline goals for each child and services needed to reach them, are intended to drive special education costs.

⁵⁹ Information on criteria for approval from interviews and emails with staff at the Office for Exceptional Children, ODE.

The base cost for regular education students in fiscal year 2008 is \$5,565. While this amount is guaranteed for each student, the state picks up a different percentage of this cost for each district based on property wealth. School districts with the highest levels of property wealth get none of the base cost from the state; the most property-poor districts get up to 90 percent of that guaranteed amount from the state. The remaining amount is to be paid by local tax dollars; the state provides “gap aid,” or additional funds for districts that don't generate enough local tax revenue to pay the local share.⁶⁰ Also, the state biennial budget that covers fiscal years 2008 and 2009 guarantees that each district will receive the same amount of formula funding it received in the previous fiscal year.

Autism is covered in category 6 of special education funding, which provides the highest extra per-pupil funding guarantee. In fiscal year 2008, this per-pupil amount is \$23,711 (no district receives this full amount, since state share is a percentage of this amount).⁶¹ This means that, in theory, state law guarantees \$29,276 in funding (\$5,565 plus \$23,711) for each student on the autism spectrum enrolled in the public school system. For most districts, this is a combination of local and state funds. (Categories 1 through 5 provide lesser amounts for different disabilities.)

These special education weights are based on average costs for services provided to these children, calculated in 2001. The weighted amounts have increased to the extent that the base amount with which they are calculated have increased. It costs more than the weighted amount to educate some children, while others may cost less.⁶²

The state share percentage determined by a district's property wealth also applies to the category 6 weighted amount. In a property-wealthy system with a state share of 5 percent, for example, an autistic child should generate about \$1,464 in state funding (this includes both

⁶⁰ The Ohio School Boards Association defines gap aid as follows: “A form of state aid in which the state pays a school district whose local tax revenues do not equal the district's share of formula costs. Gap aid pays: (A) for a portion of the local share of the basic foundation amount equal to the difference between 23 mills multiplied by the district's tax base minus the district's actual local tax revenues; (B) for a portion of the first 3.3 mills of the local share of special education, vocational education and transportation costs to the extent that the district does not raise local taxes to pay for those costs. Generally, school districts whose average effective tax rate equals at least 23 mills receive no aid under part A; school districts whose effective tax rate equals at least 26.3 mills receive no aid under parts A and B.

⁶¹ The \$5,565 base cost multiplied by a weight of 4.7342 for category 6; this total is then multiplied by .9, because special education weights are funded at 90 percent.

⁶² For an explanation on special education funding in Ohio, three publications may be helpful. *Ohio's School Foundation Funding Program: The Form SF-3 – Line by Line, Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009* is available

at: www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=1001&Content=43695; *Special Education Finance in Ohio: September 26 Methodological Update*, published by the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities, September 26, 2006; *A Profile of Ohio's Publicly Funded Services for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, prepared by Capital Partners for Columbus Children's Hospital in March 2003.

base cost and category 6 weight), while the district is required to spend the entire guaranteed amount on special education purposes approved by the Ohio Department of Education.⁶³

The same autistic student attending a property-poor school district with a state share of 80 percent, on the other hand, should generate \$23,420 in state funding. These amounts are calculated according to the state's formula, but can also be affected by gap aid and the state aid guarantee described above.

Special education funding can also come from "excess cost supplement aid," through which the state pays for costs that exceed a 3.3 mill limit on a district's share of combined funding for special education, vocational education and transportation.⁶⁴

CATASTROPHIC COSTS

The Ohio Department of Education provides additional funding to school districts in special education categories two through six when a district's costs for the fiscal year for an individual student exceed the "threshold catastrophic cost" for serving the student. This threshold is \$32,850 in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 for category 6, up from \$31,800 in fiscal years 2006 and 2007.⁶⁵ How much of these costs the state will cover depends on each district's state share. But the calculated state share is not necessarily what districts receive, as payments to districts also depend on the amount of money available at the state level. In recent years, the state has paid many districts 45 percent to 59 of what the catastrophic cost formula calculates that it owes.

PRESCHOOL FUNDING FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Ohio law requires that schools ensure a free appropriate public education is available to all children with disabilities beginning at age three. Special education programming for preschool children is funded differently than school-aged programs. Preschoolers are classified in a general disability category, and services for them are unit-funded.

Unit funding provides about \$40,000 a year for a class (unit) of no fewer than six and no more than eight children. The funding is calculated using the minimum salary for the unit's teacher, a percentage for benefits and an additional amount.⁶⁶ The amount of money available

⁶³ Ohio's School Foundation Funding Program, The Form SF-3 – Line by Line, Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009. This spending by districts is not required for students who use the voucher.

⁶⁴ According to the SF-3 explanation cited above: "If the assumed local share of special and vocational weighted aid plus the assumed local share of transportation exceeds 3.3 mills times the district's recognized valuation, the state will pay the difference in excess cost supplement aid."

⁶⁵ The amount of documented additional educational costs ODE will pay is the sum of one-half of the district's costs for the student in excess of the threshold catastrophic cost plus the product of one-half of the district's costs for the student in excess of the threshold catastrophic cost multiplied by the district's state share percentage. The state share derived from this formula is not necessarily what districts receive, however, as payments depend on the amount of money available at the state level.

⁶⁶ Ohio Revised Code 3317.052: "The department of education shall pay each school district, educational service center, institution eligible for payment under section 3323.091 of the Revised Code, or county MR/DD board an amount for the total of all classroom units for preschool children with

to fund preschool units is based on funds approved by the General Assembly in each biennial budget, and does not cover all preschool units in the public system.

Preschool children enrolled in the voucher program generate the weighted funding for category 6, just as school-age children do.

WHO FOOTS THE BILL FOR THE AUTISM VOUCHER?

School funding is notoriously complex, and Ohio is no exception. As is the case for other voucher programs and charter schools in Ohio, interpretations differ on how funding actually works and whether state funds or local tax revenues pay for autism vouchers.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to resolve this issue, districts' claims of financial harm from the autism voucher and the program's unique funding structure make a review necessary.

The Office for Exceptional Children maintains that since all money for the program is deducted from state foundation aid for each participating child's resident district (line item 501), the money is by definition state money. This position holds that no locally generated tax dollars are used to pay for the voucher.

Since school districts must use local tax dollars to pay a fixed share of the total base cost needed to educate resident students (calculated by multiplying the district's property valuation by 23 mills), a loss or gain in enrollment does not affect the amount of local money a district is required to contribute. The amount that remains after the local share is subtracted from the district's total base cost amount is the state share, which does fluctuate based on enrollment. As a result, when students leave a district, whether for a private school, a different district, a charter school or to use a voucher, it can be argued that only state money is lost by a district, which no longer is responsible for that child's education.⁶⁷

The opposing argument is that the cost to educate all resident children enrolled in public schools is borne by both the state and the local district. Almost across the board, district officials interviewed for this study said the voucher can divert local money. In the case of districts with higher property wealth, according to district officials, state funds generated by each student with autism do not cover the amount of money being deducted for the voucher.

disabilities approved under division (B) of section 3317.05 of the Revised Code. For each unit, the amount shall be the sum of the minimum salary for the teacher of the unit, calculated on the basis of the teacher's training level and years of experience pursuant to the salary schedule prescribed in the version of section 3317.13 of the Revised Code in effect prior to July 1, 2001, plus fifteen per cent of that minimum salary amount, and eight thousand twenty-three dollars."

⁶⁷ This explanation is drawn from an analysis of charter school funding by the Legislative Office of Education Oversight published in *Community Schools in Ohio: Implementation Issues and Impact on Ohio's Education System, Volume 1, Appendix G*, April 2003.

A district like the one described above with a state share of 5 percent, for example, may draw \$1,464 in state funds for an autistic child because of its low state share, but as much as \$20,000 may be deducted from its state aid if that student enrolls in the voucher program, whether or not the student has previously been enrolled in the district. On the other hand, if a district with an 80 percent state share, like the one described above, gets \$23,420 (its state share of base cost and weighted funding), even the maximum deduction of \$20,000 for a child who enrolls will not account for all the state funds that should be generated by that student. (Additional funding for poverty assistance and areas such as teacher training and data-based decision making also comes into play).

For districts affected by the formula aid guarantee enacted in the state's biennial budget for fiscal years 2008 and 2009, state formula aid won't rise or fall as enrollment increases or decreases. This means that a preschooler or a school-age child can come into a district for the first time, and any increase in formula funding generated by that child will be offset by a reduction in the guarantee amount. But if that child's family enrolls him or her in the autism voucher, the district could still see a deduction of up to \$20,000.

Two other issues make it difficult to reach definitive conclusions about funding. First, wage differentials for teachers and other staff make it difficult to generalize costs across districts – an urban or suburban district, for example, is likely to pay higher wages than a rural district.

Second, the needs of children can vary significantly according to the severity of their disability, calling into question the use of calculating average costs. A higher-functioning student may require fewer extra services – perhaps a tutor or aide who can work with several students – than a more severely disabled child, for whom costs may far exceed the guaranteed base and weighted funding. (As explained above, the state reimburses districts for a portion of “catastrophic” special education costs that exceed base and weighted funding.)

In financial terms, any negative impact of the autism voucher program could be minimal if, in fact, the cost of educating a particular student is significantly more than the \$20,000 he or she may use in the form of an autism voucher. On the other hand, if a higher-functioning student who would have required few services beyond those required by non-disabled students leaves with a voucher, a wealthier district will likely argue that local funds totaling more than the district receives from the state for a particular student “follow” that student in the voucher program.

Several district officials and other experts interviewed for this study acknowledged the varying impact the voucher program can have on district finances, agreeing that it can, in theory, provide a small boost to the bottom line of some districts. The majority of district officials, however, stressed that from their point of view the program drains district resources.

District representatives also raised concerns about staffing disruption, caused by increased movement of students into or out of the district because of the voucher program. With the voucher, such movement is easier – families no longer have to relocate to another district to

place a child in a different program nor make a case to district officials for alternative placement if they are not satisfied with the services their child is receiving. This disruption could outweigh any potential financial benefit, especially in smaller districts.

This increased student mobility and the resulting uncertainty make it harder for districts to plan staffing levels. In one rural district, a teacher hired to work with a specific student was left without that work when the student decided to take a voucher during the school year.⁶⁸

Other concerns raised in district interviews related to funding and resources included the participation in the program by students who had not been part of the public school system before they began using the voucher and likely would have remained in a private setting even without the voucher. Officials from six districts mentioned their concerns about what they see as a diversion of funds to students who otherwise would have remained outside the public system. The fact that about 50 percent of autism voucher students are preschoolers lends credence to the argument that these are not primarily parents who have experienced and been dissatisfied with public schools, but that many are families who would have chosen private school regardless.

Finally, a number of district officials raised concerns about the financial impact on districts of a proposed voucher program for all special-needs children in Ohio. Despite the rapid increase in recent years, the total number of children with autism, including preschoolers, is relatively small (likely between 10,000 and 15,000) compared to the estimated 240,000 special needs children already in Ohio's public system, around whom an infrastructure of therapists, aides and educators has been built.

FEDERAL SPECIAL EDUCATION DOLLARS

School districts, community schools and nonpublic schools also receive targeted federal money to pay for special education services.

A count of children enrolled in December determines the amount of federal money a district or school receives the following year. A student who leaves a district before the December count won't be included for that district the next year. Rather, the child will be counted at his or her new school – whether it's a traditional public school, a community school or a private school. If a student leaves after the December count, that child will still be considered enrolled at the school where he or she was counted for the following school year.

On average, school districts received about \$1,657 per-student in federal funding in fiscal year 2008, including money that flowed through to students served at nonpublic schools. While this figure does not reflect the amount spent for each child – some may need only speech therapy, while others receive a whole spectrum of services – it gives a sense of the amount of federal money districts receive to serve their special needs population. Also, the amount individual districts receive varies considerably, ranging from \$804 per special-needs student to \$5,730.

⁶⁸ Superintendent interview, November 13, 2007.

The fiscal year 2008 allocation to Ohio school districts, county boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, community schools and nonpublic schools totaled just over \$451.7 million in federal funds; \$426.7 million of that total was targeted for students enrolled in public schools.

In calculating federal funding, all children with IEPs are counted, aged 3 through 21, including those attending programs at county MR/DD boards.

No federal funds are used to pay for the autism voucher program. Although federal money can flow through school districts to pay for services at nonpublic schools, families using the voucher are not eligible to receive federal funds through those schools.

IMPACT ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Policy Matters interviewed representatives of 15 school districts where resident children are participating in the voucher program. Those interviewed included special education coordinators, superintendents, treasurers and other staff. These districts represent a mix of urban, suburban and rural systems, with an emphasis on districts with relatively higher participation in the program.

DISTRICT SERVICES

All the district personnel interviewed for this study highlighted aspects of their services for children with autism spectrum disorders, stressing the quality of those services and the training of their staff. Financial impact and staff disruption aside, most said the voucher program has had no impact on the services they offer. Although some districts mentioned new services begun in recent years, only one district clearly pointed to an initiative to improve programming that was sparked by competition from approved private providers in the program.

District services described in interviews included dedicated staff time and classrooms specifically designed for children with autism spectrum disorder. They ranged from autism specialists who provide services to children and train other teachers to dedicated autism classrooms for higher-needs students and the use of full-inclusion models for high-functioning students who may require only fewer supports. Districts also offer therapies including speech, occupational and physical therapy.

PARTNERSHIP FILLS GAPS

Competitive pressure from providers in the autism voucher program has played a role in efforts to offer new services in Bryan City School district, according to the district's superintendent.⁶⁹ Bryan and two other districts, in two largely rural northwest Ohio counties, Williams and Defiance, are working with non-district partners on two efforts to provide new services for children with autism.

⁶⁹ Interview, Bryan City School District superintendent, November 16, 2007.

Both involve the Northwest Ohio Educational Service Center, one of 60 publicly funded centers around the state. The first is focused on high-functioning secondary students in collaboration with Defiance College, where the classroom is located. The program focuses on social interaction and job skills with the goal of helping children transition out of high school, potentially into a college setting. A special curriculum prepares a seminar class of Defiance College freshmen to work with people with autism and requires them to volunteer at a nearby residential facility; these young college students spend time interacting with the autistic high schoolers at Defiance College through a book club and a knitting club. The high school students and their teachers also have started a small business selling coffee, juice and baked goods on campus. In addition to a high school curriculum, this kind of interaction is designed to provide opportunities for communication with “typical peers,” modeling of social behavior, and job skills.

This year, the first year of the program, 23 college students worked with two autistic high schoolers. The capacity of the class is six autistic students; interest in the course among Defiance College students outstripped expectations.⁷⁰

Through its teacher education program, Defiance College also offers coursework for social work majors and training for licensed social workers, as well as a new license, with an emphasis in autism, within its masters’ program for special education teachers.

The second effort in the region is a middle-school classroom with a capacity for six higher-needs students taught by one teacher and two aides in the Bryan City School District. Daily support from the Northwest Ohio Educational Service Center means the local principal doesn’t have to dedicate much time to the class. The classroom includes a sensory room (a quiet space specifically designed to help calm an over-stimulated child, or to help a child to focus on one activity without distractions), speech and occupational therapy, small group activity and a psychologist.

This program came about because the three districts involved realized that on their own they could not adequately serve severe-needs middle-schoolers, and that sending them to distant agencies was not a cost-effective option.

CONCLUSION

The autism voucher provides education and therapy options to approximately 5 percent of the children in Ohio’s public system who have an autism spectrum disorder. In many cases, the autism voucher has provided new opportunities for many of these children that their families may not have been able to access without assistance.

But the program’s exclusivity and inequities overshadow benefits to families:

⁷⁰ Defiance College press release and interviews with school superintendent and Education Service Center staff.

- All but three of the 40 private schools or school-like providers offering services under the voucher program limit enrollment either by accepting only less severely disabled children, by charging more than the maximum voucher amount, or by requiring religious instruction. Only 100 claims out of the 880 made during the first quarter of fiscal year 2008 were made for school settings that did not exclude children on the basis of one of these three criteria.
- Nearly 40 percent of first-quarter claims for payment were made for private providers that did not offer a classroom setting. These agencies, fully two-thirds of the 127 with first-quarter claims, offered services such as tutoring or therapy that are not comparable to the five hours of instruction required under Ohio law for elementary grades and the five-and-one-half hours required for grades 7 through 12.
- Families in relatively affluent communities tend to use the autism voucher to a greater extent than those in poorer areas. Voucher use by residents of Ohio's wealthiest districts accounts for 35 percent of spending on the program, while these districts enroll only 17 percent of Ohio's public school students; residents of the state's poorest districts enroll 14 percent of the state's students but account for only 7 percent of spending in the program.
- Not surprisingly, voucher providers are concentrated in and around Ohio's urban centers, leaving large areas unserved. Only 32 of Ohio's 88 counties have providers located within their borders; only 10 providers are not in one of eight major metropolitan areas. Residents of 37 counties are not using the program at all.
- Fully 75 percent of claims for voucher payment in the first quarter of fiscal year 2008 were made for providers created to primarily or exclusively serve disabled students. As a result, the program undercuts decades of advocacy for the inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream of education.

Finally, the state provides minimal oversight of voucher providers, relying primarily on two staff at the Office for Exceptional Children to check provider credentials, troubleshoot, and respond to questions from schools, providers and parents. This weak oversight stands in sharp contrast to state and federal mandates for much stricter regulation of special education services provided by public schools. Since parents surrender their right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) when they sign their children up for the voucher, this lack of oversight, along with contentious relationships between providers and districts, can severely weaken the protection IEPs are supposed to provide.

For these reasons, Policy Matters does not view the state's autism voucher program as sound education policy. Nor should it be viewed as a model for a broader special-needs voucher in Ohio or other states. In particular, the voucher's exclusionary aspects outlined above undermine the idea of public schools as a place where a diverse group of children can learn together and begin to create a common civic culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rather than supporting a system that exacerbates inequity, public resources should be directed toward strengthening services for all. To this end, we recommend policy makers:

- **Create incentives to serve autistic children through collaboration among schools, boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, regional service centers, higher education institutions and private providers.** Examples of this type of collaboration, such as the partnership among districts, the education service center and Defiance College in northwest Ohio described above, already exist. Another is the Positive Education Program, a private provider that works with more than 20 school districts in the Cleveland area. PEP provides training for teachers, consults with schools and runs a day program of its own for children with autism that focuses on getting children back into their home school. These efforts are needed around the state, but would particularly benefit underserved rural areas.
- **Create new opportunities for job-embedded professional development for teachers, aides and administrators who work with autistic children.** While public schools are arguably in the best position to deliver comprehensive education services to children on the autism spectrum, the lack of appropriate staff training is a serious shortcoming. Training would focus on areas such as making academic modifications for individual children, teaching non-disabled children appropriate ways to interact with autistic classmates, and helping autistic children develop social skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Aides who spend the most one-on-one time with many autistic children must be given better training in how to foster student independence. Finally, educators must be trained to collect data that can be used to assess children's progress.
- **Establish incentives for institutions of higher education to develop programs and curricula that lead to certification in the teaching of children with autism.** Examples of such programs already exist. At Bowling Green State University, efforts are underway to establish a master's level autism certificate which includes coursework and practical experience working with autistic children. The Rich Center for Autism, in conjunction with Youngstown State University, offers training programs for educators who specialize in working with autistic children, including a master's with an emphasis in autism. (The center is an approved provider in the autism voucher program.)
- **Establish criteria for data collection and reporting by private providers.** This would enable stronger oversight of the program and help policymakers better understand which children voucher providers are accepting or rejecting, how much progress children are making in these private settings and what services they are receiving.

The state has begun working to coordinate and improve services for children with autism, most notably through the Interagency Work Group on Autism, led by the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. Newly created Regional Autism Advisory Councils around the state are also showing promise in bringing a much needed focus to unserved areas. These efforts should be fully supported at the state and local levels, and must genuinely involve families of children with autism.

These recommendations concern concrete reforms related to educating children with autism. Other broader reforms that could help include:

- Ensuring that the state's special education funding formula for school-age children and unit funding for preschoolers are both up-to-date and fully funded.

- Ohio’s school-age funding formula for special education students is based on staffing-cost estimates from 2001 and staff ratios from 1982. These aspects of the formula should be updated. Additionally, the existing formula is funded only at 90 percent; it should be fully funded.
- Ohio’s preschool funding for special education students is unit-based, but not all public preschool units are funded, as the legislature targets available funds to the program for each biennial budget. All needed special-needs preschool units should be funded.
- Passing the bill currently before the Ohio legislature to prohibit health insurers from excluding coverage for autism spectrum disorders, as 19 other states have done with similar legislation. Introduced in April 2007 with bipartisan support, HB 170 would prohibit health insurers with certain minimum enrollment levels from denying coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism. Many health plans cover diagnosis but not treatment. Ensuring coverage would be of immense value to many families.

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APPENDIX A

Enrollment figures from Ohio Department of Education website: www.ode.state.oh.us

Gross Median Income figures from the Ohio Department of Taxation, Table Y-2, 2005 Summary of Income Tax Returns by School District (most recent year available).

Deduction amounts from Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education represent amount deducted from state foundation aid for fiscal year 2007.

Voucher student numbers from Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education.

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
COLUMBUS CSD	FRANKLIN	53,674	\$25,853	\$626,943.91	44
CINCINNATI CSD	HAMILTON	33,881	\$26,484	\$479,066.50	27
WORTHINGTON CSD	FRANKLIN	8,911	\$43,519	\$430,298.74	24
HILLIARD CSD	FRANKLIN	14,217	\$46,040	\$415,091.89	24
OLENTANGY LSD	DELAWARE	11,960	\$68,171	\$406,956.61	27
WESTERVILLE CSD	FRANKLIN	13,479	\$41,742	\$347,633.51	25
YOUNGSTOWN CSD	MAHONING	7,693	\$20,252	\$323,483.51	18
TOLEDO CSD	LUCAS	27,984	\$25,578	\$260,346.24	20
DUBLIN CSD	FRANKLIN	12,675	\$46,734	\$186,084.25	13
BRYAN CSD	WILLIAMS	2,073	\$28,754	\$154,794.00	8
SOUTH WESTERN CSD	FRANKLIN	20,496	\$32,318	\$154,016.06	10
AKRON CSD	SUMMIT	25,758	\$24,829	\$153,951.50	8
PLAIN LSD (FRANKLIN CO.)	FRANKLIN	3,500	\$60,344	\$131,817.42	7
WILLOUGHBY-EASTLAKE CSD	LAKE	8,494	\$32,759	\$128,936.96	8
NORTHWEST LSD	HAMILTON	9,835	\$35,520	\$126,685.41	9
MASON CSD	WARREN	9,778	\$59,192	\$124,226.86	8
WESTLAKE CSD	CUYAHOGA	3,841	\$46,245	\$123,131.65	8
MEDINA CSD	MEDINA	7,222	\$44,414	\$119,979.10	11
UPPER ARLINGTON CSD	FRANKLIN	5,492	\$57,764	\$115,995.00	12
CLEVELAND HTS-UNIVERSITY HTS	CUYAHOGA	6,139	\$37,350	\$115,301.18	9
CLEVELAND CSD	CUYAHOGA	52,769	\$22,115	\$113,092.22	8
GAHANNA JEFFERSON CSD	FRANKLIN	6,979	\$43,239	\$111,872.93	7
GROVEPORT-MADISON LSD	FRANKLIN	5,567	\$30,777	\$109,350.00	7
DELAWARE CSD	DELAWARE	4,395	\$35,585	\$101,671.10	5
BOARDMAN LSD	MAHONING	4,773	\$32,227	\$100,000.00	5
HUDSON LSD	SUMMIT	5,098	\$67,514	\$99,785.64	6
AUSTINTOWN LSD	MAHONING	4,801	\$30,952	\$99,300.00	6
EUCLID CSD	CUYAHOGA	6,303	\$28,918	\$82,724.47	5
MILFORD EVSD	CLERMONT	6,169	\$41,913	\$82,620.85	5
FOREST HILLS LSD	HAMILTON	7,373	\$48,475	\$82,410.54	6
HOWLAND LSD	TRUMBULL	3,007	\$34,034	\$78,483.51	4
NORTH CANTON CSD	STARK	4,749	\$38,149	\$76,554.62	4
SOUTH EUCLID-LYNDHURST CSD	CUYAHOGA	4,423	\$38,760	\$75,405.63	7

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
ANTHONY WAYNE LSD	LUCAS	4,027	\$49,662	\$74,802.97	6
GARFIELD HEIGHTS CSD	CUYAHOGA	3,655	\$29,539	\$69,309.83	4
BRUNSWICK CSD	MEDINA	7,269	\$39,424	\$66,670.19	4
POLAND LSD	MAHONING	2,363	\$38,597	\$65,719.29	4
SYCAMORE CSD	HAMILTON	5,397	\$49,388	\$65,711.98	6
JACKSON LSD	STARK	5,583	\$40,180	\$65,141.20	4
PAINESVILLE LSD	LAKE	4,561	\$41,407	\$62,011.11	4
STRONGSVILLE CSD	CUYAHOGA	6,988	\$45,195	\$60,078.96	6
CUYAHOGA FALLS CSD	SUMMIT	4,939	\$32,486	\$60,000.00	3
LIBERTY LSD	TRUMBULL	1,722	\$31,879	\$60,000.00	3
LORDSTOWN LSD	TRUMBULL	544	\$36,153	\$60,000.00	3
INDIAN HILL EVSD	HAMILTON	2,204	\$68,929	\$59,163.00	3
LICKING HEIGHTS LSD	LICKING	2,703	\$41,710	\$59,161.41	5
OLON CSD	CUYAHOGA	5,286	\$49,519	\$57,690.86	4
MENTOR EVSD	LAKE	9,355	\$37,687	\$55,738.09	5
NORTH OLMSTED CSD	CUYAHOGA	4,379	\$36,989	\$55,482.92	4
PARMA CSD	CUYAHOGA	12,350	\$32,445	\$54,803.14	4
LAKOTA LSD	BUTLER	16,780	\$52,208	\$54,655.00	4
KENSTON LSD	GEAUGA	3,060	\$53,499	\$53,356.29	3
AVON LSD	LORAIN	3,018	\$54,726	\$53,107.75	3
BEREA CSD	CUYAHOGA	7,288	\$33,641	\$52,212.00	3
MAYFIELD CSD	CUYAHOGA	4,445	\$38,198	\$52,055.32	4
LOVELAND CSD	HAMILTON	4,676	\$49,941	\$51,443.11	3
SPRINGBORO COMMUNITY SD	WARREN	5,010	\$62,714	\$51,392.21	4
OAK HILLS LSD	HAMILTON	7,710	\$37,758	\$50,696.75	3
SPRINGFIELD CSD	CLARK	8,059	\$22,852	\$50,250.00	4
NORTH ROYALTON CSD	CUYAHOGA	4,378	\$40,363	\$49,231.00	3
SHAKER HEIGHTS CSD	CUYAHOGA	5,479	\$44,826	\$47,600.12	4
BAY VILLAGE CSD	CUYAHOGA	2,415	\$53,291	\$45,913.44	3
PERRYSBURG EVSD	WOOD	4,103	\$49,799	\$45,568.71	3
SYLVANIA CSD	LUCAS	7,794	\$44,509	\$44,571.84	3
MARYSVILLE EVSD	UNION	5,081	\$41,356	\$44,345.80	3
FAIRBORN CSD	GREENE	4,244	\$29,367	\$43,844.75	3
LAKE LSD	STARK	3,473	\$37,834	\$43,231.32	3
PICKERINGTON LSD	FAIRFIELD	9,671	\$47,692	\$42,510.60	4
WEST CLERMONT LSD	CLERMONT	8,646	\$34,741	\$40,000.00	2
LEETONIA EVSD	COLUMBIANA	824	\$26,279	\$40,000.00	2
SOUTHERN LSD	COLUMBIANA	899	\$26,607	\$40,000.00	2
AURORA CSD	PORTAGE	3,050	\$51,941	\$40,000.00	2
COVENTRY LSD	SUMMIT	2,305	\$32,493	\$40,000.00	2
BLANCHESTER LSD	CLINTON	1,753	\$30,168	\$39,999.50	2

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
DEER PARK CSD	HAMILTON	1,314	\$32,665	\$39,962.50	2
FINDLAY CSD	HANCOCK	6,064	\$30,057	\$39,406.75	2
BOWLING GREEN CSD	WOOD	3,006	\$27,916	\$39,000.00	2
COPLEY-FAIRLAWN CSD	SUMMIT	3,225	\$45,471	\$38,071.60	3
EVERGREEN LSD	FULTON	1,289	\$35,394	\$37,922.50	4
LEBANON CSD	WARREN	5,316	\$38,842	\$36,263.62	2
NORDONIA HILLS LSD	SUMMIT	3,784	\$43,635	\$36,225.00	3
NORTH RIDGEVILLE CSD	LORAIN	3,527	\$40,653	\$35,770.00	2
REYNOLDSBURG CSD	FRANKLIN	6,470	\$34,674	\$35,327.97	2
NORTH COLLEGE HILL CSD	HAMILTON	1,516	\$27,907	\$34,429.72	2
CENTRAL LSD	DEFIANCE	1,113	\$32,568	\$34,000.00	3
SOUTHWEST LICKING LSD	LICKING	3,742	\$42,712	\$34,000.00	2
KIRTLAND LSD	LAKE	1,114	\$44,382	\$33,789.72	3
BROOKLYN CSD	CUYAHOGA	1,413	\$29,542	\$33,400.00	2
SPRINGFIELD LSD	LUCAS	3,869	\$36,830	\$32,991.88	3
HIGHLAND LSD	MEDINA	3,211	\$48,762	\$32,352.99	2
ELYRIA CSD	LORAIN	7,277	\$27,597	\$32,026.03	5
MAUMEE CSD	LUCAS	2,810	\$34,466	\$31,585.66	3
KINGS LSD	WARREN	3,615	\$42,426	\$31,250.95	2
PLAIN LSD	STARK	6,361	\$32,331	\$31,071.33	3
RICHMOND HEIGHTS LSD	CUYAHOGA	1,062	\$34,177	\$30,894.86	2
FAIRFIELD CSD	BUTLER	9,526	\$37,173	\$29,819.24	3
ONTARIO LSD	RICHLAND	1,731	\$36,375	\$29,350.00	2
WICKLIFFE CSD	LAKE	1,460	\$31,384	\$28,500.00	2
WARREN CSD	TRUMBULL	5,896	\$23,299	\$27,225.00	2
SOUTHEAST LSD	PORTAGE	2,061	\$32,986	\$26,800.00	2
BRECKSVILLE-BROADVIEW HTS	CUYAHOGA	4,491	\$47,593	\$26,416.78	2
NORTHMONT CSD	MONTGOMERY	5,754	\$38,275	\$25,377.72	2
LANCASTER CSD	FAIRFIELD	5,496	\$28,604	\$25,133.50	2
AMHERST EVSD	LORAIN	4,143	\$38,708	\$25,035.00	2
ROCKY RIVER CSD	CUYAHOGA	2,603	\$44,618	\$24,563.85	2
BEXLEY CSD	FRANKLIN	2,069	\$55,014	\$24,170.25	2
CANFIELD LSD	MAHONING	3,022	\$44,415	\$23,627.29	1
MAPLE HEIGHTS CSD	CUYAHOGA	3,724	\$28,916	\$23,615.20	1
LOWELLVILLE LSD	MAHONING	640	\$32,422	\$21,575.00	2
HIGHLAND LSD	MORROW	1,829	\$32,786	\$21,300.00	2
DAYTON CSD	MONTGOMERY	15,825	\$23,502	\$21,088.75	2
NORTHERN LSD	PERRY	2,413	\$32,642	\$20,806.04	1
NEW RICHMOND EVSD	CLERMONT	2,491	\$35,192	\$20,591.25	2
WILLIAMSBURG LSD	CLERMONT	975	\$32,806	\$20,000.00	1
BEAVER LSD	COLUMBIANA	2,356	\$28,840	\$20,000.00	1

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
CRESTVIEW LSD	COLUMBIANA	1,154	\$30,522	\$20,000.00	1
BEACHWOOD CSD	CUYAHOGA	1,528	\$54,459	\$20,000.00	1
FAIRVIEW PARK CSD	CUYAHOGA	1,699	\$38,242	\$20,000.00	1
LAKEWOOD CSD	CUYAHOGA	5,755	\$30,344	\$20,000.00	1
BIG WALNUT LSD	DELAWARE	2,522	\$42,861	\$20,000.00	1
BUCKEYE VALLEY LSD	DELAWARE	2,219	\$44,321	\$20,000.00	1
BERNE-UNION LSD	FAIRFIELD	939	\$31,850	\$20,000.00	1
CHARDON LSD	GEAUGA	3,223	\$40,868	\$20,000.00	1
PRINCETON CSD	HAMILTON	5,197	\$34,065	\$20,000.00	1
READING CSD	HAMILTON	1,435	\$29,012	\$20,000.00	1
SOUTHWEST LSD	HAMILTON	3,705	\$32,414	\$20,000.00	1
THREE RIVERS LSD	HAMILTON	1,828	\$41,272	\$20,000.00	1
WYOMING CSD	HAMILTON	1,939	\$60,508	\$20,000.00	1
ARLINGTON LSD	HANCOCK	626	\$34,871	\$20,000.00	1
LOGAN CSD	HOCKING	4,013	\$27,186	\$20,000.00	1
JOHNSTOWN MONROE LSD	LICKING	1,623	\$38,794	\$20,000.00	1
PLEASANT LSD	MARION	1,485	\$36,930	\$20,000.00	1
ANTWERP LSD	PAULDING	689	\$30,362	\$20,000.00	1
COLUMBUS GROVE LSD	PUTNAM	910	\$31,678	\$20,000.00	1
PORTSMOUTH CSD	SCIOTO	2,068	\$23,095	\$20,000.00	1
LOUISVILLE CSD	STARK	3,209	\$32,790	\$20,000.00	1
MARLINGTON LSD	STARK	2,529	\$31,408	\$20,000.00	1
MOGADORE LSD	SUMMIT	895	\$33,073	\$20,000.00	1
HUBBARD EVSD	TRUMBULL	2,178	\$30,235	\$20,000.00	1
LAKEVIEW LSD	TRUMBULL	2,114	\$36,457	\$20,000.00	1
MC DONALD LSD	TRUMBULL	915	\$31,984	\$20,000.00	1
NILES CSD	TRUMBULL	2,801	\$26,736	\$20,000.00	1
FRANKLIN CSD	WARREN	2,780	\$30,288	\$20,000.00	1
DALTON LSD	WAYNE	939	\$32,622	\$20,000.00	1
NORTH CENTRAL LSD	WILLIAMS	637	\$30,941	\$20,000.00	1
ROSSFORD EVSD	WOOD	1,924	\$33,115	\$20,000.00	1
MOHAWK LSD	WYANDOT	1,023	\$31,055	\$20,000.00	1
WOODMORE LSD	SANDUSKY	1,085	\$38,648	\$19,999.91	1
TIPP CITY EVSD	MIAMI	2,562	\$39,849	\$19,999.61	1
TIFFIN CSD	SENECA	2,795	\$26,942	\$19,999.14	1
MIDVIEW LSD	LORAIN	3,483	\$35,883	\$19,995.00	1
WOOSTER CSD	WAYNE	3,684	\$29,063	\$19,925.76	1
OAKWOOD CSD	MONTGOMERY	2,104	\$60,465	\$19,837.75	1
GREEN LSD	SUMMIT	4,032	\$38,698	\$19,763.62	1
LITTLE MIAMI LSD	WARREN	3,592	\$49,269	\$19,276.55	1
VANDALIA-BUTLER CSD	MONTGOMERY	3,324	\$34,846	\$18,993.00	1

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
DEFIANCE CSD	DEFIANCE	2,348	\$29,341	\$18,900.00	2
ORANGE CSD	CUYAHOGA	2,265	\$69,743	\$18,823.54	1
LONDON CSD	MADISON	2,239	\$32,369	\$18,650.00	1
MAD RIVER LSD	MONTGOMERY	3,672	\$28,584	\$18,396.55	2
ELIDA LSD	ALLEN	2,429	\$30,016	\$18,038.00	1
MECHANICSBURG EVSD	CHAMPAIGN	880	\$34,112	\$18,000.00	1
ARCHBOLD AREA LSD	FULTON	1,300	\$33,674	\$18,000.00	1
WASHINGTON LSD	LUCAS	6,681	\$30,439	\$17,888.13	2
WESTERN RESERVE LSD	MAHONING	790	\$34,755	\$16,700.00	1
BEAVERCREEK LSD	GREENE	7,280	\$50,560	\$16,292.65	1
TWINSBURG CSD	SUMMIT	4,185	\$45,355	\$15,907.50	1
BENJAMIN LOGAN LSD	LOGAN	1,947	\$37,395	\$15,773.51	1
HUBER HEIGHTS CSD	MONTGOMERY	6,203	\$35,987	\$15,002.60	1
CHAGRIN FALLS EVSD	CUYAHOGA	1,891	\$60,838	\$14,961.17	1
SUGARCREEK LSD	GREENE	2,677	\$51,196	\$14,905.58	1
WILMINGTON CSD	CLINTON	3,218	\$29,353	\$14,409.72	1
LORAIN CSD	LORAIN	8,897	\$24,011	\$14,030.00	1
OLMSTED FALLS CSD	CUYAHOGA	3,461	\$40,877	\$13,860.70	1
NORTHMOR LSD	MORROW	1,267	\$30,923	\$13,300.00	1
MANSFIELD CSD	RICHLAND	4,855	\$22,311	\$13,000.00	1
NORWOOD CSD	HAMILTON	2,323	\$26,758	\$12,835.88	1
WEST GEAUGA LSD	GEAUGA	2,346	\$46,349	\$12,453.98	1
HILLSDALE LSD	ASHLAND	1,147	\$33,536	\$11,938.31	1
MIAMISBURG CSD	MONTGOMERY	5,455	\$36,151	\$11,582.22	1
MADISON LSD	LAKE	3,454	\$33,001	\$11,515.00	1
BEDFORD CSD	CUYAHOGA	3,825	\$30,338	\$10,824.80	1
WADSWORTH CSD	MEDINA	4,530	\$38,143	\$10,605.45	2
GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS CSD	FRANKLIN	1,119	\$39,853	\$10,585.50	1
ST. BERNARD-ELMWOOD PLACE	HAMILTON	1,004	\$26,437	\$10,213.00	1
NEWTON FALLS EVSD	TRUMBULL	1,431	\$30,785	\$9,500.00	1
BROWN LSD	CARROLL	723	\$31,048	\$8,327.01	1
CANAL WINCHESTER LSD	FRANKLIN	3,024	\$41,277	\$8,300.00	1
CARDINAL LSD	GEAUGA	1,528	\$30,982	\$7,090.10	1
VANLUE LSD	HANCOCK	273	\$34,777	\$7,000.00	1
NAPOLEON CSD	HENRY	2,251	\$31,724	\$7,000.00	*
PIKE-DELTA-YORK LSD	FULTON	1,446	\$31,900	\$6,465.24	2
KALIDA LSD	PUTNAM	651	\$36,493	\$6,425.00	1
XENIA CSD	GREENE	4,744	\$29,625	\$5,345.00	1
LAKESWOOD LSD	LICKING	2,328	\$31,296	\$4,807.02	1
EDGERTON LSD	WILLIAMS	591	\$30,768	\$4,754.00	1
PREBLE-SHAWNEE LSD	PREBLE	1,479	\$33,118	\$4,165.15	1

School district	County	Enrollment	Income	Deduction	Voucher students
KETTERING-MORAINÉ CSD	MONTGOMERY	7,135	\$34,576	\$4,127.00	1
MIAMI EAST LSD	MIAMI	1,275	\$34,535	\$3,898.75	1
LISBON EVSD	COLUMBIANA	1,120	\$26,623	\$3,300.00	*
DELPHOS CSD	ALLEN	1,080	\$28,450	\$3,163.55	1
GIBSONBURG EVSD	SANDUSKY	1,121	\$32,412	\$2,296.56	1
MAD RIVER-GREEN LSD	CLARK	1,941	\$38,252	\$2,201.44	1
HAMILTON LSD	FRANKLIN	2,931	\$29,110	\$1,929.00	1
CLYDE EVSD	SANDUSKY	2,210	\$29,159	\$1,837.50	1
GOSHEN LSD	CLERMONT	2,504	\$31,807	\$1,750.00	1
CHAMPION LSD	TRUMBULL	1,647	\$33,927	\$1,575.00	*
MADERIA CSD	HAMILTON	1,411	\$48,636	\$1,158.72	1
MOUNT HEALTHY CSD	HAMILTON	3,459	\$28,480	\$950.00	1

* Incomplete records from Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education.

APPENDIX B

**AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
(ASP)**

**PRIVATE PROVIDER REGISTRATION APPLICATION
2007 - 2008**

**THE AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
PRIVATE PROVIDER REGISTRATION APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS**

COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF YOU ARE A PRIVATE PROVIDER/AGENCY SEEKING REGISTRATION APPROVAL. (This section does not apply to self-employed individuals.)

1. Enter the complete business name.
2. Enter the street address, including any P.O. Box number, city, state, zip code and county.
3. Enter the business phone number including area code.
4. Enter the business fax number including area code.
5. Enter the business email address.
6. Enter the full name of the Executive Officer and/or owner operator.
7. Enter the printed name, signature, and title of the Executive Officer, along with the date. These items must be included on the application.

COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF YOU ARE A PRIVATE PROVIDER/SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUAL SEEKING REGISTRATION APPROVAL.

1. Enter your full name.
2. Enter the business/home street address, including any P.O. Box number, apartment number, city, state, zip code and county.
3. Enter your business/home phone number including area code.
4. Enter the business fax number including area code.
5. Enter the business email address.
6. Enter your printed name and signature, along with the date. These items must be included on the application.

The **PRIVATE PROVIDER AFFIDAVIT MUST be signed, notarized and included** with the application in order to be considered for approval. Each private provider must complete the Private Provider Affidavit.

The **PRIVATE PROVIDER CREDENTIAL LIST MUST be included with the application in order to be considered for approval.** The list must include the credentials for all staff positions that will be serving students in the Autism Scholarship Program and implementing the goals and objectives in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Questions regarding the private provider registration or application process can be directed toCarolynn Head or Paul Sogan in the Office for Exceptional Children. Please call (614) 466-2650.

SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION TO:

**AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
25 SOUTH FRONT STREET
MAIL STOP #203
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215-4183**

AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
2007-2008 PRIVATE PROVIDER REGISTRATION APPLICATION
Please type or print all information using blue or black ink

PRIVATE PROVIDER/AGENCY INFORMATION

1. BUSINESS NAME: _____

2. BUSINESS ADDRESS: _____
(Number and Street)

_____ OH _____
(City) (State) (Zip Code) (County)

3. BUSINESS PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

4. FAX NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

5. EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

6. NAME OF EXECUTIVE OFFICER/OWNER/OPERATOR:

7. NAME OF PRIMARY CONTACT PERSON:

(Signature of Executive Officer/Owner/Operator) (Date)

(Title)

PRIVATE PROVIDER/SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUAL INFORMATION

1. NAME: _____
(First Name) (MI) (Last Name)

2. HOME/BUSINESS ADDRESS: _____ Apt. #:
_____ (Number and Street)

_____ OH _____
(City) (State) (Zip Code) (County)

3. HOME/BUSINESS PHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

4. HOME/BUSINESS FAX NUMBER: (_____) _____ - _____

5. EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

(Signature) (Date)

(Title)

FOR ODE OFFICE USE ONLY	
APPROVED _____	DENIED _____
APPROVAL DATE: ____ / ____ / ____	DENIAL DATE: ____ / ____ / ____
SIGNATURE: _____	
(ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN)	

***AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
2007-2008 PRIVATE PROVIDER REGISTRATION APPLICATION***

PRIVATE PROVIDER AFFIDAVIT

The Private Provider applicant swears or affirms:

1. The Private Provider applicant has written policies and procedures that address program services including program philosophy, health and safety issues, service delivery and termination, confidentiality of individual’s records, and consumer satisfaction; administrative services including a description of internal monitoring and evaluation procedures to improve delivery of services, documentation of timely reporting to parents and the resident school district, and a professional development and training plan for staff members.
2. The Private Provider applicant is Internet-based and/or is located within the boundaries of the state of Ohio.
3. The Private Provider applicant has a current copy of a criminal records check for all owners, all individuals employed by, all parties contracting with the provider, all subcontractors, and all volunteers according to OAC Rule 109:5-1-01 and Rule 3301-103-07. The applicant further affirms that, as a result of the background check, the applicant or any individual employed by the applicant or other individual or party listed above has not been convicted of or pleaded guilty to an offense or violations described in ORC Section 3319.39(B)(1). The prohibition against employing any individual or contracting with parties or having owners, subcontractors, or volunteers who have been convicted of or pleaded guilty to any of these offenses or violations shall apply to providers registered by the Ohio Department of Education for purposes of the Autism Scholarship Program.
4. The Private Provider applicant has a written policy addressing the private provider’s practices to ensure that said private provider does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, disability, age or ancestry.
5. The Private Provider applicant assures that anyone serving students through the Autism Scholarship Program has on file, at the provider’s address, a copy of any required Ohio Department of Education certification/licensure, state or national licensure appropriate for the special services they will be providing, or if certification/licensure is not required, documented specialized training in autism.
6. The Private Provider applicant has, as demonstrated by a written statement by a certified public accountant, adequate liability, property and casualty insurance.

- 7. The Private Provider applicant has no outstanding claims, for recovery, from the Auditor of State.
- 8. The Private Provider applicant’s fee schedule and description of the special education and/or related services to be provided as part of the Autism Scholarship Program are maintained and kept in the private provider’s files. **The Private Provider shall bill and reimbursement shall be based on those special education and related services as detailed in the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) and implemented by the Private Provider.**

*AUTISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
2007-2008 PRIVATE PROVIDER REGISTRATION APPLICATION*

PRIVATE PROVIDER AFFIDAVIT continued

- 9. The Private Provider applicant has sufficient capital or credit to operate during the 2007–2008 school year.
- 10. The Private Provider applicant will comply with state and federal laws regarding the delivery of services to children with disabilities, including, but not limited to, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Families Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) and Chapter 3323 of the Revised Code, per Rule 3301-103-07(A)(13) of the Administrative Code.
- 11. The Private Provider applicant will notify the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children Autism Scholarship Program, when the private provider is no longer providing Autism Scholarship Program services to a child.
- 12. The Private Provider applicant assures they have been in operation for at least one full school year prior to enrolling children participating in the Autism Scholarship Program.
- 13. The information requested and contained in this affidavit is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief.

To be completed only by an individual authorized to agree to the above statements on behalf of the Private Provider applicant.

(Print Name)

(Title)

(Signature)

(Date)

Sworn to or affirmed before me and signed in my presence this ____ day of _____,

(Notary Public)

My Commission Expires: ____ / ____ / ____

APPENDIX C

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this study are based primarily on data provided by the Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education. Data and documentation provided include:

- Total amount of deductions from state foundation aid, by district, used to pay for claims in the program for fiscal year 2007;
- Number of claims per voucher program provider for the first quarter of fiscal year 2008;⁷¹
- Number of students using the voucher per district for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2007;
- Copies of applications submitted by private providers required for approval to offer services under the program.

We also used data available on the ODE website, including information on public school enrollment by district, full-time equivalency numbers for children with autism spectrum disorders in public schools, and data on federal special education dollars allocated to Ohio schools.

To provide context to the data, Policy Matters Ohio conducted a series of interviews with:

- Twenty parents of children with autism, including parents who have chosen to use the voucher and parents who have not;
- Representatives of 18 private providers approved by the Office for Exceptional Children to offer services under the voucher program;
- Representatives of 15 public school districts where residents are using the autism voucher, including a range of urban, suburban and rural school officials;
- More than a dozen individuals with expertise in the education and treatment of children living with an autism diagnosis, including representatives of agencies or advocacy groups that have an autism focus;
- Staff at the Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education;
- Four individuals with expertise in special education law.

⁶⁶ Data on the number of claims per provider were requested for previous years, but were not made available by the Office for Exceptional Children because records for previous year are not in electronic format.

List of 40 providers under the Autism Scholarship Program that are schools or centers with day programs that had claims in the first quarter of fiscal year.

Provider	City	school type	claims ¹	special needs only?	disability level	tuition ⁴	admissions criteria	ages/grades
Academy of Greater Cincinnati for Uniquely Gifted Children	Cincinnati	private	4	no	higher functioning	approximately \$12,000	ability	K-12
Achievement Centers for Children	Highland Hills	center w/day program	2	yes	full range	\$57,000	cost	PreK-4
Applied Behavioral Services	Cincinnati	center w/day program	56	yes	full range	\$24,000 half day, \$48,000 full	cost	ages 2-21
Canton Montessori School	Canton	private	1	no	higher functioning	\$5,000 to \$6,000	ability	6 weeks to grade 3
Central College Christian Academy	Westerville	religious	1	no	higher functioning	\$3,650	religion	K-5
Central College Preschool	Westerville	religious	3	no	higher functioning	\$972 two days a week, \$1,458 for three days	religion	PreK
Children's Center for Developmental Enrichment/Oakstone	Columbus	private	23	yes ²	full range	at least \$23,000 for school-age, voucher covers preschool tuition and most services	cost	PreK-12
Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism	Cleveland	center w/day program	12	yes	full range	\$65,000	cost	up to 22 years
Columbus Torah Academy	Columbus	religious	1	no	higher functioning	from \$7,750 elementary to \$12,500 high school	religion, ability	K-12
Dragonfly Academy	Canton	private	6	yes	full range	\$35,000	cost	ages 3 to 22
Emmanuel Christian Academy	Akron	religious	2	no	higher functioning	\$20,000 plus \$95 registration (\$4,050 for non-autistic students plus registration)	religion, ability, cost	PreK-6
Emmanuel Christian Academy	Springfield	religious	1	no	higher functioning	\$4,048 to \$4,510	religion, ability	K-12
Haugland Consulting LLC (Dr Morten Haugland)	Columbus	center w/day program	47	yes	full range	\$20,000	none	K-12
Helping Hands Center for Special Needs	Worthington	center w/day program	81	yes ²	full range	\$20,000 to 25,000	cost	age 3 to grade 5
Heritage Christian School	Canton	religious	1	no	higher functioning	ranges from \$3,790 for kindergarten to grade 5, to \$4,762 for grades 9 to 12	religion	PreK-12
Integrations Treatment Center	Wickliffe	center w/day program	9	yes	full range	\$35,000	cost	age 2 to 62
Julie Billiard School	Lyndhurst	religious	33	yes	mod. to high function	\$9,200 for grades 1 to 8, plus supplemental therapy costs	religion, ability	Kindergarten to grade 8
Lake Center Christian School	Hartville	religious	15	no	higher functioning	\$2,500 to \$5,000 depending on grade level (costs for special needs can exceed \$20,000)	religion, cost	K-12
Lawrence School	Broadview Hts	private	33	yes	higher functioning ³	\$13,780 to \$15,800 plus extracurriculars, cost of laptop in secondary	ability	1-12
Linden Grove School	Cincinnati	private	28	yes	mod. to high function	\$14,900	ability	K-8
Marburn Academy	Columbus	private	11	yes	higher functioning	\$17,300 to \$19,500, plus extra if tutoring, therapy needed	ability, cost	1-12

¹ Provider claims made in first quarter of fiscal year 2008 (July 1 through September 30, 2007); data from Office for Exceptional Children at ODE.

² These providers, while designed to serve children with disabilities, also enroll non-disabled children or work to include them in programming.

³ Does not accept students for whom the lead diagnosis is autism

⁴ All figures full-year tuition unless otherwise noted.

Source: Ohio Department of Education (claims), phone interviews, and provider and media websites.

Provider	City	school type	claims ¹	special needs only?	disability level	tuition ⁴	admissions criteria	ages/grades
Mary Immaculate School	Toledo	religious	8	yes	higher functioning	\$3,600 plus 30 hours volunteer service valued at \$7.50 per hour	religion, ability	1-8
Maumee Valley Country Day School	Toledo	private	1	no	higher functioning	\$10,350 to \$14,350, preschool is lower from \$1,350 for preschool to \$4,485	ability	PreK-12
Medina Christian Academy	Medina	religious	1	no	higher functioning	grades 7 and 8 \$5500 a year maximum plus occupational therapy	religion	PreK-8
Middleburg Early Education Center	Middleburg Heights	religious	18	no	full range	range from \$25,000 half-day preschool to \$68,500 for school-age.	religion	PreK
Monarch School at Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau	Shaker Heights	private	17	yes	full range	\$5,200 for full-day preschool, \$6,100 for school-age	cost	ages 3 to 21
Montessori School of Bowling Green	Bowling Green	private	4	no	higher functioning	\$7,350, more if aide is needed	ability	PreK- 6
Nightingale Montessori	Springfield	private	6	no	higher functioning	from \$105 a month two-day preschool to \$3,340 for K-6	ability	PreK-12
Notre Dame Elementary School	Portsmouth	religious	1	no	higher functioning	from \$1,184 half-day twice weekly preschool to \$5,850 grades 11, 12	religion	K-6
Open Door Christian School	Elyria	religious	1	no	higher functioning	\$22,000	religion, ability	PreK-12
Potential Development Program	Youngstown	center w/day program	20	yes	full range	from \$3,855 for half-day preschool to \$6,400 for 6 to 8	cost	PreK-8
Queen of Angels Montessori School	Cincinnati	religious	2	no	higher functioning	\$20,000	religion	ages 3 to 21
Rich Center for Autism	Youngstown	center w/day program	42	yes ²	full range	\$20,000	none	ages 3 to 21
Sandy Cay	Bryan	center w/day program	11	yes	full range	\$20,000	none	K-12
School for Autistically Impaired Learners	Toledo	private	9	yes	full range	\$28,000 for full year	cost	PreK-3
St. Cecilia School	Columbus	religious	3	no	higher functioning	\$4,990	religion, ability	K-8
St. Clement School	St. Bernard	religious	2	no	higher functioning	\$3,900	religion	PreK-8
St. Lawrence School	Cincinnati	religious	2	no	higher functioning	\$1,200 for parishioners, \$4,000 for non-parishioners	religion, ability	K-6
St. William School	Cincinnati	religious	22	no	full range	\$21,675 for students with autism, \$4,070 for regular education students	religion, cost	PreK-8
Welsh Hills School	Granville	private	1	no	higher functioning	from \$6,200 half-day preschool to \$10,500 for middle school	ability	18 months to grade 8

¹ Provider claims made in first quarter of fiscal year 2008 (July 1 through September 30, 2007); data from Office for Exceptional Children at ODE.

² These providers, while designed to serve children with disabilities, also enroll non-disabled children or work to include them in programming.

³ Does not accept students for whom the lead diagnosis is autism

⁴ All figures full-year tuition unless otherwise noted.

Source: Ohio Department of Education (claims), phone interviews, and provider and media websites.

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