**Ohio’s new Straight A Fund**

**can help schools do more with less**

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Ohio schools and districts have a great opportunity to advance innovations with the creation of the $250 million Straight A Fund in the state, Smarter Schools Executive Director Andrew Benson told an audience of more than 50 educators and education stakeholders.

Benson joined Ohio education experts August 15 to discuss the state's new budget bill and how it affects schools and districts. The discussion was hosted by the University of Cincinnati's Economics Center.

"The Straight A Fund can be a game changer for Ohio schools," said Benson, who is a fellow at the Economics Center. "This innovation fund can be tapped into to support changes needed to make schools more efficient and effective."

The Straight A Fund was proposed by Gov. John Kasich earlier this year and was created in House Bill 59, the state budget bill that was passed into law in June. The Ohio Department of Education, which oversees the management of the fund, is currently creating grant criteria for the fund and is expected to release more details in September. (See more about the Straight A Fund [**here**](http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Straight-A-Fund)**.**)

Benson said it is unusual for a state to designate an innovation fund for education, and he noted that the $250 million in state funds rivals the federal innovation funds like President Obama's Investing in Innovation (13) fund.

In response to a question, Benson indicated that projects like developing blended learning in classrooms or shared services among several districts would be the kind of projects that the Straight A Fund could support. The legislation creating the Straight A Fund lists goals of improving academic achievement, reducing spending in districts' five year forecasts, and directing more money to the classroom.

"We will be looking into how we might help schools and districts tap into the fund with projects that can make them more effective in improving student learning and efficient in using resources," said Benson, who noted the Smarter Schools may consult with districts to put together high-quality grant applications.

Smarter Schools is a non-profit organization created to carry forward the research and advocacy of Ohio Smart Schools, which was spearheaded by Benson when he was with KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

On the UC panel discussion were State Senator Peggie Lehner (R-Kettering), who chairs the Senate Education Committee; State Rep. Denise Driehaus, D-Clifton), who is a member of the House Education Committee; Robin White, who is Superintendent of the Great Oaks Career Center; and Dr. Carlee Escue, a school finance researcher at the University of Cincinnati. The panel was moderated by Brewster Rhoads, an education stakeholder who was regional liaison for former Gov. Ted Strickland.

For more on the panel discussion, link to the Cincinnati Enquirer story [**here**](http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20130816/NEWS/308160142/Education-panel-critical-charter-voucher-issues).