

Good evening Chairman Jones and members of the Conference Committee. As President and on behalf of the 750 members of the Canton Professional Educators' Association, I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Ironically, however, I will often refer to a phone conversation I had with the principal of Steubenville High School, Ted Gorman. This testimony is as much about Steubenville as it is Canton.

As each member of the Committee is aware through individual research and/or from the plethora of educational organizations, school district personnel, and special interest groups, we have become painfully aware that there is an undeniable correlation between poverty and standardized testing. The more affluent the district, the higher the test scores, and conversely, the poorer the district, the lower the district performance index.

Despite this ominous correlation, Steubenville remains an anomaly that debunks this correlation. In fact, Steubenville ranks 560 out of 608 for median household income while having the 43<sup>rd</sup> best performance index in the state. With this information I began to hypothesize that the students, staff, parents and community must have a strong civic minded educational approach centered on a successful core of values that has created a nurturing climate and culture.

From this assumption, I decided to pick up the phone and call an administrator in the Steubenville district. I ended up getting a hold of Tom Gorman, Principal of Steubenville High School, who shared some staggering information. Mr. Gorman confirmed that the student attendance rate was 95.2%, and that 50% of the teaching staff were former students of the district, and of that 50%, 100% of these staff members live in the community and 100% of staff members' children attend the Steubenville School District.

There is empirical evidence connecting access to the Arts and extracurricular activities to a sense of belonging and a sense of value that translates to higher rates of persistence and perseverance, factors that influence academic outcomes. Naturally, I asked about the ratio of students to extracurricular activities. Mr. Gorman shared information that of the 180 incoming freshmen, nearly all of these students are participating in one or more after school activity, club, or extracurricular activity.

Furthermore, he provided the past 4 years of state test scores, which revealed that the students who left the district for scholarships had a combined 48.2% passage rate on all state tests, while the combined passage rate for Steubenville City Schools was 99.4%. The last 4 years of students enrolled in the district for ELA was 99.7% and Math at 99.1%. However, the passage

rate over the same period of time for students accepting scholarships was 69.2% in ELA and 26.9% for math.

Clearly, it's obvious that when students are provided an opportunity to participate, they participate, and when students participate, parents participate, and when students and parents participate, the community participates, and when all these stakeholders participate, a climate and culture is born that creates a buffer to the societal ills of poverty that can even deter chronic absenteeism, and in Steubenville's case, 95.2% of the time.

Clearly, I did not come here today to be a lobbyist for Steubenville, but "Go Big Red" anyway! Instead, I would like to turn the attention to ODE's document entitled, "Ohio's Strategic Plan for Education." The document lists all of the strategies required to educate a child holistically, especially broken down into two components: academics and socio-emotional learning. The theme of the document is that these two components are inseparable and equally important to student success.

Unfortunately, Ohio's report card doesn't reflect that philosophy. Rankings and decisions are made with regard to academics only. When districts perform poorly, Ohio continues to send resources elsewhere, creating a shortfall to address the emotional needs of our students.

This year, Canton City Schools will lose about 16.4 million dollars to open enrollment, charters, and private education practitioners. This is where it gets highly ironic. When we are deemed underperforming, funds are disseminated elsewhere, and funds are displaced, the first items on the chopping block are the Arts, non-core classes, extra curricular activity, and wrap-around services.

Ohio's model literally takes away the opportunities necessary to educate our students holistically with no opportunity to become a Steubenville.

Finally, I realize that there will be influences and other interested parties that will represent the interests of charters and private school endeavors, and at the end of the day, these core educational values will prevail. I just simply ask that money for these programs should be a separate line item in the budget, a line item that does not sacrifice the quality of public instruction. If it is a must to retain school choice and scholarships, then Ohio needs to invest more money into education, independent of public education dollars. A budget is about priorities; priorities dictate expenditures, and while this may cause other areas in the budget to be cut, we have to ask: How important is it to protect public education?