

Testimony for the House Subcommittee for K-12 Education

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Community/charter schools constitute an Ohio educational experiment that has become a tradition and an integral part of Ohio's educational delivery system. They started as an approach to determine if low cost, lightly regulated schools could provide an innovative spark that would improve the state's educational efficiency while providing higher quality educational alternatives for families whose children were otherwise stuck in what they considered to be inadequate schools.

Over the years, Ohio has aggressively encouraged the growth of the community school movement, but recently has been demanding greater accountability while granting more flexibility to the traditional school. On average, Ohio's traditional schools spend almost \$2,000/per pupil more than community schools and have shown little improvement. Meanwhile, a number of community schools have been closed, but an increasing number have been outperforming their traditional counterparts.

During the past eighteen months, the Cupp-Patterson Workgroup has enlisted a number of Ohio's best educators and school finance officials in a comprehensive effort to develop a school funding system that is based on the specific needs of Ohio's children, with an emphasis also on objectivity, transparency and fairness, fairness to students, to districts and to taxpayers. The results of those efforts are now being made available to this subcommittee, the rest of the General Assembly and the public at large.

The Workgroup had also hoped to make the benefits of this new methodology available to community schools as well – they, too, are public schools – but have found that a few of the key concepts in their Fair Funding plan do not apply. For example, in the new base cost methodology, all of the specific components are enumerated, but some of those components do not exist in charters, i.e. co-curriculars and athletics, while some community school expenditures don't apply to traditional schools, i.e. building rental. Trying to substitute one for the other and adding or subtracting, for a variety of reasons doesn't seem to work. The fact that teacher salaries in community schools, on average, are about two-thirds those of traditional schools skews those comparisons.

The Subgroup members are aware that community school operators believe that the per pupil building allowance is far too low, that they should participate fully in all categorical add-ons and that transporting their students creates problems for the traditional schools providing that service. They also know that both community school operators and traditional school officials want a change to direct funding of community schools by the state. What is unknown, is the level at which that direct funding should take place.

It is, therefore, the Subgroup's recommendation that it meet immediately with community school leaders to begin discussions regarding a temporary, direct funding amount and the possibility of a comprehensive cost study of community school operations. The Subgroup believes such a study is required if it is to develop a permanent, fair, cost based and transparent funding methodology that will guarantee high quality educational opportunities for all those who attend Ohio's community schools.