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Good afternoon Co-Chairmen Cupp and Patterson.

My name is Scot Prebles, I am the superintendent of Forest Hills Local Schools in Hamilton County.

I would like to provide testimony today regarding my endorsement of a public education funding proposal, brought before this body, known as the Fair School Funding Plan – most specifically I want to speak to open enrollment, community schools and voucher recommendations within the model.

However, before doing so, I must first acknowledge my deep appreciation for Senators Cupp and Patterson who have provided unwavering leadership, practitioner respect and support for the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students of Ohio. These gentlemen have devoted countless hours during the better part of an eighteen month process to develop a proposed funding model dedicated to the definition of what students really need to gain a “high quality education” in Ohio.

Obviously, the price to do so is important so Representatives Patterson and Cupp required that we as practitioners work closely with them to identify essential, cost based and justifiable proposals. I was honored to be teamed with my colleague Steve McAfee, Whitehall Treasurer, as co-chair of the open enrollment, community schools and voucher subgroup. Additionally, I was impressed by those that worked with Steve and me along the way.

We met with Chad Aldis from the Thomas Fordham Institute regarding Ohio’s open enrollment data. We spoke with Tim Anderson of the Midwest Council of State Governments to gain regional and national community and charter perspectives. Founder and President Ron Packard from Accel Charter who serve nearly 12,000 community students across the country provided funding comparison information to our subgroup. Public finance economist Howard Fleeter, Mike Sobul currently Granville’s treasurer - former chief forecaster for special projects in the Ohio Department of Taxation and Director Aaron Rausch from the Ohio Department of Education attended every meeting held. These experts and the organizations they represent along with others that provided information to our subgroup are being mentioned by me to reinforce the comprehensive nature of our work. And, this comprehensive analysis occurred in all eight groups.

The comprehensive and “TRANSPARENT” school funding proposal I respectfully present for your consideration is that students be funded where they attend school. In other words the dollars should follow the student. Current methodology in our state thought by public educators to be unpredictable, unable to serve its intended purpose and that is not in sync with the needs of today’s education is extremely difficult to understand with its many facets, and with more than 80% of Ohio districts capped or guaranteed this funding model is no longer effective.

But, our collective work to develop a base cost to educate all students fairly is difficult to apply to community and charter schools as they do not provide across the board comparable services.

Please do not misinterpret my comments. Many community schools provide appropriate and effective educational alternatives for Ohio’s students but the calculation of that service requires a comprehensive, defensible analysis such as the Fair School Funding model developed through our committee’s eighteen month journey. I am not here to cut out nor criticize community schools. Moreover, my purpose is to urge this body to consider the benefits of an appropriate amount of resources to be disbursed to all schools to ensure high quality education exists for all students.

Our work is defined and accompanied by a recommended base cost proposal. This needs to happen for our community partners to ensure fairness, rational and justifiable allocations exist in their world as we propose for ours.

It should be noted at this point that those from community and charters that collaborated with our subgroup are in general agreement with our proposal that resources follow the student. Regardless of our location or institution, we are all obligated to provide the best possible education to our students. And both community and public schools reject the somewhat combative relationship that exists between us due to the way resources flow to students. Direct funding will add the needed transparency, fairness and cost based funding we each desire; the details of which still need to be worked out for community and charters.

And, as is proposed with our committee’s overall recommendation, I am a proponent of a hold harmless aspect for community schools and charters to give them time to complete their analysis so that findings can be applied over the four year total phase in of this model.

Thank you for your consideration, the honor of providing my opinions to you today and for your collective work to ensure the needs of Ohio citizens are met.

Scot Prebles
Superintendent