

**Testimony as Interested Party: Reopening Schools**  
**Howie Beigelman | Ohio Jewish Communities**  
**Ohio Senate | Committee on Finance**  
**Columbus, OH | May 19, 2020**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony today.

Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of our eight Jewish federations and their 150 nonprofit agencies serving Ohioans of every faith, and of none, every day, from cradle-to-hospice. Among those are K-12 nonpublic schools and they are the focus of our testimony today. However, we make these points on behalf of all of our communities, and each of our agencies.

Our community agencies, like so many other nonprofit social service organizations, pivoted as the full impact of the COVID-19 virus - and its fiscal, financial, health, and mental health after-effects - have taken their toll on Ohioans sheltering at home. To borrow a corporate term, they have “leaned in” and have done so in a big way. Our senior residences and skilled nursing facilities continue to care for the most vulnerable and at-risk, and our Jewish family and vocational services organizations are providing necessary behavioral health counseling, workforce training, and placement services along with emergency food and housing assistance. Jewish community centers, along with shuttered synagogues and temples, continue to offer meals on wheels and spiritual service options to combat social isolation. And, our Jewish day schools are continuing to teach, inspire, and engage Ohio’s next generation of leaders.

But to say it’s been challenging is an understatement. Teachers have been forced, on a moment’s notice, to flip from classroom instruction to an online model. Students have needed to give up so much of what makes school special while at the same time having to change how they go to class and how they do their schoolwork. As we begin to discuss opening up for Fall 2020, and beyond, we ask that you keep the following guidelines in mind, and spell them out in policies and requirements. We are of course, speaking on behalf of our schools and our communities, but we believe these are priorities every school in any community can readily agree on.

**Principles of Reopening Schools:**

1. Equity
2. Availability of PPE and Other Health-Related Equipment
3. Capital Funding for Renovations to Campuses
4. Technology for Remote Operations
5. Safety Funding and Equipment

**Equity**

The Coronavirus has not discriminated in its attacks. Rich and poor, every country in the world, every state in the union, and every part of Ohio has been affected. The state, and legislation from this General Assembly and rules from the Administration, must recognize that in a fair and equitable response.

Students in chartered nonpublic schools - and the schools themselves - deserve their fair share of government aid.

On the federal side, this requirement was written into the CARES Act for education stabilization funding. While there is also broad discretion to the Governor on other aspects of funding that can be used for both public and nonpublic

schools (and we would urge that they too be funded equitably), the equitable share requirements are, simply stated, a legal requirement.

Yet we are hearing from schools that they are not being consulted by their local school districts, or that they are not receiving a fair share of federal funding.

So as we pursue remedies to these legal violations, we urge the General Assembly, in its approach, to be as direct as possible: funds to help educate in response to, during, and in preparation for a pandemic must be equitably shared so that every child across Ohio is getting the very best education as they are entitled to.

### **Availability of PPE and Other Health-Related Equipment**

It is critical that if schools open, each school is treated equally in its ability to stay safe. This means a planned distribution of PPE, thermometers, and disinfectants, soaps, hand sanitizer, and similarly needed equipment.

Nonpublic schools should be included at a fair and proportional share.

### **Capital Funding for Campus Renovations**

In addition, some schools may need to renovate their campuses and buildings to comply with new pandemic-related health and safety requirements. Others may need to purchase temporary prefabricated buildings or trailers for educational use. We recommend a grant program to help subsidize these costs.

### **Technology for Remote Operations**

Similarly, as we plan for a year in which some students and teachers may need to be “in school” online, or where we may see another period of sheltering at home, the need for technology hardware, software, and high-speed internet are critical to educational opportunity. We urge funding for each to every student and every teacher in need.

### **Safety Funding and Equipment**

Finally, one area that has gotten noticeably worse during the pandemic is community safety and security for groups at high risk of terror attack. In our community, we have seen warnings from both the FBI and DHS regarding potential plots and attacks.

Once our campuses are reopened, we urge that safety - as it has been in the past - continue to be a top priority for this General Assembly.

### **Next Steps**

As you prepare for a safe reopening of schools, please keep in mind that we are indeed, in this together, Ohio. That must mean that each student and every school is treated equitably. That goes for nonpublic schools and students in nonpublic schools too. As you fund items, ensure there is funding directed to nonpublic schools and students. As you enact legislation setting policy, please demand in the policies that equitable rights of nonpublic students and teachers are required.

We are ready to work with you, and we are available for any follow up questions you may have.