



**House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education  
Testimony on HB 64  
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President  
Ohio Federation of Teachers  
March 5, 2015**

Chairman Cupp and Ranking Member Phillips, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. OFT represents 20,000 members who are teachers, paraprofessionals and nurses in Ohio's public schools, high education faculty, and public employees who provide vital services to families and communities across our state. On behalf of our members and the children and families they serve, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about this legislation.

Chairman Cupp, welcome back to the legislature. We look forward to working with you and the other committee members. Your expertise and knowledge will serve this Committee and the Education Committee well.

We want to establish a fact pattern for moving forward. OFT is a solution driven union that seeks to include not only the voices of our members but also the voices of parents and community individuals and groups that help improve academic outcomes by addressing non-academic concerns.

We agree with the Governor that the state budget is a values based document and therefore it demonstrates the values that both he and the legislature hold. However, not everything should be in the budget. We feel that there are several big topics that could be dealt with in greater depth if placed in separate bills. These issues are community "charter" school reform, teacher evaluation and testing. I would like to share a few points about each of these topics.

**Charter schools –**

- What is missing in the budget's attempt to address charter reform is oversight of management companies as well as open meeting requirements for schools.
- We oppose the budget language that allows charter schools to seek levy dollars. Charters already receive local levy dollars from high wealth districts and for other formula designations such as special education funds. It is becoming more difficult for families to reach into their own pockets to afford levies. One of the reasons the school levy failed in Columbus was that charters would receive funding from the levy. Voters spoke then about the low performance of charter

schools and lack of oversight. Academic outcomes and oversight must be improved before charters go to the ballot for more taxpayer money.

- One provision that fits well in the budget is language regarding transportation of charter school students. Traditional schools must not be required to transport charter students who live within a half mile of a charter, especially since traditional schools don't provide their own students the same level of service. HB 64 language can resolve this inequity.
- The legislature currently has multiple vehicles for charter school reform which need to be consolidated. As an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, it was our late former President Al Shanker who first proposed the concept of charter schools. We are very proud of that. As public schools we should have an open discussion about reversing the current trend for poor performance and make Ohio know as having the best charter schools in the nation. We recommend removing all language from HB 64 that addresses charter school reform - except for transportation of students - and placing it in HB 2.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

We support many of the changes being made for teachers and a focus on teacher performance and alternate measures along with Student Learning Objectives (SLO), peer review evaluation or student portfolios. However, one issue we do not support is moving away from SLOs and toward shared attribution. A budget bill is not the place for this legislation or discussion. We are hopeful to be part of that conversation.

### **Testing Issues**

All testing language should be removed from the budget. Simply limiting the number of hours or limiting the percentage of time spent on testing will not address the real issue. The real issue and the question that needs to be asked and studied is "What is the purpose of testing and how do we get there?" The House and Senate have proposed bills to address testing and there should be broader more thoughtful discussions before both full education committees. Yesterday, Senator Lehner announced a testing taskforce that we fully support. It includes teachers and curriculum directors. This is a great first step in determining how to answer the larger question at hand.

In addition to these three main areas of concern, there are a few other issues to which I'd like to call your attention:

### **Ed Choice Scholarship vouchers**

We oppose expansion of the Cleveland voucher program and increasing the voucher amount for high school. Ohio has too many voucher programs as it is. Data shows little difference between the performance of voucher students and their peers who remain in traditional public schools. OFT conducted a poll last year and results show that parents prefer the state focus on providing excellence in all public schools, not choice. All

vouchers programs - except the income-based voucher - drain resources from traditional public schools. Ohio already provides funding to private schools for auxiliary services. There is no public demand for vouchers, yet Ohio's traditional public schools have a great need for additional funding.

### **High Performing School Districts**

We feel that the provisions associated with these districts and high performing teachers could be applied to all schools for third grade reading, professional development and course work. We oppose any hiring of non-licensed staff because the state now has an alternative licensing method for non-traditional teachers.

### **Early Childhood Education**

We applaud the Governor's desire to increase the participation of 4-year-olds in early childhood programs. We have concerns about how effective it will be as a partial-day program. This expansion is a start, but there needs to be more discussion about how this will work and whether the effort should be increased. We support reaching more children because the data is clear that children who begin their learning early perform better academically and have a greater social and economic impact on society.

### **Health Care Services for Students**

We have concerns about the language used in the budget that allows school districts to contract out for health services. The language is vague and lowers the quality of care and expertise needed to serve as a school nurse. School nurses have advanced certification in a master's degree or equivalent. RN's need to be supervised by a doctor. School nurses don't. School nurses need to be able to write 504s and IEPs for students with special needs. Those with other licenses don't.

### **Pensions**

OFT opposes any provision that would exempt charter school teachers from participating in STRS. OFT strongly believes in retirement stability. Our members often change employers, including moving from traditional schools to charters and back again as job opportunities permit. Any breaks in their years of service would negatively impact their pension and years of service requirement. Retirement stability benefits the state Ohio. Retirees contribute billions of dollars to the Ohio economy every year, this is especially beneficial during a recession.

Chairman Cupp, this concludes my testimony. Both I and my Legislative Director Darold Johnson are available to answer questions now or at a later time. I appreciate your attention.