

Symmest Valley Local Schools

Board of Education
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Good Morning, Chairman Cupp, members of the Ohio House Finance Sub Committee, and guests. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today with my concerns about the proposed Ohio Budget as it pertains to education.

My name is Jeff Saunders, and I am the Superintendent of the Symmes Valley Local School District in Lawrence County. Symmes Valley is a very rural school district made up of 150 square miles of farmland. Our per acre valuation is \$554, and one mil will only raise our district about \$45,000. We have over 60% of our students on free or reduced lunches and we receive 76% of our operating funds from the State of Ohio.

Even with this information, we have been told by the Governor's budget proposal that we have the capacity to produce more money for our district. It even leads everyone to believe that we have a greater capacity to raise funds than the average school district. A levy greater than two mills would be required just to replace the funds we would lose with the proposed budget. That is not realistically going to happen in our district.

There is no way that with our current or proposed budget, the Symmes Valley Local School District will be able to offer the same kind of education to our students that some of the districts in the state can offer. That is not fair to our students. With our current budget, we have been able to offer only one AP class to our students compared to the many AP classes offered at other districts. Our elective offerings are also very low due to the limited number of staff.

To try and offer our students the education they deserve, we have cut staff till it is beginning to affect our services to our students. The Symmes Valley Local School District does not have any administrative assistants, transportation director, food services coordinator, or curriculum coordinator. Those positions have all been taken on by current staff which greatly overloads their day and keeps them from doing better things for our students. Our elementary counselor has even taken on the responsibility of our Federal Programs in order to help save dollars.

Next, it has taken a great deal of money to prepare for the required state testing and Common Core. No additional funds were provided, so approximately \$400,000 has been spent from our general fund over the past two years to help prepare our school for the upcoming tests and the change to Common Core. This money was spent on technology and Common Core materials.

Also, our staff, as many in the state have done, have gone with a very minimal increase in salary in recent years. At the end of this current contract, our teachers will have received a 1%, 1%, 1 ¼% over the past nine years. We are very fortunate to have a staff that has understood the effects the economic downturn has had on our budget. However, at some point, this understanding may change to doubting the validity of our statements. They are a hard working group of teachers that deserve better.

I can't end my testimony without mentioning one thing that puts a large strain on our budget, and that is transportation. In the last fiscal year, the Symmes Valley Local School District spent approximately \$320,000 more than was provided by foundation funding for transportation operations alone. Even though we appreciate any help we receive, the \$21,000 from the Straight A Fund that was allotted to help with this need would be about one fourth the cost of one bus. Therefore, please consider some help for the rural, high poverty, low density districts when considering the Governors proposed budget.

Lastly, setting all the formulas and numbers aside, all you have to do is take a look at the disparity in what the students in some school districts have access to as compared to other districts. When looking at that picture, you can quickly see that we do not have an educational system that is equitable for all the students in Ohio. Until that happens, you will continue to see individuals such as myself, here testifying and hoping to see change.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of my testimony.