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Ashtabula, Ohio
March 18, 2015

I am a three-term school board member in the Jefferson Area Local School (JALS) District in Ashtabula County. Our district has 1,750 students and covers 128 square miles in the far north east corner of our state. Our per pupil expenditure is \$8,509 which is the lowest in our county (average = \$9,463) and well below the state average of \$10,977 per pupil. I am here today to discuss with you the fact that school finance is problematic for districts in our region and especially my district, the Jefferson Area Local Schools.

The Jefferson Area Local Schools continue to grapple with the difficult reality of school funding in Ohio. The next biennium budget proposal from the Governor adds to significant budgetary challenges for our district. The state's simulations show that my district will lose approximately \$490,000 over the next two years. This loss is caused by reduced per pupil funding and also elimination of our tangible personal reimbursement that was originally taken from us in 2005.

The district's administration has continued the process of laying out the district's financial situation for our staff and community that was begun back in 2011 when we first experienced severe budget reductions from the state. We continue to monitor our current financial status, develop projections for the future, manage the cuts that must be recommended to keep the district solvent, and try to anticipate the uncertainties that face us as we make decisions, many of which are contingent upon decisions and circumstances beyond the district's control.

The Jefferson Area Local School Board continues to emphasize its commitment to fiscal responsibility and having the school district live within its means. In 2012 we were forced to enact personnel and program cuts sufficient enough to balance the district's budget. To meet this budgetary goal, the district had to reduce expenses by \$1.5 million. For a school district of our size and in light of the already significant reductions that the district had previously implemented the cuts were difficult and deep. Our per pupil expenditures of \$8,509 has been reduced 8.0% over three years.

Our budget cuts along with the uncertainty of our financial future impacts school improvement in profound ways. Here are a few examples of the many decisions we have needed to make faced with the budgetary cuts:

- Class sizes are significantly increased – elementary classes of up to 29 students.
- After one year of all-day kindergarten we had to go back to half-day kindergarten.
- We are struggling to continue to offer courses at the high school to provide our students' adequate preparation for college or careers.
- Reduced levels of school administration and guidance

As a school board member, I am put at a disadvantage by Ohio's confusing and often incomprehensible funding formulas. We receive no support from the state in explaining how school funding decisions are made. There is no way to simply explain to a community why after making numerous cuts and restraining employee compensation, there needs to be additional cuts made. Parents, employees, community members and regional leaders are confused by the varying and inequitable reductions or increases in state funding among districts within our county or region, especially when the districts are considered by residents to be similar in size, scope and community resources.

At the same time that our resources are being reduced we fall victim to ever-increasing state mandates that come to us unfunded with no consideration for the lack of personnel and administration available in smaller districts to implement them. Testing alone this year has placed undue burden on districts to work within a PARCC testing platform that is complex and poorly designed.

Here is a partial list of legislative and ODE Initiatives over the past three years none of which have come with funding:

- The third grade reading guarantee
- Implementation of Physical Education Evaluation
- Development and implementation of a compliant teacher evaluation model
- Development of growth measures as the required 50% of the teacher evaluation
- Implementation of these growth measures SLO's
- Implementation of the new Common Core in Math and English /Language Arts
- Implementation of the revised standards in science, social studies, art, music, foreign language and business
- Revision of and/or creation of new assessments PARCC and AIR aligned to the new standards. Replacing the Kindergarten Readiness assessment to KRAL, new diagnostic tests, continuation of OGT, Alternate Assessments, OTELLA – English as a Second Language Tests etc.
- Adoption of formative assessment practices

- Preparing for new Alternative Assessments
- Implementing linkage and using well value added reports
- Complying with SB 165 - General Assembly passed and Governor Kasich signed amended
- Substitute Senate Bill. This legislation contains a number of provisions related to social studies curriculum, assessments, graduation requirements and licensure.
- Complying with the sanctions imposed as a result of special education reviews.
- Implementation of the OPES (principal evaluation)
- Implementation of OTES (teacher evaluation)
- New gifted Measure on State Report Cards
- Implementation of Resident Educator Programs
- Implementation and training for High School value Added Measures
- Linkage for Value Added Measures
- Title I compliance reviews
- New safety planning and reporting processes
- New PARCC testing requirements for American History and American Government
- Implementation of Ohio Improvement Process requirements
- School Improvement Reporting Requirements

After the Governor promoted Educational Service Centers (ESCs) as a source for collaboration in his first budget, we saw them cut in his second. The supervisory units that Local districts had funded through the ESC's for decades were removed under the guise that the funds would be returned to districts so that they could use the funds with providers of their choice. The problem is that these funds that supported curriculum, instruction and support for principals were never returned to the district and we were told that the funds were in our guarantee. This was another under the table cut in funding and now we see reductions to the guarantee that further exacerbate our problems.

In addition to an obtuse funding formula, what will the impact of Ohio's next budget be? Will the state restore cuts it made to K-12 education? Will the effects of past cuts become our new operating paradigm in which we accept bigger class sizes, reduced services, less opportunity for students, increased costs to parents for student participation in activities and an ever narrowing curriculum? Will we now see even larger discrepancies between districts so that where you live dictates education you receive? If our intention is indeed to strengthen Ohio's competitive edge and allow our students to be competitive in a global marketplace then the current way we fund our schools must change. We need stability in funding and we need a funding formula that is stable and offers a long-term picture of how we will be funded.

In conclusion, while it is imperative that work is done to fix school funding in our state to assure equitable funding across all districts for all students in Ohio, I realize that is not going to happen

today. I want to leave you with something today that you can do now to help my district and districts similar to us. Please consider addressing the targeted assistance in the formula for agriculture and transportation. As I said in the beginning, the Jefferson Area Local School district is a rural district encompassing 128 square miles much of which is designated agricultural. In its current form, the funding formula penalizes districts such as ours. I am not here today asking to be funded at the levels we were prior to our reductions and cost saving, although honestly that would be my preference. Today, I am asking that by addressing these particular items, you give us the opportunity to maintain our current levels of instruction for the students of the Jefferson Local School District. Please help your Ohio public schools systems – we are working hard for our students' futures and the future of the great state of Ohio. Thank you.