

Chairman Blessing,

Please accept these comments on HB 87 and findings for recovery of audits of enrollment records.

How we arrived at this point:

- The Auditor of State Audit Team for Qualitative Projects has been studying the Ohio Department of Education's procedures of determining the recovery of funds from community schools, specifically e-schools for the better part of a year.
- The question of whether or not ODE even has the authority to "claw back" these funds is currently before the Ohio Supreme Court
- Before we establish a mechanism for returning funds, should we first let the Supreme Court decide and the Auditor's office issue its findings?

We must be careful what we reward:

- Many students arrive at an e-school as a last resort after finding no other options available to them to continue their education. In our experience, the student inquired only to find that the traditional school district did not offer programming that met the student's needs or simply turned the student away. In either scenario, the district had the opportunity to receive funding for the student but chose not to.
- ODE claws back funds to e-schools under the presumption that "no services were rendered". Why then would the legislature seek policy that gives funding to a district when no services were rendered? The irony here is surely obvious.

Recommendations for improving HB 87:

- If a district seeks to receiving funding that was clawed back from a community school, they should demonstrate a good faith effort to educate the student. It is a policy requirement that an e-school notify the student's district of residence when a student has withdrawn or been withdrawn from an e-school. A traditional district should only be eligible to receive clawed back funding for students that were re-enrolled in the district during the funding year, after the date of withdrawal from the e-school.
- The local district should only be entitled to the portion of the claw back that exceeds the state formula funds for the student. This would return the portion of district funds raised locally through levies, income tax, or other funding sources. This would relieve the local burden but not reward either entity for a student that ODE determined had not been enrolled and properly served.

It is so sad:

- HB 87 appears to be another product of an us against them mentality that positions local districts against e-schools and other community schools. It feels as though it seeks to communicate to Ohio citizens that every community school is ripe with fraud. But, what is more fraudulent than expecting payment for a student simply because they slept in your district?
- Today I learned about a student that recently attempted suicide and is hospitalized and receiving mental health services. The student will likely be off-line while hospitalized. Our work on her behalf will continue. Hours will be spent by our social worker, graduation coach, school counselor and administration to reassure the family. To listen. To help plan, to assure them they are not alone. Our teachers will invest time in preparing her to return to her studies. In an FTE review it is likely that this student will come up short on hours. This will result in a claw back of funding sent to us to support only her durational activities. The absences will be unfunded but excused. The case will be considered fraud. Convince me why the student's district of residence is entitled to her clawed back funds....

I encourage legislators to continue to look for ways to improve Ohio's school funding system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Lutz', written over a large, sweeping horizontal line that extends across the page.

John Lutz
Newark Digital Academy Director

Chairman Blessing,

I contact you today with concerns regarding HB 87. My name is Laura Freeze, a parent board member of the Newark Digital Academy, 255 Woods Avenue, Newark, OH, 43055.

While HB 87 appears to simply provide the Ohio Department of Education with guidance on distributing funds as a result of a finding for recovery from the Auditor of State, I fear that this would only amplify the “us versus them” mentality that positions local districts against community schools when it comes to school funding. We question the rationale behind the state clawing back money from a community school for alleged violations, and then returning that funding to a school district that never educated that student. If a community school is not going to be paid for students it supposedly didn’t educate, then why should a district be paid for students it didn’t educate. Such a policy creates a double standard and does not have the students’ best interests in mind.

Community schools throughout Ohio often enroll students who have troubled pasts and face countless challenges. Often, these students were not able to succeed in a traditional school setting or were directed toward alternative forms of education. Community schools enroll these students knowing full-well that the student will come up short on hours in an FTE review. Nevertheless, community schools work with these students and spend hours upon hours providing them services. In many situations this time is never documented in an FTE review and funding will likely be clawed back. Under this proposal, funding would be clawed back from that community school and returned to the school district, despite that district failing to spend any resources educating the student.

Today, we have a school funding system that pits traditional school districts against community schools. We encourage leaders in this state to develop a school funding model that focuses on providing the best education for each individual student.

Sincerely,

Laura Freeze

Chairman Blessing,

I contact you today with concerns regarding HB 87. My name is Paul D. Barbuto. I teach Science at Newark Digital Academy.

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Regards,

Paul D. Barbuto