

**HOUSE BILL 49 TESTIMONY OF
JOHN ZITZNER
FRIENDS OF BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOLS**

Good afternoon, Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Finance Primary & Secondary Education Sub-Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49.

My name is John Zitzner, President of Friends of Breakthrough Schools. Friends of Breakthrough Schools is a non-profit development and advocacy organization, responsible for closing the gap in public funding needed to provide quality education to thousands of children in the Breakthrough community school network in Cleveland. Next year, Breakthrough will educate 3,400 scholars in 11 schools located in many of Cleveland's neediest areas.

Our student population is 99% minority and 80% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Yet Breakthrough continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio, and based on 2015-2016 state test results, all schools were in the top third of all Cleveland schools for academic performance. In addition, when it comes to the Value Add measure, three of the top 10 schools in Cleveland are Breakthrough Schools.

The City of Cleveland has had quite the year. From community and economic development projects like Public Square and the East Bank of the Flats, to hosting the Republican National Convention and a parade with 1.3 million people to celebrate an NBA Championship. A lot of great things are happening in Cleveland. But here is what else is happening in Cleveland. 33% of our traditional public school students do not graduate high school. That's about ONE in THREE that do not graduate . . . high school. 89% do not graduate from college. Breakthrough will be launching an attempt to track our students when they leave us after 8th grade. What we DO know right now is that many of our very first 6th grade students who joined us in 2006 are now seniors in college and one of them, Terrance Reynolds, actually graduated from Ohio University a year early.

During budget deliberations in 2015, the legislature took a major step towards recognizing the importance of quality community schools in Ohio. Written into permanent law is a definition for high performing community schools. Ohio Revised Code 3313.413 sets a rigorous standard to be considered high performing, one that has been made more difficult after recent revisions to Ohio's testing standards. This section is used to require public schools who are disposing of real property to FIRST offer that property to high performing community schools before offering the property to any community school.

This same high performance criteria was used to create in temporary law a \$25 million building fund for high performing community schools. This fund marked the FIRST TIME the State of Ohio has provided additional funds for high performing community schools and directs those funds to where it is most needed. The biggest gap in funding between traditional public schools

and community schools is the lack of money for facilities. We cannot educate kids without walls and computers and chairs. Breakthrough schools applied for and was awarded \$6.5 million from this fund in September of 2016. This money was matched by the community and will be used to provide seats for over 1,100 more children who will receive a high-quality education in the City of Cleveland.

On behalf of the thousands of additional children around the state who will receive a quality education thanks to this fund, I say thank you. But this fund was put in the temporary law section of the budget . . . and in fact it was temporary as Governor Kasich did not include this fund in his as introduced budget this year.

We ask the legislature to consider two things to continue to encourage the recognition of high performing community schools. The first one is logistically simple. The legislature could cut and paste the building fund from the 2015 budget into this one, which would again provide much needed funds, matched by the community, for buildings that will allow even more kids to receive a better education.

Our second idea would make a resounding, permanent statement by the State of Ohio that it supports and encourages schools that meet the definition of high performing community schools. The budget currently provides all brick-and-mortar community schools with facilities funding of \$200 per child. We ask that the legislature consider providing \$1000 per child in facilities funding for all brick-and-mortar community schools and networks that meet the definition of high performing as defined in ORC 3313.413. This would allow high performing community schools to receive additional funding directly without having to compete against other high performing schools for much needed funds. It would reinforce the definition of high quality that the legislature chose to enact in 2015 and, coupled with recent reforms to our system of community schools, make a profound statement that the State of Ohio not only encourages, but expects, community schools to work to meet the definition of high quality. If you take the number of kids currently in a high performing school or network the budget impact of this concept would be roughly \$25 million, the same amount as the building fund of the last budget.

We understand you hear requests for more money every day. We understand you must make tough decisions that balance the interests of well-intentioned causes. We understand the word “no” is not a word you like but you must use a lot during budget deliberations. As you are considering a response to our requests, I ask you to ponder this. As I testified to earlier, 33% of the student age population in Cleveland will not graduate high school. Where will these kids end up? Unfortunately, some will likely end up in the new juvenile justice facility in Cleveland. This facility cost the public \$189 million and houses up to 180 school aged kids aged 12-18. Breakthrough Schools, for just the \$6.5 million received from the high performing building fund, will provide 1,100 kids with a better education and the tools to succeed in life.

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Miller, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

