

Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee
Substitute House Bill 49 Testimony
May 18, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Hite and members of the House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. My name is Christopher Dodd, and I am a middle school social studies teacher from Madison in Lake County. I have 12 years of classroom experience, and I am currently serving as President for the Madison Education Association. I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today about provisions contained in the budget bill for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019.

When I began my career in education 12 years ago I had several job offers in various location where I live. I chose Madison over other districts due to its financial security and reputation for preparing students for the future. When I started our teacher's union had 225 members, yet now we have dwindled to about 165. This does not include the number of support staff or administrators that we have lost due to state budget cuts. Once the state started cutting our funding we followed the pattern of other Ohio districts and tightened our belts. We cut spending, eliminated teachers, reduced support staff, condensed administration personnel, and removed beneficial programs. We have reached a point where we are unable to "tighten our belts" anymore without seriously jeopardizing the validity of our students' education.

In our elementary schools students receive the minimum required time for physical education, art, and music instruction. The middle school has cut extra classes and has been reduced to a basic education structure of core classes, whereas at one time we provided programs such as computer classes, Spanish, German, Project Gateways, 90 minutes of Language Arts a day, and Co-taught history and science classes. Last year in the Middle School the majority of students were forced to take 2-3 study halls, amounting to almost half of the school day, simply because we didn't have the staff nor the resources to offer rigorous courses. The teachers and the administration attempted to remedy this by requiring all teachers to provide an additional class on top of their normal classes, yet with no additional resources. Although this has alleviated the massive study halls for students it has had an adverse affect on the staff causing great teachers to look for employment elsewhere. Madison High School has also made significant cuts to programs and class offerings. The high school lost Speech/Communications, Video Productions, Metals, Webpage Design, Modern Fiction, Music Theory, Dance, Globalization of the World Economy, Modern Politics, and cut the life skills class in half (basically home economics). Our school district has been reduced to a core subject educational structure with little extras, yet all of the pedagogy and research out there demands that an efficient education should include more.

Class sizes in our schools have been increased to the maximum in most classes and have easily surpassed the Ohio Department of Education's recommended ratio of 1 teacher to 25 students. The high school and middle school is operating with 28-30 students in

each class, while the elementary schools have 26-28 in each class. Madison teachers are moving out of Madison or open enrolling their children in other districts with more resources due to the lack of programs and classes available in Madison. These large class sizes and lack of programs are diminishing the quality of education that Madison was known for providing and tarnishing the standard of education that the state of Ohio has professed to support.

We have survived during these times of financial crisis so far simply due to the partnership between our teacher's union and administration. For the past 8 years we have negotiated one-year contracts that usually includes some form of pay freezes, loss of salary steps, insurance rates increases, and other detrimental measures. We currently pay the most in insurance costs throughout our area as well as remain stagnant on the pay scale. Our members get excited over the idea of a pay freeze and no changes to insurance costs. Negotiations conversations revolve around the motto, "We have no money, so let's talk language." The teaching and administrative leadership in our district have grown accustomed to scraping the bottom of the barrel and compromising, yet both sides struggle to accept that with each cutback, with each compromise, it is ultimately the students that will suffer these losses more than anyone. That is a disservice. Both the administration and the union worked diligently together to pass our first new levy since 1989. We are determined to work together to find solutions to our problems, but we need your help in order to repair the funding issues facing our schools today.

There is no question that times are tough for every district in the state. I urge you to thoroughly consider the implications of defunding or decreasing the funds going to public education. Decreasing funds to our students' education renders an entire generation helpless when trying to compete with their peers that are privy to higher funding. Madison is not the only district in this state that has had to cut massively just to stay afloat. These students now have a disadvantage in the areas of learning that are most important for a student's success in a 21st century. While the four core subjects are indeed important, it is the well-rounded education that will push students to their maximum potential and help them discover their passions and future. All students should be afforded the opportunity to a high quality education regardless of their zip code or financial wellbeing. Madison still offers the best education possible considering the financial situation we have endured. However, with future cuts this quality cannot be sustained and it is our children that will suffer. As an educator, I cannot sit back and watch our district deteriorate over financial cutbacks without addressing this committee in hopes of trying to persuade you to reconsider reducing funding to public schools. It is my job to help preserve and protect the education that Madison has always offered to our students.

I would like to thank you, Chairman Hite, for allowing me to address you and this committee.