



River View Local School District

"Building Educational Excellence for Tomorrow... Today"

Office of the Superintendent

26496 SR 60 North, Warsaw, Ohio 43844

(740) 824-3521

www.river-view.k12.oh.us

Testimony Sub. HB 305
House Finance Committee

Representative Chair, Oelslager; and Representative Vice Chair, Scherer; and Ranking Minority Member Cera; and members of the House finance Committee, let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify on Substitute HB 305. My name is Dalton Summers and I am the superintendent of the River View Local School District located in Coshocton County. I am here to represent not only my own school district, but also on behalf of the "Ohio Fair School Funding Work Group", otherwise known as the "Cupp/Patterson group".

For the past three years I have had the privilege of serving as a co-chair on the transportation subcommittee of the "Fair School Funding Work Group". As you are aware, this work committee was formed by our current Speaker of the House, Bob Cupp and Representative John Patterson. This bi-partisan lead effort was to create a long overdue, functional, explainable, equitable and adequate school funding model. The group was composed of 8 superintendents and 8 treasurers along with various other educational professionals representing all types of communities and school districts. This is the first completely student-centered and logical method for creating a school funding model that I have witnessed in my years as an educator. Having served through five different budget cycles as a superintendent, it would be the first funding model I could rationally explain and justify to my local district.

I am specifically here today to try to speak on behalf of the "transportation component" of this funding model. I would like to tell you I was asked to co chair this because of my keen sense for school finance and my excellent understanding of the current funding methods used for school transportation. I would be lying if I did. My co-chair, Kevin Lillie, the treasurer of Geneva Area City Schools would be a much better candidate for those qualifications. I believe my experiences serving a district composed of 376 rural, square miles; bussing approximately 2000 students; with a transportation budget making up over 10% of our total operating costs is what possibly allowed me to be invited into this great endeavor. I live and manage the excessive, but essential, needs and costs to transport students safely and efficiently to and from school. Through the work with this group, I have learned the unique but equal challenges faced by urban, suburban, and rural districts with respect to school transportation and adequate

funding. The fact is, school transportation is a necessity in the public educational process. It holds its own set of critical challenges and specific funding needs.

The transportation sub committee reviewed the current and past transportation funding methods and formulas. We studied transportation services used in similar states as well as their level of state funding compared to mandated requirements and expectations. What we found was that Ohio has some of the most stringent requirements on local districts with regards to transportation of not only our own students, but also resident students attending private or nonpublic schools within and even outside of the local school district's boundaries. Balancing these multiple schedules, calendars, and growing number of options with little local control has created a reality where the costs to transport non-public school students far exceeds the costs of transporting those attending the public schools.

We have evaluated and studied the costs in purchasing new busses. We looked at the average age and miles of fleets across the state. We know the efficiency rates go down as age and miles increase. Districts are facing real burdens when trying to purchase new units at \$90,000 to \$100,000 dollars a piece. In a previous district I served, we had to reduce two teaching positions to purchase the first bus we had purchased in ten years. This was out of a fleet of over 20 routes averaging 15 to 20,000 miles a year. In the past there were funds to assist districts in the purchase of new busses but over the years these were eliminated. It is noted that funds were allotted recently to assist districts, which were appreciated by some, however; many like River View were not eligible to receive any based on some of the same factors that create shortfalls throughout the entire current school funding method. So, think about a district like RV. We travel the same amount of miles as it takes to go to Disney World and back each day thereby doubling and tripling the average miles accumulated yearly by busses, and we did not qualify for any state assistance in bus purchasing.

We also looked at areas, regions, ESC involvement, and creative district collaborative efforts to increase efficiency and cost savings measures for different district transportation operations. There are many schools that have overcome certain obstacles and are trying to expand options collectively to lower their transportation costs. We have submitted proposals to not only eliminate some of the obstacles but encourage these creative efforts towards efficiency.

We began looking at the increased costs to provide special education transportation and the fact that this amount of support has not been increased since 2009. Special education transportation is the most expensive form of transportation with costs that can exceed \$5000 per student.

Through our studies of all types of school transportation challenges, costs, barriers, and individual school stories and realities, we determined some basic premises that guided us to our proposals and recommendations for HB 305. School transportation benefits everyone. School transportation is essential in that it must take place in order to provide the necessary education to boys and girls. As demands and costs have gone up, state funding has declined forcing districts to use more dollars needed for core education towards the upkeep and operations of transportation. Recognizing that State funding for transportation was once at the higher of 60% or state share and has been decreased to 25% as of 2019, along with the elimination of an adequate bus purchase program, is essential to understanding the dire need to create a separate transportation funding formula to go along side of any new fair school funding plan.

While many of our original recommendations from the beginning have been amended and changed, we still believe and fully support all of them as well as the changes brought forth in this substitute bill.

The following is a list of the proposed changes that we feel are of the most importance as introduced in this Sub. Bill 305:

1. Fund School transportation through a separate formula, unaffected by artificial caps and guarantees that may only distort or harm essential transportation support.
2. Retain the current, locally selected option of being funded on a per mile or per rider basis.
3. Restore the State's minimum state share of district transportation funding to 50%. (Our original proposal was at the full 60%).
4. Continue the density supplement payments, but change the threshold eligibility to 28 riders per mile and the median to 14 riders per mile to reflect the change to the density calculation based upon riders per square mile rather than students per mile.
5. Permits ridership counts based on either a.m. or p.m. ridership numbers.
6. Eliminates the one-mile restriction for counting student ridership.
7. Allows a 30 minute leeway in drop off and pick up times at community and non-public schools.
8. Implement a state bus purchase program as we had originally submitted. There are some similarities to that of House and Senate passed versions of H.B.166. There will be an increased set-aside for bus purchase to \$45 million dollars per year to allow for a complete replacement of the statewide total of 15,000 operating buses every 10 years. (Our proposal focuses on the replacement of the inefficient, high mileage, and aging fleets with a much fairer and equal approach.)
9. Provide for a thorough study to determine the cost of the following and to make recommendations to more efficiently provide the same:
 - a. Transporting special education students
 - b. Transporting community school students and nonpublic school students on days when transporting district is not in session.
 - c. Transporting community school students and nonpublic students outside of district boundaries
10. Sub HB 305 changes the interim additional payments for non-traditional riders from the additional 10% per non-traditional rider to a weight system that adds .5 for community school riders and 1.0 for nonpublic school riders.
11. The Sub Bill creates a collaborative Grant Fund of \$250,000 per year, allowing grants to districts of a maximum of \$10,000 per year.
12. This Sub Bill modifies and expands the introduced language that permits the use of school buses to benefit community organizations and during emergencies.
13. For the small number of community schools that provide their own transportation, the Sub Bill allows them to receive the basic per pupil funding amount in accordance with the formula for traditional schools.

14. Finally, Sub. Bill 305 creates a separate district funding guarantee.

I realize I have thrown many concepts, changes, and suggestions at you that may be better understood if you have a very working knowledge of the current practices and systems in play. Please be sure that from our original research, our original proposals, and after much consultation with stakeholders, educational institutions, representatives such as yourselves, and input from treasurers and superintendents of all different classes or communities, we believe we are proposing workable solutions and fair and equitable answers to a growing need. While I may not have all the answers to any questions you have today, I would be happy to answer those I can and find the answers to those I can't. I thank you for listening and making considerations for not only this piece of the Fair School Funding Model, but the actual entire model. I believe this is our best model and formula to date and it will finally lay the groundwork for a workable school funding system.

Sincerely,
Dalton Summers
Superintendent, RVLSD