

Ohio Online Learning Coalition

Substitute H.B. 305 Testimony
House Finance Committee

December 2, 2020

Chairman Oelslager, Co-Chair Callender, Vice-Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding Substitute H.B. 305 (Cupp, Patterson), the Fair School Funding Plan.

My name is Colleen Grady, and I serve as the executive director of the Ohio Online Learning Coalition. The Ohio Online Learning Coalition represents Ohio's online community schools, focusing on best practices, identifying ways to enrich students' experience with online education, and sharing the advantages of technology-based instruction.

Before addressing specific provisions, it's critical to acknowledge all the individuals, particularly the bill's sponsors, for their time and efforts. The complexity of school funding and its importance to our state make any changes to school funding a challenging task. The proposal under consideration is a testament to your commitment and tenacity.

Community School Funding

As presented, the Plan provides many details to explain district funding changes; however, the Plan has several gaps where community schools are concerned. Several provisions need adjustment to ensure funding equity for community schools.

General community school issues include:

- The use of salary data from fiscal year 2018 underfunds the base cost for community schools.
- Limiting community schools to 90% of formula components further exacerbates the existing inequity in available resources between districts and community schools.
- The proposed calculation for economically disadvantaged students in community schools uses a state average rather than district-specific data. This change could lower per-pupil funding for most community schools since most community school students are located primarily in districts with higher than average concentrations of poverty.

The existing version of the Plan results in community schools receiving an overall funding increase of 15% versus 23% for districts. This difference further exacerbates the current resource gap between districts and community schools.

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Online Community Schools

Equity concerns are especially pronounced for online community schools. The projected overall increase for online community schools is approximately 10% versus 15% for all community schools.

Major concerns for online schools include:

- The Ohio Department of Education reports that statewide the student-teacher ratio is approximately 20-1. The Ohio Department of Education further reported that online community schools had one teacher to 21.72 students per classroom during the 2019-20 school year. The base cost model, as presented, uses grade-level student-teacher ratios that average approximately 25-1. The use of a higher ratio appears to underfund the base cost for online community schools.
- Online community schools receive only base funding and special education and career-technical funding for eligible students. Although economically disadvantaged students comprise the majority of students enrolled in online community schools, no supplemental funding is available to support those students. Health and Wellness funding, which averages more than \$250 per-pupil statewide, on average amounts to less than \$17 per-pupil for online community schools. Students in online schools should have access to resources available to their peers in brick and mortar schools. Providing funding for economically disadvantaged students enrolled in online community schools is a first step to address equity concerns.
- Online community schools serving primarily students who previously dropped out of school or are at risk of doing so work with young adults several years behind and credit deficient. As presented, Sub. H.B. 305 does not include resources beyond the base cost to address these students' needs.

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the importance of online instruction. A refuge for families with health concerns, virtual education offers the ability to meet specific student needs, make adjustments in the depth, breadth, and pace of instruction, and offer access to content not available in all traditional settings. Fair funding for these students is a necessity.

A comprehensive, rational, and fair school funding system that ensures access to quality educational options for all students and value for taxpayers is a shared goal. The members of the Ohio Online Learning Coalition welcome the opportunity to work with you to address outstanding issues and make that goal a reality.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding Substitute H.B. 305.