

Testimony on HB 166: Main Operating Budget for FY 2020-2021  
Senate Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education  
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Breakthrough Schools, Alumni Relations

Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Subcommittee; my name is Eric Baumgartner, and I have been a supporter and advocate of Breakthrough Schools, and its predecessors, from the very beginning in 2006. I've been a donor, a volunteer and a board member, and 12 months ago I left corporate America to establish an Alumni Relations capability for Breakthrough, an important function that will allow us to continue supporting our scholars after they graduate 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

As you know, public charter schools in Cleveland receive about 40% less funding than traditional public schools. Put another way, the traditional public school receives \$18,000 per student. We receive \$10,000. And we spend \$12,000. Just getting to 2/3 requires a significant philanthropic effort. As a result, the limited resources that we do have, are completely- and rightfully- focused on student education. And we're proud of the results we've achieved. Breakthrough Schools was ranked by CREDO, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, in 2017 as the #1 charter school network in all of Ohio. But our reliance on philanthropy is simply unsustainable. We now serve over 3,400 youth each year, making us the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest "K-8" district in Cuyahoga County. But- each incremental student represents another individual funding gap that must be addressed through even more philanthropy. We all know this needs to be fixed, and we applaud Governor DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Husted's commitment to increase funding for schools of quality. The budget proposal to provide funding to support Charter Schools of quality is sorely needed, and greatly welcomed. The "student wellness and success" funds for wraparound services will also greatly assist the students in our network and throughout the state.

Funding, however, is really only half of the story. Most decisions ultimately distill down to a cost/benefit calculation. We know intrinsically that education is the key to success, but being able to measure the benefit is likely an important consideration for this committee- and it is what led me to focus my efforts on Alumni Relations. I mentioned earlier that our limited resources have gone completely to education. That's proper, but it also means that we are unable to track or support our alumni after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. To paraphrase our mission, it is "to provide distinctive school options...for success in life." We know we've done well on the first part, but we cannot yet say with conviction what our impact on "success in life" has been. And that, of course, is the end game. So, I agreed to establish the ability to find, track and support our 1,333 alumni, with the ultimate goal of returning them to the Cleveland economy, to the very businesses who have had the vision of supporting us- as the ultimate return on their investment.

After 12 months, I do have some very encouraging news that I wanted to share with this committee. From our initial 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduating class of 2009, 75% attended college after high school. 27% have already graduated with a degree, and we project that this number will grow to as much as 40%. That's comparable to a nationwide rate- urban high school graduates- that I understand to be about 12%.

I don't have official high school graduation rates yet (our 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduates have gone to 104 high schools over a ten-year period, so it takes time) but I know it is very high. We actively guide and encourage our scholars to attend the very best high schools for them. Over the last 2 years, we've sent 49.2% of our graduates to the best Cleveland Metropolitan School District schools, with the balance going to charter, suburban, or private schools.

Our model is working, and I know that my efforts to track the successes of our students will yield amazing success stories. But without adequate funding, it is impossible for us to continue to grow and serve the youth of Cleveland. We support the state's efforts to help fund charter schools of quality, and we applaud the accountability that is required. I know Breakthrough Schools worked with a coalition of quality charter schools across the state to help the administration define the concept of quality, and how the money would be distributed. It is not a low bar, and not even every Breakthrough school will qualify, but it will reward those who do and will inspire others to reach that bar in the future.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.