

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, Alumnus

Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Subcommittee; my name is Immanuel Gainer. I am a senior at MC2STEM High School in Cleveland, Ohio, and an alumnus of Citizens Leadership Academy, class of 2015. Citizens Leadership, or "CLA" is one of the Breakthrough Schools models.

I went into CLA with some relatively negative experiences from my previous schools and it gave me a pretty negative outlook on schools, teachers, and other students. Mixed with being raised in the inner city of Cleveland, it created a less than optimistic student entering middle school, prepared only to go through the stereotypical public schooling: overwhelming student to teacher ratios, harsh and unsympathetic faculty, dehumanizing lunches. And to my surprise, I received far more of a family aesthetic- nothing like what I was used to! Teachers who had the time to work with us, even one on one during their lunch times if they had to. But they didn't help only academically, many of the faculty understood our surroundings and that overall mental stability and comfort would lead to academic success. They made themselves open to being a lifeline of sorts, to those of us that went for the opportunity. The curriculum was challenging in an invigorating sense, which helped the learning process. There wasn't an intense amount of us so we could grow as a whole class together. And the lunches....well, no one anywhere likes school lunches (*Joke*). Nevertheless, for me, CLA and Breakthrough Schools in general changed my way of thinking and the way I looked at life, really allowing me to grow as a maturing young man and not being written off as another failed statistic.

Without CLA in my life, the people I met there, the connections I gained, the knowledge I absorbed....I would be in a much worse place in my life. The most impactful person I met in my middle school journey was a man named Ricardo Franklin, who kept me on the correct path and acted as a father/mentor sort of figure. That sort of presence in a school is needed. The way it can change and affect a child's life is phenomenal. And that is what Breakthrough brings to its students' lives- not a strict, uniform way of operating but allowing true change and growth, and that is why Breakthrough Schools are a necessity."

My story is not unlike those of thousands of kids across Ohio whose life changed due to a high-quality education. But these quality schools are at a breaking point. They spend more than they receive, and they make up the gap mainly through community support. This is not sustainable.

I completely support the budget proposal to provide funding for Charter Schools of Quality, and encourage each of you to do the same. This, combined with the "Wellness funds" for wraparound services will make a huge difference in the lives of other students like me.

Thank you for your time, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.