



# Ohio Federation of Teachers AFT, AFL-CIO

*A Union of Professionals*

1251 E. Broad Street  
Columbus, OH 43205

Senate Finance Sub Committee on Primary and Secondary Education

HB 166 Interested party testimony

Presented by Melissa Cropper,

President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Terhar, Ranking member Fedor and members of the Subcommittee, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT has more than 50 local unions representing 20,000 members who are active and retired public school teachers, charter school teachers, school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, and public employees. OFT works to advance quality education and services that impact children and is a voice in the workplace for Ohio's education professionals.

All across Ohio, our members have advocated for a budget that will fund our future by investing in our children. The budget passed by the House begins to move us in the right direction with the most substantial increase in funding for Ohio's traditional K-12 public schools in more than a decade, a \$675 million investment. However, we urge the state Senate to continue work that was started in the House and create an actual funding formula that works for all districts and advances equity in education spending.

Having a formula that works and grows over time is very important. Last week, according to OSBA, there were 104 school districts with levies on the ballots which speaks to the inadequacies of our current funding system and its overreliance on property taxes. The House version basically just allocates a lump sum of money for education, allocating it in the same manner as in the past without establishing a distribution mechanism or formula that districts can use in planning for the future. This type of transitional funding has resulted in districts losing over \$600 million over the past eight years. We do appreciate the additional funding for meeting the social/emotional needs of students. This has been an increasing need in schools all

across our state. We still need money, allocated through a formula, that will also provide for all the other components that go into educating a child.

### **Academic Distress Commission**

I remember the day that House Bill 70 was amended as if it was yesterday. I came to testify that day in support of HB 70 because it was a bill to encourage integrated wraparound services at schools. I had been informed that vast amendments were being made to the bill. In reviewing these amendments, there were numerous pieces, including the role of the Academic Distress Commission, that I wanted to speak in opposition to during my testimony; however, I was prevented from speaking to those pieces at that time because my testimony came before the amendment was actually made. I will remind you that those changes were literally inserted and passed through the whole system in less than twenty-four hours.

The Academic Distress Commissions and CEOs have not worked which is evidence of what happens with secret meetings and limited input. Discussions on what should happen next have been on-going and evolving over that last four years. Several approaches have been introduced and not moved.

We support the language from HB 154 inserted into the budget for the following reasons: It restores power to the locally elected school board. It focuses on buildings, not districts. It calls for action when a building gets its first "F" instead of its third "F" in a row. It provides a road map for a building and school districts to follow based on research for what it takes to turn around a building. It allows communities to develop plans with the understanding that no two buildings are the same even if they are a few miles apart. It creates accountability by developing turnaround teams consisting of principals, teachers, parents and community stakeholders. Engaging parents and teachers are two essential elements in school turnaround.

HB 154 bill also engage the Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education to develop policies for what would happen if a building failed to make progress after four years. Buildings could also reach out for help anytime during their planning process. Building plans must select turnaround models that have been proven to work. They must address building climate, student needs and intervention, and professional development issues to name a few topics.

HB 154 is a bi-partisan road map and has been the subject of several lengthy hearings. Teachers and school board members have told the House Education Committee of the horrors occurring within the community and school buildings including the poor morale among staff living under an ADC and CEO. They also told of the positive things that are happening or were happening in their school districts before the turnaround. For example, in 2015, Youngstown City Schools had two early college high schools that received a B and C on their report cards. The district received an upgraded B for their K-3 literacy. Yet these successes were never mentioned in conversations about Youngstown. In Lorain, schools had developed a plan for a turnaround by

reaching out to community stakeholders, teachers and parents. Lorain school board members traveled to Cincinnati Public Schools to learn about their community learning centers program.

Prior to being put in the budget, HB 154 passed with a vote of 83-12. We urge the Senate to use this language as the foundation for how to do turnaround models in Ohio.

### **Graduation Requirements**

There are many graduation requirements plans being discussed. We have been with conversations with our members about the various plans. What we hear repeatedly, especially from counselors, is that we need a pathway for students that is flexible, easy to track, and not heavily focused on test results. We will be glad to provide more testimony on the requirements as plans are released.

### **Additional Concerns**

We have concerns about weakening standards for paraprofessionals and teachers by allowing a long-term substitute license to qualify people for these positions. We want to ensure that anyone working with students, either as a paraprofessional or a teacher, has had the appropriate training and works towards receiving the appropriate licensure.

While the state works on funding for high-quality charter schools, we think it must also take steps to open the books of these management companies so that the public can see how their public dollars are being spent. We can avoid another ECOT type situation by creating more transparency in the system.

We become concerned when the budget process is used to make education policy changes, such as happened in the House with some language that advanced the interests of the charter industry. These policy proposals should be constructed as stand-alone bills so they can receive more scrutiny and deliberation by legislators.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.