Testimony: HB 166
FY 2020-21 Biennial Budget
Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee
Doug Ute, Superintendent
Newark City Schools
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Good afternoon Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking member Fedor, and members of the Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. My name is Doug Ute, Superintendent of the Newark City Schools in Licking County, I also serve on the Buckeye Association of School Administrators Executive Committee, this year serving as the Association President. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of language included by the House in Amended Substitute House Bill 166 that would increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by ensuring that all high-poverty public schools in Ohio are working to reach the national benchmark of 70 percent participation in their low-income school breakfast program as compared to their low-income lunch participation.

The Newark City School District is an example of how schools can successfully expand the number of students eating breakfast. We believe that students who come to school hungry or worried about where they will get their next meal are unable to focus on learning. We want to remove that barrier and help kids to be well fed and feel safe and secure. We also want to remove any stigma that students may feel comes with receiving a free meal.

The process of delivering free breakfast to students has differed across our 12 school buildings, dependent on student ages and populations. We have found a lot of success in serving breakfast in the classroom, delivering the meals to each classroom and offering them to every single student. Some of our buildings use a "grab-and-go" method, where they will pick up breakfast in the cafeteria and take it to their classrooms, while some buildings have a more traditional breakfast in the cafeteria. The ultimate goal is that all students have the chance to eat breakfast at school, even if they are running a little late.

While staff members were apprehensive about the model of breakfast-in-the-classroom, the positives we were able to show during a trial period at one of our elementary schools helped to achieve buy-in from staff. We emphasized to our kitchen staff that jobs were being changed, rather than eliminated. One key about the breakfasts we offer in the classroom is that they are not messy. Teachers don't need to worry about spilled milk or other barriers. The breakfasts are also easy for kids to eat while completing early morning tasks.

We noticed immediate improvements in many ways during our trial period. More students were eating breakfast. Student trips to the nurse's office decreased, and students are able to concentrate more on their learning. Districtwide, our daily breakfasts served have increased from 850 3 years ago to about 3,500 today, out of 5,700 students attending a Newark school every day. Newark has a low-income population of nearly 61 percent. The initial student successes have continued on as we have broadened our outreach.

The program is also financially sound. Money provided through the federal breakfast program allows us to keep our food service budget balanced, while offering higher quality food to our students. Agencies like the Children's Hunger Alliance have been invaluable in providing support, onsite development and collaboration, while seeking out grants to help us fund the program.

I believe that all students should have the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast, and that a full stomach helps with student learning, achievement and behavior. This program has been successful in Newark, and I believe it can be successful in districts all across Ohio.

In conclusion, Chairman Terhar and committee members, I would urge your support for the provisions included by the House in Amended Substitute House Bill 166 that would strengthen Ohio's School Breakfast Program.

I would now be pleased to answer any questions you may have.