



**The Ohio 8 Coalition**

**Senate Finance Committee - House Bill 110**

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Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee. On behalf of the Ohio 8 Coalition, we appreciate the opportunity to share our written testimony on three K-12 related matters. The Ohio 8 Coalition is comprised of Ohio's eight urban school district Superintendents and eight Teacher Union Presidents and we serve nearly 200,000 students across Ohio. In that vein, we provide this testimony on behalf of The Ohio 8 Coalition as an Interested Party regarding House Bill 110 on matters of State maintenance of effort requirements for federal relief funding; K-12 school funding; K-12 school transportation; and school vouchers.

#### **State Maintenance of Effort (MOE) for Federal Relief Funds**

According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE), the purpose of the most recent pandemic recovery funds is to "expand resources for K-12 and postsecondary schools and students, not to replace existing State commitments." Like with previous relief packages, Federal funds were not meant to replace what States have already or will continue to commit to K-12 and post-secondary schools and students. These federal funds are meant to help spur and support true recovery from a pandemic that has drained school budgets across rural, suburban, and urban districts. The recovery has and will continue to require significant and sometimes unexpected costs related to personal protective equipment, software and hardware needs to support online learning, broader and more comprehensive student and family outreach efforts, to name a few. As our districts have returned to in-person learning, we cannot sacrifice existing State commitments in exchange for one-time Federal funds. Portions of the initial guidance provided by the USDOE seemingly allow states to count a mere portion of the funding mechanisms needed to provide a full education towards the list of State funding needed to comply with MOE requirements. This lack of clarity has spurred various K-12 stakeholders around the country to push for further clarification from USDOE to ensure that post COVID recovery we are not left with deficits and gaps that States and local communities cannot fill. Although revised guidance might be forthcoming, our concern is that will not arrive in time for final decisions related to the State budget. Our request to this committee is to respectfully request that all K-12 funding MOE decisions do not replace existing State commitments in any manner. Ongoing and consistent state commitments in addition to one-time Federal relief funds will help urban, suburban, and rural districts better recovery and thrive.

## School Transportation

The following provisions are significantly problematic for many school districts across Ohio including all of the Ohio 8 school districts. The suggested solution for these provisions is to allow schools districts to determine what is best for their local community including deadlines, transportation timelines, and how best to leverage local public transportation systems.

- 1. June 1<sup>st</sup> Deadline:** Chartered nonpublic and community schools must notify home school districts of their start and end times in order for transportation plans to be created that work for all students, public districts as well as charter, private, and parochial students. While a deadline for any and all students in need of transportation is helpful, one that is timed to accommodate as many students as possible is critical. Many families do not make schooling decisions until after the school year is finished, which can stretch to mid-June. Understanding this dynamic in any deadline is necessary to avoid confusion and frustration.
- 2. July 1<sup>st</sup> Deadline:** Home school districts must produce final transportation schedule by July 1 and the local ESC would have the authority to mandate the adoption of said plan by July 15<sup>th</sup>. As outlined above, home school districts must have the time to accommodate as many students as possible. A deadline of July 1<sup>st</sup> is too early to have a comprehensive picture of the transportation needs of all students for the upcoming school year. In addition, mandating the involvement of the local ESC seems to be a burdensome and unnecessary additional layer of bureaucratic involvement.
- 3. Students enrolling after June 1<sup>st</sup>:** The current version of the bill requires that students must be scheduled on a bus within 14 days of enrollment. This date assumes many variables including the fact that our own internal transportation plans are completed by June 1<sup>st</sup>. As stated above, the planning and strategy for the significant undertaking of school transportation includes late and last-minute enrollment that occur within days of the start of the school year and throughout the school year. In other words, any schedule put into place too early will require changes to accommodate ongoing enrollment needs of all students. As the demands on transportation plans have grown to accommodate a variety of start and stop times, open enrollment and increasing demand from students in every learning environment, those plans have grown increasingly complex. Requiring a plan to be created within 14 days of enrollment will create unnecessary, and perhaps duplicative work, as other students enter and leave the transportation plan over the summer months.
- 4. Prevents the use of mass transit systems:** Mass transit use as a means to provide transportation services to community or chartered nonpublic students in grades K-8 is prohibited under HB 110, unless the district enters into an agreement with the school authorizing such transportation. It remains true that despite a desire by districts to expand yellow bus service, current circumstances make it impossible due to the limited number of buses and more critically, the limited number of bus drivers (which is a national shortage). In addition, while the Ohio 8 districts attempt to limit the use of mass transit, especially for younger students, requiring contracts with every single school building requiring such transportation would, in practical terms, establish a first right of refusal for any school building to which we are mandated to provide transportation. Negotiating such agreements would require an enormous amount of human capital, since individual

building administrators will need to be educated on the complexities of the entire system to understand the rationale of any plan (for example Dayton Public Schools transports to 27 of their own schools and 24 non DPS schools). Our districts leverage public transit for our own students as well as those who attend schools of choice-we work to ensure the safety of ALL students, every day. Until additional buses can be purchased and more critically, drivers recruited and hired, public transportation is a necessary element of district transportation systems.

5. **Requires single transfer route:** For students in grades 9-12, school districts are required to offer only routes with a single transfer. While Ohio 8 districts attempt to limit any transportation option that is burdensome to students and families, this mandate is not possible as routes are in the control of and dictated by the local transit system. This requirement would be particularly impossible in our regions with complex public transit routes. While we work to ensure routes are as simple as possible, one transfer is not always possible.

For at least the past decade our districts have struggled to balance the ongoing increased need for students transportation with the costs of yellow bus purchases and recruitment and retention of bus drivers. To be more specific, each of our eight school districts provide transportation to our traditional public school, charter, private and parochial students to and from school as well as extracurricular activities. Transportation policy and related funding mechanisms of the past have not caught up with the understandable demands of all students for which we are responsible for transporting today. These above referenced provisions will only exacerbate the challenges we face each day to transport all students regardless of where they attend school.

### **Vouchers**

In the bi-partisan House Bill 409, the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation that was meant to provide a safe harbor for standardized testing results during the 2020-2021 school year for voucher eligibility. This *temporary* law traditionally has an expiration date. Unfortunately, during the drafting process this expiration date was missed. As a result, this oversight eliminated the safe harbor and if not changed, will indeed count pandemic year testing results for voucher eligibility. This runs counter to the purpose of HB 409 and that provision specifically. We ask that that amendment SC 2517 be accepted to address this issue.

### **School Funding**

We are at a point in our state's history where there is the political will and the social desire to prioritize education funding and to finally make a change in the way we support our children. The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that now is the time to finally resolve a constitutional challenge of Ohio's funding system that has plagued us for nearly 30 years and provide our students with equitable opportunities to succeed. We fervently believe that any school funding modifications need to take into account the lessons we've collectively learned over the last year when it comes to educational needs, and specifically what will be required to provide our Ohio students with equity. To that end, we offer some thoughts on the funding formula as passed by the House.

1. The net increase in funding to districts is welcome news. It is worth noting, however, the Title 1 funds listed in the school funding projections are dedicated to all schools. As a

result, the total amount dedicated to a particular public school system is shared with charters and non-public school buildings with Title 1 eligible students.

2. The framework begins to reduce the reliance on property taxes by providing additional state funds and potentially reducing the need for tax levies.
3. Prioritizes and begins to fund the true costs related to educating economically disadvantaged students, gifted students, English Language Learners and students with disabilities.
4. Includes direct funding for charter schools including per pupil and transportation costs.
5. There is no mechanism outlined in the legislation to adjust for inflation or to determine future costs attached to the studies that still need to be conducted related to economically disadvantaged, etc.
6. Districts have short term funding numbers, but no formulaic calculations to build their required 5-year projections.

*[The Ohio 8 Coalition](#) is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition's mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to help shape state education policy.*