

Senate Testimony – Spring 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony about the Fair School Funding Plan.

My name is Scott Karlo and I am a parent in the Woodridge Local School District. I have been the chairperson of our local levy efforts for the past 10 years as well as the leader of our Woodridge Advocacy Network serving to drive community engagement to bring awareness, discussion, and proactive efforts to shape support/better legislation for public schools.

I find it sad that too many in Ohio do not know this, but education was in fact a critical component to the founding of our nation, and Ohio. Even before either constitution was written, the Northwest Ordinance of 1785 explicitly spelled out the establishment of public schools and ultimately gave us Article VI, Section 2 of the Ohio Constitution:

The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state.

The history of public education and its linkage to our democracy continued well into the days of establishing this nation. George Washington wrote to Congress, imploring that “no duty [is] more pressing on [the national] legislature [than] the common education of a portion of our youth from every quarter. [They are] the future guardians of the liberties of the country, [and the very] prospect of [a] permanent union” depends on their education (George Washington, Eighth Annual Message (December 7, 1796), Avalon Project (New York: Bureau of National Literature, Inc., 1897, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/wash08.asp).

John Adams continued the argument, “every rank and class of people, down to the lowest and the poorest [was to be educated as a matter of democratic theory] at public expense (John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, Vol VI, *Defense of the Constitution*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1851, 168).

More of these examples continue, and I encourage you to learn with a quality read from Derek W Black’s *Schoolhouse Burning: Public Education and the Assault on American Democracy*. You will learn an entire history of the tight relationship between education and democracy; how public education set our nation apart from all others, and yet here we are more than 230 years later failing to support and embrace that relationship. Perhaps as part of your evaluation in this committee, you should invite Professor Black to offer testimony on the topic per his expertise.

Or perhaps listen to the will of the people, as represented in the Ohio House where support for the bill, for a second time in just months, received overwhelming support. Communities are tired of the endless levy cycles and need balance in the way schools are funded beyond just property taxes. Senior citizens are being taxed out of their homes in one community, while in another, impoverished members of our state are struggling to find necessary stability in their desire to reach all that this country has to offer.

House Bill 110 will not be a magic bullet. It will not address all of the issues facing public education. It certainly is not perfect, but it is a pathway to help us strive towards perfection. It provides an incredibly sound structure to educate the whole child – every child. It provides a measurable formula that can be adjusted as we learn from its implementation and seek to continually improve in the process. It provides equity in a very inequitable, unconstitutional system today.

This new measurable formula will enable a means to examine where the model falls short, thus creating opportunities for more targeted fixes. This new formula is far easier to communicate across local communities why the need for additional funding is necessary as the base calculation clearly addresses each facet of

education versus some arbitrary formula that fails to represent the majority of our districts. The new formula also provides balance to tax paying property owners, especially our senior citizens, who are no longer collecting an income.

Contrary to the misnomer of failing public schools, and the misleading state report cards, the real failure has been our legislative body ignoring an unconstitutional funding model for decades. That failure has left Ohio falling further and further behind. In reality, our public schools are doing great work. I have two daughters excelling in their education, each at significantly different school districts. Each are surrounded by their peers who are equally achieving. Yet they each have classmates that are struggling, and poverty is a clear factor in many of those instances.

In fact, the data routinely tells us that students in well-funded schools, surrounded by stable resources in safe communities, routinely excel. Yet equally routinely, the burden to address some of the toughest burdens of society continue to fall to our public schools and the administrators, teachers, and staff that serve the students. There are countless examples of new demands with no funding to support such initiatives.

Further, any beliefs that a universal voucher program will equitably address this issue seem to ignore numerous key problems. Here are some questions that seem unanswered:

- Students in my district receive about \$900 while voucher students get \$6,000. With the new voucher plan, how will the State provide \$6000 for every student?
- Has anyone addressed the dilution issue? There is a single pot of education dollars, distributing those funds over the potential for endless charter/voucher/public schools (buildings, admin, staff, maintenance, educational resources, etc.) will weaken the ability to deliver quality education for the whole.
- If funds come from property taxes, do the taxpayers truly want their money funding private education tuition? Schools without publicly elected oversight?
- While State Report Cards are used to attack public education, how do we know the voucher institutions are better since they are not measured in the same way? By the way, there is data available courtesy of the Cleveland Plain Dealer (<https://t.co/T1o22aXMwB?amp=1> and <https://t.co/T1o22aXMwB?amp=1>). Many of them perform poorly compared to the home district.
- How will we avoid an environment of modern segregation with a voucher model knowing that only certain families will be able to afford the additional tuition and transportation to a voucher school?
- How are we turning a blind eye to the important separation of Church and State?

A nation to be governed by the people, for the people, must be an educated nation. Ensuring education is equitable for all citizens is a mandate outlined in our State constitution. Equitably funding public education will go beyond reaching every child. It will reach every corner of our society. Abortion rates fall when people are educated. Crime falls in educated societies. Creativity, entrepreneurship, and the economy rise in an educated population. Society becomes more civil in an educated society. We achieve greatness in an educated society. Democracy is protected in an educated society. YOU have a means to make all these things happen through support of the Fair School Funding Bill. Meet the will of the people and let's get this done.

Scott Karlo