



**HB 110 Interested Party Testimony**  
**Cynitra Skillern, Breakthrough Public Schools**  
**Senate Committee on Primary and Secondary Education**  
**Chairman Andrew Brenner**  
**May 5, 2021**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today as an interested party on HB 110, the state biennial budget bill. My name is Cynitra Skillern and I am a 6<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher at Breakthrough Public Schools. Breakthrough Public Schools is a network of 12 nonprofit, high performing community schools in Cleveland, most of which are sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Our student population is 99% minority and 70% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Breakthrough Public Schools continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio, consistently outperforming our urban counterparts as well as many suburban school districts.

I came to education by way of passion rather than initial vocation, teaching is my second career. Transitioning from the corporate world to education has been filled with challenges and rewards. One of those rewards is being able to teach at Breakthrough. Although this is my 7<sup>th</sup> year in education, I have been a part of the Breakthrough family for 4 years and I will be returning this fall. What keeps me at Breakthrough is our mission to prepare Cleveland area students for success in life. We understand that education transcends the classroom. Sure it's about content and curriculum, but it's also allowing our scholars to be authentically themselves with programs like Compass and the most recent Identity group started at our Cliffs Campus.

During the 2019 budget process, we worked closely with Governor DeWine on the inclusion and passage of the Quality Community School Support Fund. This program provided \$30 million each fiscal year distributed on a per-pupil basis for students who attend a "quality" community school as defined in law, with more resources being allocated to economically disadvantaged students.

The initiative went a long way towards closing the severe funding gap between district schools and charter schools. This is critical because for far too long, the lack of sufficient charter funding has made it nearly impossible for the top charter schools to expand to serve more students. The increased funding has allowed our networks to identify and train more teachers, retain our existing teachers, and reduce our reliance on generous philanthropic support from our community.

In the as introduced budget, Governor DeWine proposed an increase in funding for this program to \$54 million per year in recognition of its success. More children qualify for funding because more schools have attained the definition of "quality" as described in the fund.

Unfortunately, the House reduced the funding for the Quality Community School Support Fund \$30 million. We feel this is a mistake. Ohio has come a long way in providing more rigorous oversight

and accountability to its community school system. As a result, bad schools have been closed, results have improved for several years and most important, our children scholars are receiving an education that prepares them to succeed. The Quality Community School Support Fund has played a significant part in continuing this trend.

Please consider restoring the Quality Community School Support Fund in HB 110 to \$54 million per year. I will be happy to take any questions you may have.