



Belpre City School District

2014 Rockland Avenue, Belpre, OH 45714

(740) 423-9511 FAX (740) 423-3050

EAGLES WITH VISION

Jeffrey Greenley - Superintendent

Lance Erlwein - Treasurer

HB 110 – State Budget Bill (2021) Testimony

Before the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Jeffrey S. Greenley, Superintendent

Good Afternoon Chairmen Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Jeffrey Greenley and I currently serve as Superintendent of Belpre City School District. I am submitting this testimony in my official capacity as Superintendent as well as on behalf of the Belpre City School District Board of Education. Belpre City Schools serves approximately 985 students in Washington County Ohio and is nestled along a particularly beautiful bend of the Ohio River just across from Parkersburg, WV. Our district is considered high poverty with an elementary school that fluctuates year to year around 60% of students in high poverty. We are proud to say that, despite the pandemic, we worked very closely with our stakeholders and found a way to remain open all year to provide in-person, five day a week delivery of education to our students.

It is my pleasure today to offer testimony in support of HB 110, the State Budget Bill, which includes the components of what was formally HB 1 (Oeslanger) otherwise known as the Ohio Fair School Funding Plan. This body has already received sufficient technical testimony regarding the inner workings of the proposed Fair School Funding Plan, its various formulae

Belpre High School
612 Third Street
Belpre, OH 45714
740-423-3000

Board of Education
Mike Miller, President
Fred Meredith, Vice-President
Brenda Church
Cathy O'Donnell
Leonard Wiggins

Belpre Elementary
2000 Rockland Avenue
Belpre, Ohio 45714
740-423-3010

and weights and its impact on the state's overall bottom line. I offer qualitative evidence on the harm that the current formula creates. I will tell this body a little about Belpre City Schools, the adverse impact the current formula has had on our district and the return on investment this body will reap should it invest in education and pass this badly needed legislation.

The current formula in conjunction with multiple school finance decisions in Ohio have resulted in many challenges for Belpre City Schools. We previously testified in the House during its deliberations on Substitute HB 49 regarding the catastrophic impact that Belpre City dealt with in the phase out of the formerly locally generated Tangible Personal Property taxes that at one time made up about 40% of our district's budget. I have attached that testimony into the record as an exhibit to my testimony for additional background. In a nut shell, Belpre City Schools lost over \$28 million in badly needed revenue from the elimination of the TPP despite the legislature's assurance that 70% of the then created Commercial Activity Tax ("CAT tax") would be allocated to education. As many of you are aware, not one penny of that money has been allocated towards education or received by Belpre City Schools.

Despite that loss in CAT tax funding and the high need of our Appalachian students we are considered a "Capped" district and only receive approximately one-third of the funding per pupil that the other schools in our county receive. This is due to the current formula's over reliance on property tax valuation in determining wealth. Although our valuation on paper may look high, the reality is that we have a large, transient rental population and more than one-third of our population is made up of aging seniors on fixed incomes who cannot easily support levy requests. Belpre's demographic is the poster child for why the Fair Funding Plan is so badly needed. Because the proposed formula rightfully takes into account our community's income,

current simulations project that we would receive nearly \$2.5 million in additional funding per year. From our perspective that isn't new money – it's the money we equitably should have received for years. My heart aches when I think about how badly our children have needed this revenue and what more we could have done to support our most challenged learners to close the equity gap in learning.

As fiduciaries of the institution, we have taken our obligation to ensure that we have the necessary funds to meet our needs very seriously. By statute the district has two mechanisms to ensure that it has the necessary dollars to support its expenses: pass a levy or institute a reduction in force. Belpre City Schools has had historic difficulty in passing levies. Prior to 2018, the district was successful on only two new operating levies out of eleven total tries in the past 45 years. During that time period, the district failed all nine attempts to secure a bond or permanent improvement fund to support capital needs. But in May 2018 the taxpayers of Belpre City supported the district in passing a new levy to generate \$1.5 million per year in badly needed funds; funds which did not add to our offerings but just ensured we could provide just the bare minimum in terms of teachers and programming for our students. Because of the convoluted and arcane funding formula, Belpre City Schools was still projected to need new operating dollars just a few years after its May 2018 five year forecast projection. The district did the responsible and prudent thing that lawmakers would have it do: it contacted the Ohio Auditor of State's office and invited it in to do a performance audit to identify potential cost savings. After reviewing the results, Belpre City School District Board of Education passed a reduction in force in May 2019 that saved the district approximately \$650,000 per year. The current funding formula requires Belpre City Schools to do both a levy and a RIF just

to provide basic programming for our students. We are trapped with no other way to support our students. In contrast, prior to serving as Superintendent of Belpre City Schools I was Superintendent of Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools which, as you heard in testimony last week, is now one of the 5 richest school districts in the state due to oil and gas revenues. Incredibly, that district, despite its wealth, receives nearly three times what we do in foundation payments under the current funding formula and has not recently needed to pass any operational levies: an irrational result.

Belpre City Schools is at a crossroads. We have recently spent a great deal of time in our district to create consensus around a Portrait of A Belpre Graduate and are optimistic that we have outstanding faculty members and the right leadership team in place, with the right board of education, to make that aspiration into a reality. But to truly enact this transformative change for children we have to overcome the significant funding challenges created by the elimination of the TPP tax, the broken promise of the CAT tax and the absurdly low amount of foundation payment generated under the current funding formula. I implore this body to pass this badly needed reform.

As previously mentioned, our new operating levy and simultaneous RIF allowed us to continue to operate into the future but now create the type of programming we would like to have for our secondary students. The additional revenue from the Ohio Fair Funding Plan would allow us to offer badly needing coursework and career pathways to Belpre High School students. We would be able to expand services to Gifted and Talented students across the district in a way we cannot currently provide due to budget constraints. We have invested Governor DeWine's wellness dollars into additional social-emotional learning curriculum and

staff to help guide and support our students – positions which we could make permanent with that money converted from outside the funding formula to dollars guaranteed within the formula moving forward. Finally, it would provide us with the financial security of a stable funding formula so we could shift our budget and begin to save money and make our operations efficient enough to seek a capital improvement levy to rebuild our aged school buildings. The additional course offerings and supports, coupled with a 21st century building, would propel our district to new heights and ensure we have the resources to support our learners and bring our Portrait of a Graduate to life.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your time today. I am happy to address any questions you may have about our district and how the Ohio Fair Funding Plan will catapult our students into new heights.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey S. Greenley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeffrey" being more prominent than the last name "Greenley".

Jeffrey S. Greenley JD, MBA
Superintendent, Belpre City Schools