



House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Testimony on HB 33 Education Budget Provisions
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers
March 15, 2023

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacson, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, I am Melissa Cropper, a library media specialist from Georgetown Exempted Village Schools currently serving as President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents preK – 12 teachers and support staff in traditional public schools and charter schools in rural, suburban, and urban districts across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the HB 33 education budget revisions.

Fair School Funding Formula

OFT is pleased that the Governor's Budget supports the continuation of the Fair School Funding formula; however, we recommend a full phase in of the plan. Delaying now, when we have the revenue to fully implement, simply means keeping all students from having the resources they need at a time when the state is able to provide.

In order for the Fair School Funding Plan to meet the needs of all students, no matter where they're from or what obstacles they face, we recommend the following:

- Update the base cost inputs (insurance costs, per-pupil expenditures, salaries.) We can't fund schools in 2023 using costs from 2018.
- Raise funding levels for English language learners and students with disabilities to match the amounts indicated by the state's research.
- Determine, and implement, the appropriate allocation funding levels for economically disadvantaged children.

School Resource Officers

OFT supports the funding for school resource officers in HB 33. This funding will provide the funds for schools to hire safety personnel instead of arming teachers and school staff thereby eliminating the need for FASTER Saves Lives training. FASTER Saves Lives only requires 26 hours of training over three days and has been criticized for including harmful racial and religious stereotypes in their program. OFT asks that the \$200,000 earmarked for FASTER Saves Lives training be removed from the budget.

Graduation Requirements

HB 33 requires public and chartered nonpublic school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. OFT understands the importance of filling out a FAFSA if a student

intends to pursue post-secondary options. However, we oppose this being mandatory for graduation. Instead, districts should be required to educate students about the FAFSA and provide opportunities and support for families to complete the paperwork.

Preparing students to be fully functioning members of society is one of the goals of public education; therefore, schools should have a responsibility for graduating students prepared for the civic duty of voting. OFT asks for the budget to provide funding for schools to register all eligible graduating students and to provide government issued ID cards prior to graduation using the information readily available within a student's school records.

Literacy

OFT is a supporter of following the science whether it be on COVID-19 precautions or climate change. We feel the same when it comes to reading. In 2000, AFT, our national union, released a report entitled *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science*. Since then, AFT has been creating and delivering (using a train-the-trainer model) professional development in reading that teaches a set of strategies and scaffolds needed for reading instruction that work in any curricular context. We want to be clear what the Science of Reading actually is and is not. According to "The Science of Reading Defining Guide" published by The Reading League, "The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing."

The science of reading is **not** a one-size-fits all approach, a program of instruction, or a single component, such as phonics. Rather, it is a branch of science that encompasses phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, word recognition, vocabulary building, and other components.

We wholeheartedly agree that funding literacy should be a priority for the state. OFT and AFT have also made literacy a priority by partnering with the non-profit First Book, local unions, and community groups to support literacy efforts and put books in the hands of children through our "Reading Open the World" campaign. Last year, AFT gave out over one million books with OFT giving out over 100,000 in Ohio. We plan to reach that goal again this year.

As promoters of literacy, we have the following comments to make about the literacy proposals in the budget.

We support:

- Funding for professional development in the science of reading for teachers in K-5 and for administrators.
- Stipends for educators taking the professional development.
- Funding to purchase new curriculum materials to align with the science of reading.
- Funding for literacy coaches. In order to avoid taking good talent from districts, we are advocating that the funds go to each district to pay for literacy coaches who are embedded in the district, understand the culture of the district, and will remain within the district.

We oppose:

- Requiring all teachers, regardless of the grade or subject they teach, to receive professional development in the science of reading. We instead propose that funding

levels be set at an appropriate level for schools to hire additional reading intervention specialists at the middle school and high school levels.

- Banning any type of reading strategies. Teachers should be trained in the science of reading and trusted as professionals to use the techniques to teach students how to read. Banning certain methods opens the door to politically-charged attacks that can limit a teacher's ability to choose the most appropriate method for meeting a student's needs.

We are concerned about:

- The assumptions about why student reading scores are not as high as we would like them to be. There has been no analysis done on which districts are using which teaching methods or curriculum; therefore, it is an unsafe assumption to think that low test scores are attributable to teaching methods. Many other factors contribute to students' academic success including their socioeconomic status which is why it is so important to continue to study the DPIA funding and other factors in the Fair School Funding formula to make sure that we get them correct.
- The amount of Professional Development that may be required. The language says "a course." How many hours of professional development is that? Is the entire professional development already encompassed within the required training for Dyslexia or will this be layered on top of that?
- The lack of a requirement for teacher voice in the process of changing how reading is taught in a district. If districts need to make curricular changes, teachers should be involved in that decision-making process.

Workforce Readiness Initiatives

Career Education/Workforce Development is also a priority area for AFT/OFT. We are currently working with New Lexington Schools in Perry County on their workforce development initiatives. New Lexington works with a business advisory council (BAC) of about 48 members to create exposure and immersion opportunities for students at young ages that lead into work experiences and credentialing opportunities as the students advance in the grades. Their BAC recently received a three-star rating, missing a four-star rating by just .8 of a point. The expansiveness of their programming is too vast for me to go into detail in here, but I invite you to both look at their [webpage](#) and schedule a visit to see what they currently have happening (including working farm, prefab lab, partnership with IBEW for pre-apprenticeship training, drone licensing, and much more) as well as their plans for including more programming.

Through OFT and AFT, they also have a grant to bring businesses into the classrooms to work with students on identifying solutions to real problems a business might be facing. New Lexington is a prime example of how districts (even at a classroom level), businesses, parents, and community partners can work together to provide opportunities for students and to prepare them to succeed in those opportunities.

In addition to New Lexington, OFT has seen the amazing work that happens in our Career Tech Centers. Career Tech education engages students in learning. It helps them make the connection between what they are learning and how it will apply to what they want to accomplish in life.

OFT supports the following workforce readiness initiatives included in the budget:

- \$50 million in each fiscal year to establish a program to assist schools with equipment purchases necessary to establish or expand career-tech education.
- \$200 million in FY 2024 under the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission budget to support construction projects that establish or expand CTE programs.
- Payments up to \$50,000 in each fiscal year to BAC's designated as "high quality" by receiving a rating of three to four stars.

Scholarship Programs and EdChoice Expansion

OFT opposes increasing the family income eligibility threshold to qualify for an income-based EdChoice scholarship from 250% of the federal poverty level to 400% (\$111,000 for a family of four) beginning in 2024.

Year after year we see proposals in Ohio to keep expanding private school vouchers. This expansion has been great for for-profit private schools, but it has been an obstacle toward the full and fair funding of Ohio's public schools, which 90% of Ohio students attend. As teachers, parents, taxpayers, and community members, we have a moral imperative to everything possible to ensure that our public schools are fully funded before additional funds are diverted to unaccountable private schools. As legislators, you have a constitutional responsibility to do the same.

When we compare the income thresholds for private school vouchers with the income thresholds for other, more essential services, we see how out-of-step this policy proposal is. In order to qualify for food assistance under the WIC program, a family in Ohio must earn less than 185% of the poverty level. To qualify for publicly funded child care they must earn less than 142% of the poverty level (Governor DeWine's budget proposal increases this to 160%). To qualify for pre-K / early education funds, they must earn less than 200% of the poverty level. And to qualify for Ohio Works First, the financial assistance portion of the state's TANF program, a family must earn less than 50% of the poverty level.

Assistance for private school is not a greater need for families than essentials like food, childcare, pre-K, and direct cash assistance. If needy families had as much lobbying capacity as private school supporters do, perhaps there would be less of a discrepancy.

EdChoice voucher eligibility should not be expanded at this time.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. We know that you have many competing priorities for the state budget. Due to the work that many of you did in the previous budget cycle, Ohio has a framework to finally meet our constitutional obligation to fully fund our public schools. Please build on this work and fully implement the Fair School Funding Plan. Ohio students deserve quality, well-resourced schools.