



House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education HB 33 Testimony

Licking Heights Schools
Mr. Brian Bagley, Board President
Dr. Kevin S. Miller, Superintendent
Mr. Todd Griffith, Treasurer

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Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on House Bill (HB) 33.

My name is Brian Bagley and I serve as the President of Licking Heights Local Schools Board of Education. It has been my pleasure to serve on our district's Board of Education for 12 years. Joining me today as I present this testimony are district Superintendent Dr. Kevin Miller and district CFO Mr. Todd Griffith.

We are here today to ask the Ohio Legislature to approve the school funding formula included in House Bill (HB) 33. The Fair School Funding Formula is an objective, transparent, fair solution to school funding that draws upon the expertise of practitioners and invested parties from within the field of education and our communities. The formula is about meeting the needs of *each child* we educate. The formula is also about our communities, because when our schools thrive, our communities thrive and Ohio thrives.

Situated in both Franklin and Licking Counties, Licking Heights is the second fastest growing school district in central Ohio, and one of the fastest growing in the state. At over 5,100 students, we have nearly tripled our enrollment since 2003. In the past five years alone, our enrollment has increased by over 1,000 students. As our district is growing quickly, it is becoming more diverse in many ways:

- Almost 20% of our students are English Language Learners, with 47 different home languages spoken in our school district
- Over 47% of our students are economically disadvantaged
- 13% of our students are students with disabilities

Due to the state funding gain cap, Licking Heights has lost approximately \$95 million in state funding over the last 10 years. The initial phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan has been a positive step for the district; however, Licking Heights still realized \$11 million in lost state funding this past fiscal year. Obviously, this loss of state funding negatively impacts programming for our students and our long-term financial strategy. We have the highest property tax rates in Licking County. Much of that is due to construction needed to keep up with our growing student population.

Frankly, we do not have the ability to address such rapid growth without full implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan. Without full implementation of the plan, we will continue to limit our programming while struggling with high student to teacher ratios. Our current ratios are 26th highest out of Ohio's 600-plus school districts. Licking Heights ranks fourth lowest in the state with per-pupil expenditures.

The initial phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan has had a positive impact on our district. Mrs. Mickelson is one of our 14 English Language Learner teachers in the district. Previously, she was serving 85 students each day who are not only learning math, science, social studies, and reading—they are also learning how to speak English. This ratio was typical of all of the EL teachers in our district. The initial phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan has provided funding to hire more EL teachers. Now, Mrs. Mickelson serves 68 students a day. It is progress, but it is still too many students for one teacher to serve. Further phase-in of the plan will allow us to continue reducing those ratios so that our EL students have the very best chances for success.

Mrs. Stirn is a kindergarten teacher who has served our district for 14 years. Previous to the initial phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, she had 29 five-year-olds in her kindergarten class. Mrs. Majerus had 31 students in her kindergarten class. These were typical kindergarten classroom sizes. We have used the funding from the initial phase-in of the plan to focus on reducing class sizes in the primary grades and to meet the individual needs of a diverse student population. Although still high, our kindergarten ratios are now closer to 1 teacher for every 25 students.

The Fair School Funding Plan is making a difference for Licking Heights' students, and we are thankful for legislators' support of it in the FY22-FY23 budget. As a rapidly growing district, the 33% phase-in from the last budget bill has allowed us to maintain and begin to improve the educational opportunities for our students.

We support the continued phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan formula for the next biennial budget. Furthermore, the District is supportive of the school resource officer funding.

We would propose an amendment to use data from FY22 to calculate a district's aggregate base costs. Currently, HB 33 does not amend the provision of the school funding plan that uses data from FY18 to calculate a district's aggregate base costs for things such as average teacher salaries and teacher retirement benefits. Using FY22 data would help offset some of the increased expenses resulting from inflationary factors in our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 33 and the Fair School Funding Plan. We welcome your questions and feedback.