



Norwalk City School District

Office of the Treasurer

134 Benedict Avenue

Norwalk, Ohio 44857

419.668.2779

March 21, 2023

House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education HB 33 Testimony

**Norwalk City School District, Huron County
Joyce Dupont, Treasurer**

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

My name is Joyce Dupont and I serve as the Treasurer for the Norwalk City School District in Huron County. The Norwalk City School District is a city school district encompassing 32 square miles including many rural areas. We educate 2619 PK-12 (up to age 22 for extended learner) students in four elementary buildings, one middle school and one high school building.

I have worked in education since 2002 and been a school treasurer since 2009 with experience in a variety of districts. Prior to my career in public education I worked in private business. The sharing of knowledge between school treasurers and commitment to working together in public education is amazing. The Fair School Funding Plan was so exciting when it was introduced as it was based on actual, real world data to determine the cost to educate a child. It had been years since we had a formula that tried to determine a fair school funding method. The last one I recall as a school treasurer was the Ohio Evidenced Based Model which had the unfortunate timing of following the 2008-09 recession and therefore was not able to be fully funded.

For the Fair School Funding Plan formula to work it needs to be fully implemented and funded. We are part of the way there and I am asking on behalf of my students, my district, and all of public education in Ohio that you fully implement the formula and update all the inputs for the FY24-25 budget.

My district is considered a formula district under the Fair School Funding Plan even though our enrollment has been slowly decreasing over time. Due to the phase in of the formula, Norwalk City School District was unfunded by over 2 million dollars in base state funding in FY22 and 1.3 million in FY23. Full implementation of the formula and the inputs updated to at least 2022 would actually put my district on the formula.

I am thankful that the Fair School Funding Plan directly funds students where they are educated. Prior funding methods deducted local taxpayer funds for open enrolled, private and out of district charter schools. I am asking that public education be fully funded at the state level before any private education is taxpayer funded.

As important as it is, there have been unintended consequences of the Fair School Funding Plan and other changes to education funding parts in the current budget. I would ask that a School Funding Advisory Workgroup be created to research and advise the General Assembly.

Special education and the catastrophic cost payment that districts can apply for is one of those issues that arose with the current budget. All school districts have ten percent of special education funding withheld to cover the cost of catastrophic costs statewide. This used to be a separate state appropriation, not subtracted from individual districts special education weighted funding. My district has a very good special education department (and an incredible special education director) and many parents open enroll for services. In FY22 Norwalk City's 10% catastrophic cost reimbursement set aside deduction was \$143,686. We had expenses of \$292,956. (only the expenses over \$27,375 for category 2-5 students or \$32,850 for category 6 students can be used to apply for reimbursement) yet our amount received from the state for catastrophic costs was \$139,828. A loss of \$3,858 and, I must say, a lot of work for myself as treasurer, my EMIS coordinator and my special education department to calculate and file the catastrophic costs. As a district we would have been better off financially to have the catastrophic cost program eliminated. It is penalizing my district to be known as a district with exceptionally good special education supports.

Another funding issue is the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission. Norwalk City is ready to move forward with a new K-6 building but is unable to secure state funding for the state share. We currently have four old elementary buildings that were neighborhood schools at one time prior to being clustered by grade spans. It would be financially efficient and educationally sound to have one elementary building which would be located directly across from our "new" (20-year-old) high school. The high school was completely financed by the community; no state dollars were spent. Our community has not received any OFCC funds in the past and now that we are ready, they are not available.

My district struggled during the pandemic but we were in school, in person, five days a week in the 2020-21 school year. We also gave our families the option of remote schooling. It was like running two separate school districts and very expensive. The federal funding we received - CARES Act, ESSER and ARP - have made us able to operate and address the learning loss students had in those last few months of the 2019-20 school year and to implement new programs and add staff to help with literacy in the following years. But those are one time funds and I am concerned for the future.

Norwalk City School District supports the Fair School Funding Plan because it clearly outlines an approach for funding the cost of educating Ohio's children. We ask that you support it with full funding and updated inputs in the upcoming budget. I also ask that you address other funding issues; specifically, the OFCC projects and catastrophic cost reimbursements penalty.

Chair Richardson and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joyce Dupont".

Joyce Dupont

Treasurer

Norwalk City School District