



HB 33 Proponent Testimony

David Taylor, Superintendent of the Dayton Early College Academy

Ohio Senate Education Committee

Chair Andrew O. Brenner

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, I am honored to be before you today as a proponent of HB 33. My name is Dave Taylor, and I am the Superintendent of the Dayton Early College Academy (commonly known as DECA), a network of high performing community schools in the city of Dayton. Our three schools serve approximately 1,300 students K-12 in Dayton, or about 6% of our city's children, with a singular focus of helping each of them gain the skills they need to go to and graduate from college. Our schools overwhelmingly serve children who are underrepresented in higher education: three quarters of our students are considered economically disadvantaged, 98% are children of color, and the vast majority will be in their family's first generation to graduate from college.

Despite countless reforms across many decades, children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to reach the American Dream of financial independence and career and social stability. This is especially true in the city of Dayton where the majority of children live in poverty. Since DECA's inception as a Dayton Public school in 2003 and through our conversion to become a community school in 2007, we have served as a choice for families in Dayton who are searching for a school that will challenge their children academically and provide them with the structure and support they need to find success. Our schools are providing hope—a free and readily accessible school option—for families in our city who are bold enough to dream about the future their children deserve. And it works: DECA has consistently produced the highest performing schools in the city of Dayton on the Ohio State Tests, and 98% of our graduates go on to enroll in college. What's more, we boast a college graduation rate of more than 50%—that is five times the national average for students of similar demographics and very comparable to many of the suburban districts in the Dayton area. Since our inception, over 75% of DECA graduates have either graduated from college or are still enrolled.

Since our conversion to become a community school in 2007, our schools have made due with significantly less funding than other schools serving similar students. We haven't always been able to afford the best technology, to pay our staff competitively, or to provide the best facilities. We constantly have our hands out asking our friends in the community to support the work we do. We have worked to make sure that our students never felt less than; however, we are finding that it is increasingly more challenging for us to keep pace with the skyrocketing costs associated with running public schools. Each year we watch our traditional public school counterparts raise their salaries and poach our best, most talented teachers. Too many times, we had teachers tell us that they will have to leave because the next district is offering \$5,000, \$10,000 or even upwards of \$15,000 more than we can offer them.

We have known for some time that poverty and student achievement are negatively correlated and while community schools receive some additional funding to support our efforts, we know that without this provision our funding levels are alarmingly insufficient to meet our children's needs. Simply put, the work to mitigate generational poverty costs more. Inside our school walls we act as surrogate parents to our students. We constantly run activities before school, after school, on weekends, over breaks, and during the summer to help students make up ground academically. We work diligently to ensure that we are equipping our students with the skills they need to interact socially and professionally. We ensure that every student completes college courses while they are in high school. We continue to invest deeply in alumni relationships after graduation and provide support as they move to and through college. We constantly work to improve our ability to understand our students' cultures, experiences, and values to ensure they are reflected in our curriculum and instructional practices. During the pandemic we have adapted and reshaped our model of instruction several times to meet our students' academic, social, and emotional needs. We labor to find teachers who are willing to consistently go beyond the expectations of what the typical classroom teacher is expected to do. I would welcome any of you here to come visit our schools--there simply are no shortcuts to serving our students well. We do all of these things and so much more because our scholars--in fact every child--deserves to go to a school that believes in them and is worthy of them. This is why I come before you today with three (3) requests:

1. Support the Governor's increased proposal for the quality community school funding provisions and move it from a line item into Ohio Revised Code;
2. Protect the \$1,000 per pupil community school facilities line item introduced in the Governor's budget and sustained in the House's approved budget;
3. Add a \$1,000 per pupil community school fairness supplement for all brick and mortar charter schools into Ohio Revised Code.

I am grateful to Governor DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Husted for their continued commitment to all children in Ohio. I wish to specifically call out the Quality Community School Support provision: in the executive budget, the Governor proposes increasing the allotment per economically disadvantaged pupil for schools that qualify from \$1,750 to \$3,000. This increase along with the \$500 per pupil increase in facilities for community schools will make a significant impact on our ability to be competitive with our traditional counterparts; however, I respectfully submit that we can and should go further to ensure that Ohio's most disadvantaged students receive all of the support they need to become college and career ready. Two years ago, this body debated and approved the Fair School Funding Plan. While I fully support that effort and am hopeful that our state will be able to fully fund it, the irony of the plan is that while it is "fair" to traditional public schools, it does not address the inequity that community schools receive 25% less funding on average per equivalent pupil. This is why we ask for a \$1,000 per pupil community school fairness supplement. These proposals would still not get schools like mine to fully equitable funding with our traditional counterparts, but it would get us to approximately 90% of what Dayton Public spends.

I am asking you to place these funding provisions in the Ohio Revised Code. The vast majority of our expenses are related to personnel—education in fact is a people driven world—and we are constantly wondering if our funding will be struck in the next budget. This makes planning for salary increases and committing to grow our schools extremely difficult. Simply put, we need to know that we can count on being funded if we continue to perform above expectations.

I have only a few words to say in conclusion, while we continue to outpace our traditional school counterpart's performance, when our schools are consistently underfunded, it undercuts our ability to hang on to our top teachers, invest in the curriculum materials our students need and provide the enrichments—like Destination Imagination, Robotics, and Youth Entrepreneurship—our students and families deserve. The work we do is hard and our teachers tell us consistently that they are taxed beyond their limit, all in service of our students. Please help us continue to fulfill our mission and continue to change students' lives for the better.

I want to thank Chair Brenner and Senator Blessing for taking time to meet with a few of our parents last week. They were honored to have the opportunity to visit with you and appreciate your willingness to hear their perspectives. I am grateful that you are approaching this endeavor with clear eyes and that you have afforded me an opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I stand ready to help you in any way and would welcome any questions you may have for me.