



UNITED SCHOOLS NETWORK

Andrew Boy, CEO

United Schools Network

HB 33 Testimony before the Senate Education Committee

May 4, 2023

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of United Schools Network. I am Andrew Boy, the Founder and CEO of USN. United Schools Network is a locally-grown non-profit charter school system of four schools, all authorized by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, serving kindergarten through 8th grade students in Columbus. We are serving nearly 1,000 students this year and we will be adding additional students next year in three of the most under-resourced boroughs in our capital city. About 85% of those children will identify as people of color, and about 17% will have identified disabilities. Nearly 100% of those students will be identified as economically disadvantaged. Every single one of those children is a bright, creative, interesting person who deserves outstanding educational opportunities, regardless of their zip code. That's what we provide at USN. Our focus on academic excellence, including intentional student supports and interventions, regular homework, and advanced work, ensures that every scholar at every level thrives.

Need continues to outpace opportunities in our students' neighborhoods; every year, waitlists for a seat at USN schools grow, even as we increase the number of students we serve. Our reputation as a network that invests deeply in our neighborhoods, from breathing life into vacant school buildings to building family resource centers at every campus to bringing outstanding partners in to spark student creativity, has earned us support ranging from local neighborhood associations to national accolades. The proof is in our results: students arrive at USN an average of 2-3 grade levels behind, and they grow 1.5-2 grade levels each academic year. USN 8th graders outperform their district counterparts in every tested subject area. Nearly 100% of our students go on to graduate from high school, a third then matriculate to two- and four-year colleges, while others are serving in the military or completing apprenticeships on their way to becoming successful professionals.

We are grateful for the commitment by the members of the Ohio General Assembly, as well as Governor DeWine, to ensure that quality community schools are provided increased opportunity through the Quality Community School Support Fund. All four of our schools qualified for these funds, which has helped us serve more of the students on our waitlists and to continue to provide high quality education to our students by making needed investments to enhance the learning experiences of our students.

These much-needed and necessary funds allowed us to better serve our students and to grow our student body. Across our network of 120 staff members, we created space for multiple staff positions to reduce the student: teacher ratio for students with disabilities, to provide more

resources for families experiencing non-academic barriers to success, to invest deeply in proven curriculum and the time and talent of academic leaders in our network, to strengthen our arts programming, to build sustainable leadership pipelines through the addition of teaching fellows, to enhance professional development for staff and reward their outstanding work. We invested these funds carefully and with the needs of our students in mind, and your continued support of this fund is a direct investment in the academic and life outcomes of our city's most under-resourced children.

As the Ohio House and Senate continue to discuss the funding plan for Ohio's schools, we urge you to work collaboratively to close the funding gaps that exist between public charter schools and traditional public schools.

On average, public charter schools in Ohio receive only 75% of the taxpayer support that traditional public districts receive, despite educating similar students. When charter schools are systematically underfunded, students are the ones that pay the price. Limited resources make it difficult to offer certain programs and provide the unique support our students need. At stake here is not the wellbeing of an organization, but the life outcomes of vulnerable students and families who receive less per-pupil funding, if they exercise their right to choose a school that better meets their needs.

To create a more fair system for charter students, we urge you to create a charter equity supplement that ensures all charter school students are funded to at least 90 percent of their district counter parts. This level of funding will allow charters to provide additional supports to students, and increase teacher salaries.

To further bridge the funding gap, we ask that you support Governor DeWine's increased proposal for the quality community school funding provisions and move it from a line item into the Ohio Revised Code. Secondly, we ask that you protect the \$1,000 per pupil community school facilities line item introduced in the Governor's budget. And, lastly, add a \$1,000 per pupil community school fairness supplement for all brick-and-mortar charter schools into the Ohio Revised Code.

I would also like to address the teacher shortage we are experiencing in our state. Over the past two years, we have seen many of our teachers move on to higher paying districts or we have seen them leaving the profession altogether. Our network has consistently been understaffed making it difficult to operate at our best. There is no doubt that closing the funding gap that exists between our public schools and traditional public schools will improve our ability to increase compensation and improve our staffing. In addition to fixing the funding gap, we need to add flexibility to who can teach in Ohio so that we can expand the teacher pipeline and develop a more diverse teaching force.

To expand the supply of teachers, we ask that you allow teachers with valid out-of-state licenses to be exempt from completing additional coursework provided they pass Ohio's Foundations of Reading exam on the first attempt, and to allow them to be eligible for

automatic license reciprocity, even if they were trained in a non-traditional preparation program. We would also like to eliminate the additional coursework currently required for teachers who hold an alternative resident educator license, and issue resident educator licenses to teaching candidates who complete state-approved alternative teaching programs. It is critical for state leaders to make Ohio a welcoming place for as many effective alternative training programs and residencies as possible.

Lastly, we are also happy to see our state leaders focused on fixing school transportation. We need your help now - students are missing significant amounts of time in school simply because their bus is not showing up on time or showing up at all. We are hopeful that recent conversations with interested parties may allow for a pilot program that will ensure students, parents, and teachers can count on getting students to school and home on a regular schedule.

With equitable funding, a robust teacher pipeline, and reliable transportation for our students, our four schools will thrive - paving the way for us to grow our impact so that even more students will benefit from our mission.