

May 9, 2023



Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee
Senate Building-Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Chairperson Brenner, Ranking Member Ingram and Members of the Senate Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, good afternoon.

Ohio must prioritize funding its public schools and hold any school receiving public dollars, either directly or through EdChoice vouchers, accountable for those funds.

As the Ohio Senate continues its debate over the biennial state budget (HB 33) which includes funding for public schools, we urge you to retain and prioritize **fully funding the Fair School Funding plan, using the most recent data**. Many items change throughout the biennial budget negotiation process. These two items must be included in the final budget for schools to be adequately funded.

For the past 20 years, the voucher program has expanded from a limited program for students of a particular income level to one that, at 450% of Federal Poverty Level (“FPL”), would include almost all students in Ohio—at a significant cost. **There is ample empirical evidence to prove that the way to address the poverty achievement gap is by robustly funding public schools to institute best practices:** early childhood education; a well-rounded school experience including culture, sports, and the arts; extra-curricular activities that give students a sense of purpose; community-minded and community-building schools; and cooperative learning.

As a state, we must prioritize the places where this is happening — the public schools.

The First Ring Schools Collaborative represent over 93,000 Ohio public school students and we strongly urge you to consider the fair and equitable use of state funds when it comes to EdChoice vouchers. There is often talk of competition being good, but that only works if we are competing on a level playing field. In some school districts, non-public schools are receiving more state funding per student via vouchers than the public school is receiving from the state’s share of student funding. If that scale has tipped, shouldn’t accountability follow? Public schools are accountable to the state, to their community at large, and the families they serve. Private schools have the option to accept or not accept students, to reject students who may need additional supports, present behavioral or attendance challenges, and/or do not match the private schools’ core values and beliefs. Public schools do not have such choice.

Any school receiving public dollars should be held accountable for those dollars just as traditional public schools are through annual reporting and financial forecasting mandates. Any entity receiving state dollars, should prove those funds were used in a responsible manner.

Collectively, we urge you to prioritize the public school funding needed for all children to succeed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Dr. William W. Wagner, Co-Director
First Ring Schools Collaborative

The First Ring Schools Collaborative

Bedford City School District

Dr. Cassandra Johnson, Superintendent

Berea City School District

Dr. Tracy Wheeler, Superintendent

Brooklyn City School District

Dr. Theodore Caleris, Superintendent

Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District

Elizabeth Kirby, Superintendent

Cuyahoga Heights Local School District

Tom Evans, Superintendent

East Cleveland City School District

Dr. Henry Pettiegrew, CEO/Superintendent

Euclid City School District

Christopher Papouras, Superintendent

Fairview Park City School District

Keith Ahearn, Superintendent

Garfield Heights City School District

Christopher Hanke, Superintendent

Lakewood City School District

Maggie Niedzwiecki, Superintendent

Maple Heights City School District

Dr. Charlie Keenan, Superintendent

Parma City School District

Dr. Charlie Smialek, Superintendent

Richmond Heights Local School District

Dr. Renee Willis, Superintendent

Heights City School District

Dr. David Glasner, Superintendent

South Euclid Lyndhurst City School District

Dr. Linda Reid, Superintendent

Warrensville Heights City School District

Donald Jolly, Superintendent

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Dr. Eric Gordon, Superintendent

Ex-Officio Member

CO-DIRECTORS:

Dr. William W. Wagner

Dr. Jennifer Dodd

