



**Alliance for High Quality Education
Substitute House Bill 33 Proponent Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
May 31, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on Substitute (Sub.) House Bill (HB) 33, the main operating budget bill for the fiscal year (FY) 2024 and 2025 biennium. My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for High Quality Education.

The Alliance is a consortium of more than 70 high-performing school districts and educational service centers located throughout the State of Ohio. For more than 30 years, the Alliance has represented its members' interests on matters of state education policy and funding, as well as contributing to fostering high-quality educational opportunities for students in their districts and those across the state.

School Funding

With limited exceptions, the Alliance continues to support the Fair School Funding Plan, its continued phase in, and updating of the base cost inputs to FY 2022. We urge the Senate to maintain these investments.

A longstanding concern held by our members relates to the formula's continued use of a 5% minimum funding floor. The Alliance believes that the current minimum funding level is an arbitrary figure that can and should be reasonably increased over time.

Alliance districts are at the lowest end of the spectrum when it comes to state aid per student, bottoming out at \$439 per student. The median state aid per student for Alliance districts is \$1,669, compared to the statewide median of \$5,837 for traditional school districts. The 5% floor also contributes to nearly 30 of Ohio's public-school districts receiving less state aid per student than the \$1,402 per student state payment every private school annually receives for auxiliary services and administrative reimbursements.

Without adjusting the floor, Alliance districts' overreliance on property taxes will deepen, frequent levy efforts will persist, and more districts will fall to that minimum level. While we realize that once the guarantees are removed from the current formula calculations, many of our members are slated to lose substantial levels of state support. Adjusting the base will not

eliminate all those losses but will make the move off guarantees a much more manageable transition.

The Alliance proposes increasing the minimum funding floor from 5% to 10% in fiscal year 2024.

ESC Funding

Several of Ohio's educational service centers (ESCs) are members of the Alliance, and we are proud to support the budget priorities of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association (OESCA), which call for updating the ESC funding cost components with FY 2022 data consistent with funding for traditional districts. We also support OESCA's recommendation to retain funding of ESC gifted units and the establishment of a transportation pilot project that leverages our ESCs.

Literacy

We are proud to support Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed creation of a comprehensive statewide literacy strategy. Without a strong foundation in this area, our young learners will be unable to make progress towards comprehension, critical thinking, problem-solving, and other important areas along their educational journey.

The Alliance is greatly appreciative of the budget bill's funding to support districts' purchase of curriculum and instructional materials, professional development, and other items. However, we urge the Senate to restore the funding levels to the executive version's proposed amount of \$174 million, rather than the reduced \$111 million proposed by the House. Ensuring these new mandates in the bill are adequately funded will assist schools in increasing literacy achievement for all students in Ohio.

OFCC Facilities

The Alliance believes strongly that the state must increase its support to our higher capacity districts who often "go it alone" and fund their building projects without or with very little state support. The Alliance supports increasing the minimum state share for Ohio Facilities Construction Commission building projects to 25% in limited instances, including providing facility capacity for all-day kindergarten. Ensuring every district in the state can provide all-day kindergarten and other high-quality early childhood education programs will help jumpstart the state's commitment to improving literacy proficiency and meeting each child's individual needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. The Alliance looks forward to working together as the budget process continues. I am happy to address any questions you may have at this time.