

Senate Finance Committee

HB 33

Interested Party Testimony

May 31, 2023

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, Members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am Dick Smith, Marysville Exempted Village School District Board Member. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 33, the Biennium Budget Bill. I am testifying as an interested party.

Several members of the Ohio Senate toured our District and saw first-hand how the personalized approach to instruction is preparing future ready students. I extend an invitation to all members of this body to come and see quality education in practice. But first, we need you to properly fund your share of our District's budget.

**Funding** - Our school district, Marysville EVSD, supports the Fair School Funding Plan because it provides a fair, predictable and reliable means for us to plan our spending as we meet the needs of our students and community. We were pleased that Governor DeWine's budget included the FSFP phase-in during this biennium budget. We applauded the House for sharing the Governor's perspective. It is my hope that the Senate will concur. Ohio is in a healthy financial position, ending the previous year, FY 22, \$2.7 billion above estimates. Current data shows that the above estimates continue in FY 23. Further, another \$3.5 billion is held in Ohio's rainy-day fund.

Our district has responded to this legislative body's calls to prepare students for success. Marysville EVSD has become an educational leader in Personalized Learning, Career Tech Education, and Future Ready Student programs. Rigorous coursework and career pathways help students meet academic and workforce readiness goals. We are doing our part. It is now up to you to provide crucial resources which are reliable and predictable. The FSFP's phased-in implementation is critical for us to continue to meet our shared goals. I urge you to: 1) use FY 22 data for inputs to the FSFP formula, 2) fund 2024 at 50% and 2025 at 66% of the FSFP formula, and 3) be prepared to fully fund the FSFP in during the next biennium budget. I will explain the necessity of these request in a moment.

I am aware of some topics of discussion about the current financial status of schools in Ohio. Addressing recent Federal ESSER funds, I am providing detailed information at the end of this testimony. In short, we have used or have specific plans for every dollar. They are helping us help our students.

**Early Literacy** - Governor DeWine's proposed investments in literacy and the comprehensive approach to reading by shifting focus to literacy coaches fits the model we adopted several years ago. The House supported these changes. Marysville Schools implemented literacy instruction based on the science of reading which has resulted in outstanding student achievement. We were recently named a Model School for the State of Ohio. I ask that the Senate agree with the Governor and the House but ensure that our district, as well as other districts who were early adopters of the science of reading, to be eligible for reimbursement for funds we previously spent for this purpose. Requiring institutions of higher education to instruct future teachers in the science of reading would facilitate the implementation of this proposal.

**Voucher Expansion** - Expansion of vouchers within HB 33 has four areas worthy of additional consideration. Expansion: (1) undermines a fundamental value of public education in the development of

a civil/democratic society. (2) promotes inequality of per-pupil funding between private and public recipients. {Private funding levels of \$5,500 and \$7,500 while our district receives \$4,000 per student.}. (3) misaligns priorities by putting voucher funding ahead of the constitutional mandate to fully fund public schools, and (4) does not require the same level of accountability for voucher recipients as public schools.

**School Resource Officers** – In response to school gun violence, Marysville EVSD, in collaboration with Marysville Police Department and the Union County Sherriff, has one SRO in each of our 9 buildings. The cost takes money away from academic instruction. I appreciate the inclusion of funds to support our SRO program but ODE’s intent to apply the state share calculation to this amount for public school applicants is unfair. Such an action would provide private and charter schools with the full amount from the state, while many public schools would receive partial funding. I ask for equal funding for all school buildings for their SROs.

**Career Technical Education** – Marysville ESVD is an educational leader in career education, academic pathways and personalized education. Each child at Marysville Schools is challenged, prepared, and empowered through innovation, collaboration, and inspiration. Innovation to ignite their curiosity, collaboration to strengthen their capacity, inspiration to empower their confidence and fortitude toward the future. In our district, future ready is defined by the path that a student chooses to follow after high school graduation. MEVSD believes students have a multitude of options and opportunities. We recognize the school experience is fundamental to the exploration of career paths and the development of robust employability skills which are widely applicable. As such, MEVSD aspires for 100% of graduates to be prepared for their future by demonstrating successful placement in one of our academic/career pathways one year following graduation. I appreciate the you past support for career education and hope the Senate will support or increase the Governor’s and House proposals in this area.

**Immediate Impact on Marysville EVSD** - Our District’s Five Year Forecast currently shows a \$23.6 M dollar deficient in 2027. Operating on a lean spending model, approximately \$1,700 below state average, our expenses exceed our income by over \$3 M this year. To fill the gaps and balance our budget, the Marysville School Board placed an 8.4 mil levy on the May 2, 2023 ballot. It was defeated 44% to 56%. Preparing for the possibility of failure, the Board, adopted a contingency plan in January which contained a hiring freeze. That hiring freeze (not replacing resignations and retirements) would have forced us to eliminate All-Day, Every-Day kindergarten as well as other significant program reductions in our district.

Based on the House passed version of HB 33, knowing that the Senate now must act, the Board voted to amend the contingency plan. The following note to our community provides insight as to that decision.

**At the May 10th special board meeting, the Marysville EVSD school board voted to amend the levy contingency plan previously approved at their January 19, 2023 regular meeting. Treasurer Todd Johnson shared recently released simulations of the House’s version of state funding for FY24 which showed an increase of \$3 million based on current enrollment. According to a simulation received by the Ohio Department of Education just prior to the special meeting, the Treasurer informed the board that a change from all-day every day kindergarten to part-time kindergarten would reduce funding by nearly \$2 million over the next two years. The potential savings resulting from a switch in kindergarten approaches would be negated due to this reduction in funding. While the state funding simulation is currently just a projection and will not be known for certain until June 30th, a decision had to be made now due to the impact on staffing and the difficulty of filling open positions. “School districts are facing staffing challenges across Central Ohio, so we need to act quickly to fill open elementary positions,” stated Superintendent Allen.**

**Board President Sue Devine commented, "There is a risk that our state funding could come in less than currently projected, but the board felt that the educational value of all-day every day kindergarten made this decision worth that risk ". The aforementioned decision allows the district to offer the Alternative Kindergarten program in a half day (AM/PM) format which is identical to the current school year. Other aspects of the contingency plan remain in effect: elimination of Tri Academy, elimination of board funded assistant coaches/ advisors/directors, elimination of board funded extra-curricular transportation and field trips, hiring freeze 5-12. It was also noted that with the number of resignations and other reductions the district has already received, the goal of \$2 million in savings to the general fund budget will be met.**

One of the most difficult things I have ever had to do as a former teacher, now school board member, was to vote in January to take actions that were not in the best interest of our students. With failure of the levy, we received many emails similar to the one below:

**I'm sure everyone has been getting inundated with emails from concerned parents about the impacts to our children based on the unfortunate recently failed tax levy. I am very disappointed in our community for not seeing past the increase in taxes for a few years and seeing the impacts that this failed levy will have on our children and community as a whole. When we were looking to move, the sole reason we chose Marysville was based on the great school system including all day kindergarten. To be honest, without the great school system, we would not have moved to Marysville, and I'm sure other parents were influenced by the school system in their decision on where to move.**

**As parents of an incoming kindergarten student, we are extremely concerned and troubled by the impacts that potential removal of all-day kindergarten will have on our daughter. Every parent that we have talked to have similar concerns about their children that are entering kindergarten this fall. All parents are frantic on what the schedule will be, how they will handle daycare now including transportation, impacts on the education on their children for this upcoming school year and for future years as a ripple effect from not having all day kindergarten now. We understand that this is not a state requirement, but have other options been looked before immediately removing educational items that have such a huge impact on our children's development both emotionally and educationally? All parents I have spoken with would gladly pay to have their children attend all-day kindergarten instead of letting their children's education suffer with such a drastic cut in educational hours that would result from the proposed cuts. Currently we are frantically looking at all potential options for this upcoming school year for our daughter including supplemental education, private school, etc. We do not want to pursue any of those options though and want our daughter to enter public education at Marysville with her friends.**

Senators, the House actions have given us hope that we can continue to provide quality educational services to the families in our school district. We are keenly aware that additional funding from the State Fair School Funding Plan will not solve our financial needs. However, it does provide support for critical staffing needs.

Support for the continuing the adoption of the Fair School Funding Plan is an absolute necessity for our district. It is the right thing to do for Marysville EVSD, I believe it is the right thing to do for Ohio.

Respectfully,

Dick Smith  
Marysville Board of Education – Member  
Legislative Liaison

## **Marysville EVSD use of Federal COVID relief funds:**

### **March 20, 2020 – CARES ACT**

The first funding measure, Congress set aside approximately \$13.2 billion of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund). Signed into law on March 20, 2020, the Department awarded these grants to State educational agencies (SEAs) for the purpose of providing local educational agencies (LEAs), including charter schools that are LEAs, with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.

Marysville EVSD used these funds to offset the reductions in funding we receive from the State of Ohio. The economic impact of COVID-19 on Ohio prompted Governor DeWine to order a reduction in state funding for education. Our district was informed early in June that our last state payment due the end of June would be reduced by \$1 Million Dollars for 2020. We were advised that we would experience the same reduction for 2021.

CARES ACT funds, ESSER I, were used to pay our teachers and to provide broadband internet to students without internet access.

These emergency relief funds allowed us to finish the year with a balanced budget while meeting our obligations and expenses. Avoiding cuts and staff reductions was critical as we were planning for the 2020-21 school year. Being able to know that we had a full complement of teachers, could retain all the support staff and administrators, was critical to any plan which was put into place to meet the uncertainty of the coming year. Had we not received those funds, education in our district would have looked very different than what we were able to provide.

Additionally, these Care Funds provided us with the ability to provide to every student, who requested assistance, broadband internet access. The Educational Digital Divide, the Homework Gap, has and continues to be a barrier to equal educational opportunity. This was never more present than at the beginning of this past school year. Our district received heart wrenching pleas from parents as they struggled to find ways to gain this basic educational resource which online instruction requires. With the emergency funds, we purchased a full year (required by the provider) of wireless high-speed internet from local providers for each of well over 100 children K-12.

### **January 5, 2021 – ESSER II**

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), was signed into law on December 27, 2020 and provides an additional \$54.3 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II Fund).

The second round of Emergency Relief Funding was used by Marysville Schools to pay our academic coaches. These are specially trained teachers who assist teachers, students and administrators in developing and implementing personalized learning strategies. These teachers provided critical support as our district adapted technology, instruction and social emotional/mental health resources to meet the needs of our 5,300 students. With the extra expenses that COVID-19 created and the loss of \$1 M Dollars, being able to fully fund all of our existing instructional support expenses, allowed us to maximize the resources necessary to meet the needs of our students.

### **March 11, 2021 – American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER**

On Thursday, March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act was signed into law. It is an unprecedented \$1.9 trillion package of assistance measures, including \$122 billion for the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund. Funds are provided to State educational agencies and school districts to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Nation's students.

The ESSER III funds which we just received are being used for our summer extended learning opportunities K-12. Our district is serving over 600 students in some type of learning activity this summer. While the focus is primarily intervention, our focus is about student engagement. Re-engagement with community partners, families and students is absolutely essential for us to build back the academic normalcy our community needs.

In our elementary schools, our goal for Summer STEAM Camp is to create a fun, learning experience for students. The MEVSD staff focuses will be Reading and Math, combined with Science themes will integrate a balanced educational experience for learners. Our Program: Week 1 - Life Science, Week 2 - Physical Science, Week 3 - Earth & Space, Week 4 - All Sciences. Students needing extra support in Reading will also have an opportunity to receive small group instruction in a personalized environment.

In our Intermediate, Middle and High Schools, summer programs will be a mix of remedial and high interest extended learning opportunities. Students needing remedial help are individually contacted and personalized experiences are created for them. Additionally, "Boot Camps", early August intensive instructional sessions, are arranged to meet the needs of targeted students to provide a restart transition to the new school year.

I am pleased to be able to report that based on data collected from student academic test and other measures, our students were within the statistical achievement range we would have expected if students had a normal school year. We observed that, as expected, some students struggled with online learning but we were pleasantly surprised that a remarkable number of students thrived with online options. As a result of this fact, we are going to continue to offer the Marysville Virtual Academy in partnership with 2 adjoining districts in future years. Additionally, social-emotional measures indicate that student mental well-being was within the normal expected ranges. Our mental health/social emotional efforts are now being studied as a model for other districts in Ohio.

**Federal funds through ESSER I, ESSER II and ESSER III have helped to make these results possible.**