



**Senate Finance Committee
Substitute House Bill 33
Ohio School Boards Association
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
May 31, 2023**

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill (HB) 33, the biennial budget. Our organizations represent public school district, career technical education center and educational service center boards of education, superintendents, treasurers/CFOs, business managers and other school business officials from around the state.

Fair School Funding Plan

We continue to support the Fair School Funding Plan because it provides a fair, predictable, and reliable means of meeting the needs of students. We appreciate that Governor DeWine and the House chose to include the next two years of the phase-in as a part of the budget proposal. Ohio is in a healthy financial position with projections that we will end this biennium with a \$6 billion surplus and holding another \$3.5 billion in Ohio's rainy day fund. We believe that with this firm financial footing, the time is right to invest in Ohio's public school students by updating and fully funding the Fair School Funding plan in the upcoming biennium.

We request that the Senate continue to use FY 22 data for inputs to the formula and maintain the FY24 statewide average base cost value that is included in the House version of the bill. Additionally, we request that you add a provision to ensure that updates to the capacity measures in future years will trigger updates for the inputs data.

Economically Disadvantaged Student Cost Study

After the last biennial budget, Ohio undertook several studies to look at the unique educational needs of certain categories of students including students with disabilities, gifted students and English learners. However, Ohio has yet to conduct a study on the needs of economically disadvantaged students, which account for nearly 50% of Ohio's students.

We request that the Senate retain the requirement for an independent comprehensive analysis of the true costs of providing supplemental services to economically disadvantaged students in Ohio along with the funding provided to conduct the study.

Educational Service Centers

Educational Service Centers (ESCs) serve as a vital link and partner in the educational process. ESCs provide a wide variety of direct and support services, including curriculum development, staff development, technology assistance and special education services to the public school districts they serve. ***We request that the inputs for ESC funding be updated to use FY22 levels. This will mirror what the House did for the funding of traditional public school districts and other educational entities.*** The use of FY 22 inputs will ensure that ESCs can continue providing high quality services to districts as the priorities outlined in this budget are implemented.

Career Technical Education

Ohio is blessed to have amazing career technical education opportunities that provide students a

pathway for lifelong success. Many of these programs are experiencing waitlists because they do not have the capacity necessary to serve all the students interested in enrolling in their programs. We are thankful that the budget recognizes the importance of career technical education and provides funding through several initiatives including the career technical education equipment grants. This program will provide \$100 million over the biennium for schools to make the equipment purchases that will allow them to expand their programs to serve additional students. ***We request that the Senate maintain the programs for career technical education included in the bill.***

English Learners

The budget removes the exemptions from state assessments and report cards for English learners who have been enrolled in school in the United States for less than a full school year. The state assessments do not benefit the instruction of new English learners and would take away valuable time that should be used for instruction. English learners will continue to be evaluated locally through diagnostic assessments. These diagnostic assessments serve to evaluate student needs, identify their strengths, and inform instruction. Testing English learners with state assessments before they have a chance to complete a full year of instruction in the United States will not have any added benefit for the student. ***We ask that the bill be amended to restore these exemptions for English learners who have not attended a full school year in the U.S.***

Voucher Expansion

Our organizations continue to have concerns about expanding Ohio's voucher programs. We believe that Ohio should first invest in the students who have chosen Ohio's public schools. These students continue to wait for the state to fully fund their success through the Fair School Funding Formula. In addition, ***we believe that additional expansion of vouchers should come with additional academic and financial accountability.*** Private schools enrolling students on state vouchers should be held to the same assessments, report cards, financial reporting, and audits as public schools. Providing the same measures and reporting will provide parents with transparent and consistent information across school settings while ensuring that taxpayer funds are being used in appropriate ways to provide a quality education.

Transportation

Pupil transportation presents a significant challenge for many districts. From the challenges of finding drivers to rising fuels costs, districts find themselves needing to pivot and be creative as they work to ensure safe delivery of students to and from school each day. As a result of the current environment, some districts have been forced to make choices that have resulted in the district being found to be out of compliance by ODE resulting in the withholding of funds from the district. Often these issues are caused by lack of funding and withholding funds only serves to exacerbate the problem that resulted in the finding of noncompliance. ***We request that the budget bill be amended to remove financial penalties for noncompliance with pupil transportation laws.***

Additionally, our organizations have concerns about language inserted in the House-passed version that would require a board of education to provide each pupil in grades K-8 substantially the same level of transportation service, route, and schedule convenience, and pick-up and drop-off times relative to the pupil's school's start and end times, regardless of whether the pupil attends a school operated by the board of education, a nonpublic school or community school. This provision could eliminate the ability of a school district to use a central point for transporting nonpublic students and would require a nonpublic student to be transported directly from their home to their school of attendance. A school district that is already facing a bus driver shortage and a bus shortage may have to use a single bus to transport only a few students to comply with this provision. School districts plan their routes to ensure that they are utilizing capacity on the bus, not only to respond to the shortages but to be fiscally responsible. ***We request that this provision be removed from the bill and that the Senate look to other transportation provisions that would help school districts transport all students including nonpublic students.***

Chair Dolan and members of the subcommittee, thank you for reviewing our testimony. Please reach out with any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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