



**March 4, 2025**

**House Education Committee**

**Interested Party Testimony on HB 96**

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Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96, Ohio's next biennial budget.

We are grateful for the bipartisan effort in the last two budget cycles that created the Fair School Funding Plan framework and began phasing in funding for that framework. There are few issues that bring Republican, Democratic, and Independent voters together as much as our shared desire for quality local public schools in our communities. We hope that this bipartisan work can continue and that we can fully fund all of Ohio's traditional public schools.

We are also grateful for Governor DeWine's focus on education and his inclusion of the Fair School Funding Plan in his budget proposal. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget uses flawed data and creates what we believe is the polar opposite of the Governor's intention: public school districts will get less funding, and local communities will need to pick up the slack by increasing property taxes.

This is because the budget proposal uses outdated cost inputs in the funding formula, which drastically understate the real cost of educating kids in Ohio in 2025, let alone 2026 and 2027. If you sat down at your kitchen table tonight and made a grocery budget based on prices in 2022, you are going to have some problems when you get to the check out line.

At the same time, the budget proposal uses updated property tax assessments and income tax assessments, data which determines a community's ability to fund schools locally. The result of this mismatch of old and new data is that the local share ends up increasing while the state share decreases. Rather than getting the increased funding they need, Ohio's public school districts will see a \$103 million cut over the two years of this budget.

Approximately 360 school districts (59% of the districts in Ohio) would see a decrease in state formula funding from the current fiscal year to the first fiscal year of this budget. This is not a result of a decrease in student enrollment. Of these districts that would see a decrease in formula funding, 61 of them had an increase in enrollment. This is a direct result of updating the local capacity side of the equation but not the base cost inputs.

Statewide, the Ohio Education Policy Institute shows that we are looking at a steep decrease in the share of school funding covered by the state, from a state share of 43.3% to 32.2% in just three years. For reference, at the time of the DeRolph decision, the state share of education

funding was 42%, and that decision said that school funding would only be constitutional when legislators move away from an overreliance on property taxes.

Gov. DeWine's budget also proposes reducing the funding guarantees some districts receive from the state, further squeezing school district budgets and forcing school boards to ask communities to pay higher property taxes.

The budget proposal also does not address the study recommendations, commissioned by the 135th General Assembly, that calculated additional costs to educate students with disabilities and English learners. These recommendations must be included in the funding formula to accurately consider the costs of each school district's student population.

The unsustainable cost of private school vouchers, particularly the EdChoice voucher expansion that primarily went to families who were already sending their children to private school without public assistance, is partially driving this decrease in the state share of funding. [According to Policy Matters Ohio, only 3,000 students of the 69,000 voucher recipients](#) attended an Ohio private school for the first time last year. This school year, we are spending one billion dollars on private school vouchers, and this budget proposal expects that amount to climb by another \$177 million. Yet, public schools are being asked to do more with less while still educating 90% of Ohio's children.

We have heard some legislators express concern that the Fair School Funding Plan costs more than Ohio can afford. If that is the case – and we do not necessarily agree it is – then the legislature must scale back private school voucher costs before shortchanging public schools. You have a constitutional obligation to adequately fund public schools; there is no such obligation for private school vouchers.

Public school funding cuts, due to voucher expansion, hurt all school districts in Ohio, yet not all school districts have private school options nearby that would allow families to take advantage of vouchers. This is especially true for Ohio's rural communities, where the population density just doesn't support competing education systems.

Let me be clear, the answer to this disparity is not to expand public funding to non-chartered, non-public schools. These schools, sparsely regulated in regards to student safety and academics, are less equipped to educate and elevate students than public schools or even chartered non-public schools. Rural students deserve better than a second tier school system. They deserve the same high quality education that every Ohio student deserves. The only way to achieve this is with full and fair public school funding.

Ohio's rural communities, especially the Appalachian part of Ohio like my hometown of Georgetown, have routinely been taken advantage of, and stripped of our resources to benefit those who live elsewhere. By decreasing rural school funding to benefit families of whom the vast majority already have enough income to send their children to private schools, we are perpetuating this cycle of shifting wealth from those who need it to those who already have it.

The focus on private school vouchers also has the potential to severely harm students with disabilities or other challenges. Private institutions can pick and choose their students, but

public schools educate all. When we hollow out our public school system to prop up private schools, these are the students we leave behind.

We strongly believe that accountability is necessary for schools receiving public funding. If private school vouchers are in place, we think it is common sense to require private schools to meet the same academic accountability and fiscal transparency requirements that are required of local public schools.

In addition to their core function of educating Ohio kids, our public schools are also centers of the community. Supporting our public schools will strengthen our communities.

We appreciate the Governor's continued commitment to wellness programs in schools, which have provided essential health and mental health support to families who need it most. As we face a teacher shortage and educators are stretched thin, we are also advocating for the inclusion of educators in these wellness programs.

We also applaud Governor DeWine's dedication to Career Tech Education, which is crucial for the future of our state. We are currently unable to serve all the students who want to enroll in these programs because we do not have enough space. OFT represents the educators at four career technical centers, including the Warren County Career Center, which is in such high demand that they have to deny admittance to a third of their applicants simply because there is not enough space. We strongly support increased funding to help expand career tech education so that more students have the opportunity to learn 21st century career skills.

In addition, we support the Governor's initiatives around career-connected learning in grades 7-8, career planning, and industry credentials. OFT is highly supportive of making education more relevant for many students by teaching them the connections between what they are learning and what they can do in their next phase of life. We have been working with the Career-Connected Learning Coalition in Ohio and with AFT at the national level to elevate career-connected learning and to infuse it more deeply into the student experience. We caution though that without a fully funded school funding formula, it will be hard to do the work with fidelity.

Likewise, we are highly supportive of Governor DeWine's initiatives around literacy and appreciate that he continues to keep a focus on ensuring that all teachers have the proper professional development and supports for implementing the Science of Reading. OFT has actively been developing more layers of professional development for our members that go above and beyond what the state has provided including training our members in workshops that can be delivered to parents to help them understand the Science of Reading and to equip them with strategies they can use at home to supplement what is being taught in school. In addition, we have been helping to build home libraries by giving away over a quarter of a million books over the past few years.

We are concerned however, that the Executive Budget bill eliminates the use of seniority and collective bargaining agreements in the teacher assignment process. We oppose any policy change that would undercut collective bargaining agreements, especially language that appears

to authorize, or encourage, teacher assignment without regard to teacher license qualifications or specific training requirements required by the Ohio General Assembly. Abandoning objective standards and qualifications to guide teacher assignment makes it less likely that all students will have an experienced and prepared educator in every classroom. If school districts have a specific reason for needing more flexibility, that is a discussion they can have with their educators at the bargaining table.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for listening. We welcome an opportunity to work with you to make our education system the best it can be. I welcome any questions you may have.