

Honorable Chair, esteemed members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Brian Hanner, and I come before you today as an elected member of the Dover Board of Education, in rural Tuscarawas County, and I stand here representing the 2,676 students, 174 educators, and 17,126 residents of our district who rely on the 1851 Ohio Constitution for our State budget to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state. Today, I am here to urge this committee to prioritize updating the inputs in the Fair School Funding Formula.

From the time I graduated high school 30 years ago this spring, our public schools have been victim of an unfortunate game of “hot potato” as the Ohio Supreme Court, the General Assembly and our school districts, aiming to provide every student—regardless of their background or zip code—with the resources they need to succeed. At long last, the Cupp-Patterson Work group assembled and Reps Callendar and Sweeney got the Fair School Funding Formula into the Ohio budget in 2022.

As many of you know, the current formula is based on data inputs from 2022. While the program has been phased in over time, many of its fundamental inputs have remained static. The reality is that the landscape of education in Ohio has changed, and so too must our approach to funding.

First and foremost, we must account for the growing disparities in student needs. Schools in our urban centers face unique challenges—high poverty rates, higher incidences of trauma, and a greater need for support services. Rural schools, too, have distinct needs, with issues such as transportation and access to resources that must be considered in a more tailored way. The formula should reflect these differences, ensuring that schools receive the necessary support to address the specific challenges they face.

Second, we must update the data inputs to reflect current realities. Ohio’s Fair School Funding Formula will only remain relevant if we update the inputs from 2022 to the most recent data available. By updating these inputs with more accurate and timely data, we can ensure that resources are directed where they are most needed and that no school is unfairly disadvantaged by data that is no longer relevant.

Third, we need to ensure adequate funding for special education, mental health services, and other student supports. The needs of our students have become more complex, and as the importance of supporting mental health, social-emotional learning, and inclusion grows, the funding formula must adequately address these areas. We know that students who struggle with mental health or learning disabilities require targeted support to thrive in school—and these services must be funded fairly.

Finally, let’s take this opportunity to reinvest in our teachers. Teachers are the most critical factor in student success, yet their compensation, professional development opportunities, and classroom resources are often tied to funding limitations that the formula doesn’t fully address.

By making targeted investments in teacher support, we can build a stronger, more sustainable education system for generations to come.

In conclusion, I'm here begging you to update Ohio's Public School Funding Formula in each and every budget. Our children deserve a system that is responsive to their needs, one that supports their growth and ensures they have every opportunity to succeed. By prioritizing these updates, we can create a future where all students—whether in urban, suburban, or rural schools—are given the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time, your dedication to Ohio's students. I look forward to working with all of you to ensure a brighter, more equitable future for our schools and communities. I will gladly answer any questions you may have.

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