



**The Alliance for High Quality Education  
Interested Party Testimony – H.B. No. 96  
House Education Committee  
March 4, 2025**

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on House Bill 96 (State Operating Budget). My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of The Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE).

The Alliance for High Quality Education is a consortium of 74 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio including the Toledo, Cleveland, Akron-Canton, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati areas. The Alliance for the last twenty-nine years 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.

**State Operating Budget**

The Alliance supports the Governor's recommendation to continue the phase-in of the school funding formula but urges the legislature to update the base cost inputs to reflect inflationary impacts on school budgets and growing student needs. We also recommend the legislature support the budget priorities of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association, which include updating the ESC funding cost components.

The Alliance believes that the current minimum funding level contained in HB 96 – the 10% state share percentage - must be retained and subsequently reviewed to ensure that all districts receive a base level of funding commensurate with similar funding levels for private schools – roughly \$1,402 per student – through the distribution of the administrative and auxiliary funds program.

In addition, we support the request to maintain funding to support literacy coaches in schools and districts with the lowest reading proficiency.

We support the Governor's School Bus Safety Task Force initiative that recommends \$30 million over the biennium for grants for school districts to purchase school bus safety features

such as seat belts, collision avoidance systems, ground wash lights, and more. This recommendation also increases the annual bus driver training requirement from four to six hours and provides advanced bus driver training opportunities, a proposal we would also support. In addition, if funds become available, we would recommend those be added to the bus purchase program that was a component in past budgets.

We support the Governor's recommendation to provide \$10 million over the biennium to establish the Ohio Principal Apprenticeship Program. This new program will allow aspiring principals to train under veteran principals to gain on-the-job experience and help school districts to train and retain skilled principals.

We support the Governor's continued promotion of the Governor's Read Ohio program which supports schools and districts in the implementation of evidence-based strategies for effective literacy instruction.

We support the Governor's proposal to better prepare high school graduates with the skills needed for success in college, careers, and real life by coordinating with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation to review and update the industry-recognized credential list to ensure Ohio's schools and districts are preparing students for careers on Ohio's Top Jobs List. We support the continued effort to increase the number of in-demand career-tech programs across the state and provide additional assistance in mentoring and career advising

We support the Governor's proposal to address non-academic barriers that prevent students from engaging in learning, such as attendance, mental health, and student wellness by allocating funds for the use of Student Wellness and Success to ensure all students have access to quality mental health and physical healthcare services as well as leverage state funding for reduced-price meals to ensure all low-income students have access to school breakfasts and lunches and expand federal programs to provide additional schools and districts access to meal programs

## **Transportation**

Transportation routing systems are both complex and contain interrelated components that many times result in multiple changes when requests involve a route change. For example, if a new student does not live along an existing route, a route must be modified. Any time a route is modified, all students riding the bus on the modified route could be impacted regarding bus stop and pick up time changes. These issues would be magnified depending on the time of the school year, any route modification is implemented.

We recommend that in lieu of making any comprehensive changes to the current system using the budget process as the vehicle we would suggest that the General Assembly establish a task force, comprised of all impacted stakeholders, to work with DEW to review

current rules and guidelines with the purpose of making changes to the system related to scheduling, route development and prioritizing, funding and penalties related to compliance.

The Alliance offers our involvement and support related to the above recommendation and would offer our recommendation that this task should happen as early as possible so that changes to the system can be made no later than the 26-27 school year.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony today. The Alliance looks forward to working with the General Assembly and the DeWine Administration as HB 96 moves through the legislative process. I am happy to address any questions members may have at this time.

#### Dr. Podojil's Bio

Prior to joining the Alliance as its Executive Director, Dr. Podojil worked as an elementary teacher and Middle School and High School building administrator in the Orange, Chagrin Falls, Riverside and Cleveland Heights/University Heights school districts. He also served as superintendent for the West Geauga Local Schools for thirteen years, earning a doctorate in Educational Urban Administration at Cleveland State University.