

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tony Rett. I am a parent, a substitute teacher, an active PTA member, and a dedicated volunteer in my community. I see firsthand how funding decisions impact students, teachers, and families. That is why I am here to urge this committee to fully fund and complete the phase-in of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP) in this state budget.

Ohio has the opportunity to ensure that all students—regardless of where they live—have access to a high-quality education. The FSFP was created as a multi-year solution to our unconstitutional school funding system and was designed by educators, for educators. However, recent discussions in the Legislature suggest that Ohio may stall at the current phase-in level instead of fully implementing the plan as promised. If this happens, Ohio will once again fail its students, leaving schools underfunded and forcing local communities to shoulder even more of the burden.

The Consequences of Not Fully Funding the FSFP

- The state's share of public education funding is projected to fall from 43.3% in FY24 to just 32.2% by FY27, forcing communities to rely even more on local property taxes.
- 343 school districts (56%) will see a funding decrease from FY25 to FY26, and 360 districts (59%) will experience further cuts from FY26 to FY27, despite rising educational costs.
- The number of districts receiving only the minimum 10% state share is expected to more than double, from 63 in FY24 to 131 by FY27. These schools are not suddenly "wealthier"—this is the result of an outdated funding formula failing to keep pace with real costs.

Base Cost Inputs Must Be Updated to Keep the Formula Fair

The FSFP is a research-based formula designed to reflect what it actually costs to educate a child. However, the Legislature has failed to keep the formula accurate by not updating base cost inputs while regularly updating local capacity measures like property values and income. This skews the formula, making districts appear wealthier than they truly are and reducing their state funding.

- The FSFP still uses base cost data from FY22, even though inflation and rising costs have dramatically increased school expenses.
- At the same time, the local capacity calculations are updated yearly, making it seem like districts can contribute more than they actually can.
- As a result, schools are being pushed onto funding guarantees, which only serve as a temporary patch for an underfunded, outdated system.

School costs do not remain static. Teacher salaries, transportation expenses, technology, special education services, and classroom materials have all increased significantly. If we do not update base cost inputs, schools will continue to receive funding based on outdated numbers while being expected to cover modern expenses. This is not sustainable, and it is not fair to Ohio's students.

The Burden on Local Taxpayers Must Stop

Ohio's continued failure to fully fund public schools means that districts are forced to rely on local property tax levies just to maintain basic services. This places an unfair burden on homeowners and businesses, deepening inequities between wealthier and lower-income communities. The *DeRolph* ruling made it clear that the state must reduce its over-reliance on local property taxes—but instead, this budget would make the problem worse.

Meanwhile, instead of fully funding public schools, the state is increasing funding for private school vouchers:

- Over \$1 billion in taxpayer money is now being used to fund private school tuition, and that amount will increase by \$176.8 million (16.5%) by FY27.
- At the same time, public school funding is being cut, even though 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools.

What Needs to Happen

To ensure Ohio's students receive the education they deserve, the Legislature must take these critical actions in this budget:

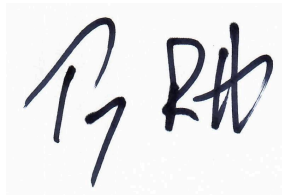
1. **Fully phase in the FSFP as originally planned** – The Legislature must follow through on its commitment to complete the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, reaching 83% in FY26 and 100% in FY27. Freezing the phase-in at its current level would leave schools underfunded and unable to meet students' needs.
2. **Update base cost inputs to reflect actual educational expenses** – The FSFP is only effective if it is based on current, accurate costs. Using FY22 data while updating local capacity measures skews the formula, reducing state funding for many districts. Base cost inputs must be updated using FY24 data so schools are funded based on today's costs, not outdated figures.
3. **Reduce Ohio's over-reliance on local property tax levies** – The state must take responsibility for adequately funding public education rather than forcing communities to repeatedly turn to the ballot for basic school funding. By ensuring the state pays its fair share, Ohio can ease the tax burden on homeowners and businesses.
4. **Maintain school funding guarantees until the formula is fully implemented** – With so many schools already struggling due to outdated funding calculations, the state must maintain funding guarantees to prevent sudden budget shortfalls that could force cuts to staff, programs, and services.

Conclusion

As a parent, a substitute teacher, and a public education advocate, I see every day how these funding decisions impact students. Freezing the FSFP phase-in at its current level would be an outright failure of leadership. If Ohio is serious about providing a “thorough and efficient” system of public education, the state must fulfill its promise: fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan, update cost inputs, and reduce the reliance on local property taxes.

Ohio’s students cannot afford more delays. I urge you to take action and fully fund the FSFP in this budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TJ RHB", is positioned on a light gray rectangular background.