



Columbus Education Justice Coalition

**House Education Committee House Bill 96 – Interested Party Testimony
March 3, 2025**

**Izetta N. Thomas, Lead Organizer
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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 Izetta Thomas. I am a 2nd generation, 20-year veteran educator in Columbus City Schools, a proud 3rd generation graduate of Columbus Public Schools, and the lead organizer of the Columbus Education Justice Coalition. On behalf of the over 300 parents, educators, students, and members of the Columbus Education Justice Coalition, I submit this testimony to urge the committee to continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget.

Fair school funding deserves to be at the top of everyone's agenda, but the proposed Ohio budget seems focused on stripping funds from our schools. In fact, based on the proposed budget, Columbus City Schools alone could lose up to \$45 million in budget cuts over the next two years. The citizens of Columbus chose to invest in our schools by passing a school levy in November of 2023. If the proposed funding formula is passed, our state will be turning it's back on the public schools of Ohio, forcing parents, families, and community members to shoulder the weight of the losses during one of the most dire economic times in our lifetime.

When our schools thrive, so do our communities, our economy, and our beloved state of Ohio. The Columbus Education Justice Coalition remains committed to the Fair School Funding Plan. The plan provides a fair, predictable and reliable means of meeting the needs of our students. This plan must also be reflective of and responsive to the real-time economic changes that we are in now and will see in the future. Without regular updates to the base cost inputs, we would see an imbalance formula. That imbalance could perpetuate the financial burden of our tax pacers and take away from the formula's goal of equitable funding distribution.

Respectfully, we ask the following from the House:



- Maintain the phase-in proposed by Governor DeWine, (reaching 83% in fiscal year (FY) 26 and 100% in FY 27). The full implementation of this plan is essential to promoting funding equity across districts.
- Amend HB 96 to update the special education funding categories to align with the actual costs of services, as outlined in recent cost studies, to ensure that districts have the resources needed in the future to support all students with disabilities.
- Update base cost inputs for FY26 and FY27. Without annual updates, the formula becomes imbalanced, shifting more financial responsibility onto local taxpayers.

Around 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools. We ask you to focus state resources on these students. Ohio's public schools deserve to be a priority of our state, fully resourced and empowered to succeed. A decline in the state share of funding moves Ohio public schools further away from being competitive schools and deepens the disparities rather than addressing them. If we fail to act, we risk returning to a system that neglects the true cost of education and forces local communities to bear an even greater financial burden, potentially forcing Ohioans to leave our great state.

I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools. Please continue phasing the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan into Ohio's budget. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Izetta Thomas
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