

Minford Local Schools

Home of the Mighty Minford Falcons

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Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill (HB) 96, the biennial budget.

My name is Claudia Zaler and I serve as the Treasurer/CFO for the Minford Local School District in Scioto County. The Minford Local School District, organized in 1923, is a small rural district located in south-central Ohio near the Ohio River, approximately 98 square miles, with two school buildings serving 1,100 students.

As a Treasurer/CFO in Minford Local School District, I see firsthand how our schools shape not just individual student futures, but the vitality of our entire community. That's why I'm here to speak about the Fair School Funding Plan - because our schools thrive, our communities thrive, our economy thrives, and Ohio thrives.

The Fair School Funding Plan provides an objective, rational, and transparent solution to school funding. Created in collaboration with school district leaders and expert practitioners, it translates real student needs into concrete resources. For example, the formula accounts for the actual costs of providing essential education components like appropriate class sizes, student support services, and educational technology - resources that directly impact student success in today's world.

However, for the formula to work as designed, it needs to be fully implemented with updated inputs. Research consistently shows that education investment generates significant returns. Each dollar invested in education can generate economic benefits through increased earnings and reduced social costs.

I am here today to ask on behalf of my students, my district, and the community I serve to request that the House continues the phase-in of the formula with updated base cost inputs. This will provide the stability and predictability our schools need to create accurate five-year forecasts and implement sustainable educational programming, and will account for the inflation we are all experiencing.

Minford Local School District is committed to providing high-quality, adaptable instruction tailored to each student's unique educational needs, ensuring their success in both college or career pathways. The District continues to operate efficiently and conservatively while

maintaining a high level of educational excellence within the District. The District has a cash balance reserve policy that finances be managed to ensure a General Operating Fund unencumbered unreserved cash balance be equivalent to at least ninety (90) days and not to exceed one hundred fifty (150) days of operating expenditures. Without the base cost inputs updated and continued phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, our cash balance will continue to decline. This could ultimately force the District to reduce or eliminate educational programs.

The continued phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, along with updated base cost inputs, will enable us to maintain the current level of educational opportunities. Additionally, it could provide resources to expand support services for all students, update curriculum, reduce class sizes, retain staff, and enhance other critical areas.

DEW also conducted a study to determine the cost of educating economically disadvantaged students. Over half of Ohio's students fall into this category, including 55.88% of our district's students (98% for CEP). This is significant because research shows that educating economically disadvantaged students requires additional resources, with costs increasing as the concentration of these students rises. Fully implementing the funding formula and updating its inputs will ensure that our district can provide the necessary support and individualized education for every student, regardless of their economic background or address.

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) conducted a study to examine the true costs of special education and recommended funding weights to establish a more accurate partnership between the state and local school districts. Implementing these weights is critical for our district, as we continue to see a rising number of identified students each year—many at an earlier age. The increasing costs of services, coupled with a lack of resources in our area and a shortage of qualified special education and support service professionals, further highlight the need for adequate funding.

We need the formula fully implemented to ensure sustainability throughout the state. When the future of funding is unpredictability, districts are not able to plan for student needs and implement the programming necessary in their communities and schools.

In closing, the Fair School Funding Plan represents more than just a funding formula - it represents our commitment to every Ohio student, family, and community. By fully implementing this plan, we invest in stronger communities, a more competitive workforce, and a brighter future for Ohio. Thank you for your consideration of these crucial next steps in supporting Ohio's educational excellence.

Chair Stewart and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.