



Jonathan Alder Local Schools
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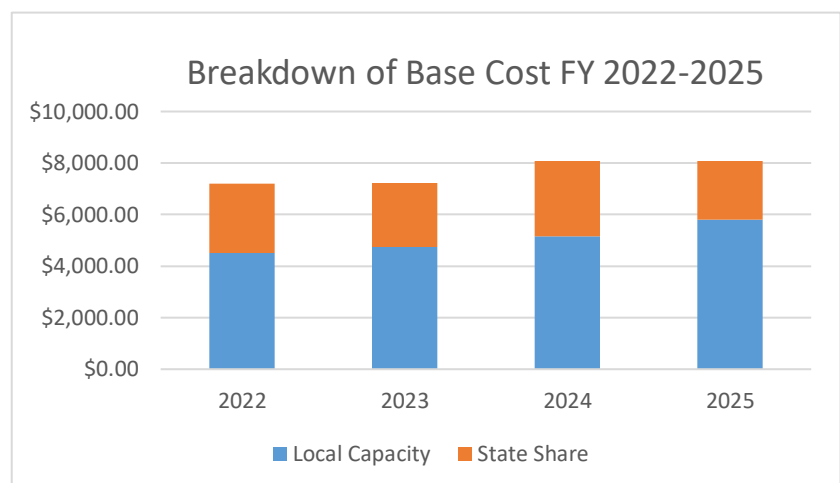
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House Finance Committee
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeny, and the rest of the distinguished committee members, I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed state budget bill for the 2026-2027 biennium, introduced as HB96. As the chief financial officer of Jonathan Alder Local School District, I am responsible for managing the resources required to provide a quality education to over 2,300 students in a rapidly growing school district just west of Columbus. We have done an admirable job managing the local resources entrusted to us by our residents. The legislation in front of the committee threatens the balance we have achieved between the support we receive from our residents and the state in the shared partnership that is school funding in Ohio.

In fiscal year 2024 state support accounted for 28% of our total funding. Most of our state support came in the form of the state foundation formula. Due to the anomalous increases in property wealth and the lack of updates to the state base cost inputs, our state share percentage has steadily dropped over the last several years. In fiscal year 2022, the first year of the Fair School Funding Plan, our state share percentage was 38%. It is now 28%. The proposed budget bill will further reduce that percentage to 14% by the end of the biennium. As a result, the restricted funding that is used to support our English language learners, gifted, and economically disadvantaged students will take a hit, even with the completion of the phase-in, risking the support that we are providing to these students. Updating the state base cost inputs will help provide the support those students need to succeed not just in the classroom, but also in the future when they enter college, the workforce, or the military.

Due to the lack of updates to the state base cost inputs, our local capacity has exceeded our state support for fiscal year 2025. That has resulted in our district to be on a funding guarantee, providing us with funding at fiscal year 2021 levels. As you know, no one's costs have remained the same since 2021. In fact, our general fund expenses have increased nearly 20% since fiscal year 2022. Meanwhile, our state funding has decreased by over \$300,000, or 4%, between fiscal years 2024 and 2025 because of being forced back onto the funding guarantee. Schools have been hit hard by inflation just like our residents. Updating the state base cost inputs can lift us off the guarantee and keep pace with inflation.



As mentioned above, my district is on a funding guarantee for this fiscal year. The governor’s proposal includes reducing the funding received on the guarantee by 5% each year of the biennium. I understand that the governor is concerned about funding “empty seats”, as some districts are on the guarantee due to declining enrollment. However, that is not the case here at Jonathan Alder. Our enrollment has increased by an average of 70 students per year following the enrollment disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2023 we have had three enrollment studies performed by esteemed firms such as FutureThink, Cooperative Strategies, and Woolpert. All those reports project an increase of at least 300 students in the next decade. We are running out of space at Plain City Elementary and are going to our voters this May to ask for their support for a bond to renovate and construct new facilities to alleviate our current and projected capacity issues. The reason why we are on the guarantee is that our local capacity as calculated by the formula lowers our state funding to levels below fiscal year 2021 levels. Reducing the funding guarantee for a district like mine, which is seeing enrollment growth, does not make sense. I urge you to reconsider this proposal to protect growing districts like Jonathan Alder.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for its consideration of my comments. I am proud to be a part of the public schools here in Ohio and would like to see them succeed. To do so, public school districts need the support of the legislature so we can provide a quality education to our students. The Fair School Funding Plan has been a game changer for public schools, but for any formula to work both sides of the equation needs to be updated. While our local wealth and enrollment figures are continuously updated, the state base cost inputs are not. That has led to a formula that only half works. I urge the committee to fully fund and update the formula so that it can work as it was intended to.

Thank you,

Mark Ingles
CFO
Jonathan Alder Local School District

