

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 96 EDUCATION BUDGET

Westerville Education Foundation

My name is Martha Sweterlitsch, and I am a board member of the Westerville Education Foundation. I am here today to urge you to fairly and fully fund Ohio's Fair School Funding Plan and ensure that our public schools receive the resources they need to support all students. As a forty-nine (49) year resident of the Westerville School District, I have seen firsthand how insufficient funding affects our classrooms, teachers, and students. The State continues to decrease our District funding and has decreased its share by 20% in the last four years which has resulted in more of the tax burden being placed on our local community. Our modest Foundation supports students and educators in trying new and creative ways to engage children in learning. We cannot make up the deficit in education funding.

My daughter is a proud graduate of Westerville South and the education she received there enabled her to become a highly successful AP social studies teacher and finally to very recently achieve her doctorate in education. She is the kind of teacher every student should have, smart, engaged, concerned with and for her students. She was Woman of the Year in Sun Valley, Idaho where she now resides, quite an achievement for a high school teacher. I tell you this because, sadly for her school district and her students, after more than 20 years teaching, she will be leaving secondary teaching for college teaching or other opportunities. Idaho, like Ohio, has reduced support for public education over time such that she cannot stay in public school teaching and maintain her modest standard of living, let alone support her two college student children. This is happening all over, including Ohio where we are losing good teachers because we are failing to properly support public education. In education, like in many other endeavors, you only can reap what you sow. We need to seed our public schools with the resources our children and grandchildren need and deserve.

Our District's Mission, indeed, the mission of public schools in general, is to prepare students to contribute to the competitive and changing world in which we live. To help us achieve this, we are asking you to step up and fight for public school education and advocate for the following funding priorities in the upcoming two-year budget cycle.

- Do not decrease the state's share of our funding in the next Ohio Biennium Budget.
- **Use 2025 data to determine the actual cost to educate a child, not data from 2022.**
- Increase funding for special education as your cost studies have suggested.
- Fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan with the changes above.
- Stop unfunded mandates.

The Westerville City Schools District is doing their best, but they cannot continue to provide a high-quality education without the State doing its part as required by the Ohio Constitution. I ask that you prioritize public education in the upcoming budget and fully fund Ohio's public schools. Our students, teachers, and communities depend on it. An educated citizenry is the cornerstone of our democracy.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you on where you stand and how you plan to support our schools.

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<https://www.westervilleeducationfoundation.com/>