

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Mark Hensen and I'm a board member with the Pickerington Local School District (PLSD). I'm not here speaking for the board. I'm here advocating for our 12,000 students and 1,300 staff members.

I will be direct: it is vital for the legislature to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP), especially for a growing district like Pickerington schools.

As presented to the legislature, the governor's budget proposal did not fully fund the FSFP as it did not update the base costs from FY22 to FY24. This lack of full implementation and funding would result in a PLSD forecasting shortfall of approximately **\$16M** over FY26 & FY27 (\$6.8M/\$9.2M, respectively).

A **\$16M+** shortfall over two fiscal years would have a significantly negative impact on our student learning and outcomes. Class sizes for general education classrooms will increase. Workloads for special education teachers and English Learner teachers will also go up.

The district will be forced to make difficult decisions that will negatively impact student performance and achievement: eliminating staff at all levels, increasing student fees, reducing programming and non-core courses such as foreign languages and "specials" classes, postponing facility and technology needs, and updates, and doing away with busing high school students.

Our board of education has embraced its role in district fiscal leadership and is already engaged in discussions about an operating levy in the near future. Again, this is primarily due to continued student population growth – 1,000 students in the last 5 years and another 2,000 students projected in the next 10 years.

This lack of funding for public education is occurring while the State of Ohio sits on its own significant cash balance - "rainy day" fund of over \$3.9B. I noted on Tuesday in an article that the legislature only needed to apply \$440M more to fully fund the FSFP. If fully funding our K-12 students' education doesn't constitute a "rainy day need", then I don't know what does. Education is the foundation for our economy and everything else in the state.

To exacerbate our funding situation, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) is also looking to change the way we receive disadvantaged

pupil impact aid (DPIA) funding as a result of being in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program. The CEP provides all of our students' free school breakfasts and lunches this school year. We also received over \$7.2M in DPIA funding this year as a result of being in the CEP. Potential changes to the program would result in the loss of an additional **\$14.4M+** in FY 26/27. On top of that the federal government is looking at eligibility changes to the CEP itself.

Additionally, our school district is the second largest employer in Fairfield County with over 1,300 staff members. So, these funding issues also represent a significant economic concern, along with the more important educational impact. If not addressed by the state legislature, **both** the FSFP and DPIA **funding shortfalls – \$30M+ in FY26/27** will have to be discussed in our local operating levy conversations.

The bottom line is that PLSD is a large and rapidly growing school district, a 4.5-star district that is likely the best in the area given our demographic challenges including over 40% economically disadvantaged students. Please don't derail and turn back our progress. Please do not penalize a growing, achieving school district with a lack of rigorous thinking and appropriate financial support.

Thank you.