

March 18, 2025

### **Testimony – Proponent HB 43**

#### **Lisa Newsome – Superintendent – Ashtabula Area City Schools**

In December 2024, Lakeside High School in Ashtabula County experienced a partial roof collapse due to approximately 5.5 feet of snow accumulation. The heavy snowfall caused the roof to lift and separate from the building, rendering the structure unsafe for occupancy. In response to the collapse, the administrative team immediately began working on a plan to bring our students back to in-person learning as quickly as possible. This team developed a plan to allow all our high school students to return to the classroom immediately following winter break. Lakeside High School has a student population of almost 850 students and is the largest building in the county.

The plan called for the district to relocate students to various temporary sites, including a former primary school and a former Catholic school. While this required significant adjustments and changes district-wide, it allowed the high school students to return to school while repairs were underway. Because the building was deemed unsafe for occupancy, we could not get any of the teachers' materials out of their rooms. At that time, we had lost all instructional materials, supplies, furniture, etc. The district immediately began ordering all necessary supplies and preparing these buildings for occupancy by high school students.

Simultaneously, our teachers immediately transitioned to remote learning in order to maintain a continuum of education and provide support and encouragement to our students. However, as we are all keenly aware, this structure is not in the best interest of the students.

While online learning can serve as a temporary solution in emergencies, we knew it should not replace the structure and benefits that traditional schooling provides. We immediately realized that we had to prioritize safe, in-person education to prevent further learning loss and ensure the best outcomes for our students. In addition to the difficulties, the district was without internet and phones for over a month because our server was located in the high school. Once the team could access that part of the building, the entire server room had to be dismantled, relocated, repaired, and reassembled at a different location.

This outage and process began during the three-day period from December 18th to the 20th. In order to facilitate the return to in-person learning, the staff had to set up brand new classrooms, the master schedule had to be redone, transportation had to develop new bus routes, and we had to adjust the school day's start and end times for students and staff, just to list a few issues. It was like starting another new school year, but much more complex. My staff worked tirelessly to prepare to welcome students back to the classroom in an environment that was as closely replicated to what they had prior to their displacement. These were not calamity days. The students did not report on these days,

but the staff was provided time to complete this daunting mountain of tasks. I want to reiterate and clarify that there was no internet during this time because we had no server, making it impossible to continue with online learning.

These additional 3 waiver days are essential for us. I believe that if you were to look at what we were able to accomplish in such a short time, our action plan could be used as a model for other future emergencies. These are not typical “calamity days” we are asking for.. Again, our number one goal was to maintain educational continuity. This is why we ask that you consider our request for additional calamity days be granted. Given the magnitude of this transition, additional days were necessary to:

- Ensure a Properly Structured Learning Environment – Granting these days will allow the district to complete the necessary adjustments to provide a stable and effective learning environment for students.
- Minimize Learning Loss – Research supports the need for structured, in-person learning to prevent educational setbacks. Additional calamity days will help ensure that students receive the instructional time needed for success.
- Support Student and Teacher Adaptation – These extra days will provide both students and staff the necessary time to adjust to the new locations, establish routines, and resume high-quality instruction.

In addition, our District is facing a necessary \$1.7 million budget cut, and the cost of extending the school year for these three days would be a significant burden to the district, costing about \$400,000. It would also cause an undue burden to the students, staff, and community during a time that has already been quite arduous for many.

Adding days to the 2024-2025 academic calendar is not as simple as it may sound. For example, it would force adjustments to summer academic services, extended school year services, and our after-school, Summer Discovery Programs, and graduation. It feels like these students have been through enough; they lived through COVID-19 and are now living through displacement from their high school that currently is torn apart as shown in the pictures submitted.

The challenges posed by their displacement cannot be ignored, and the use of these 3 days allowed the district to prioritize in-person learning, minimize disruption, and ensure that students receive the academic and emotional support needed to succeed

From a leadership position, I understand the concern regarding precedent-setting decisions. . It has given me the opportunity to be proactive and increase our student day from 6 ½ hours to 6 hours and 45 mins. Totaling 1098 hours, not that we are planning again for 6 feet of snow in Ashtabula.

However, this is a rare and unique situation that, hopefully, we never see again in Ohio. I appreciate being given the time to testify today for HB 43. This natural disaster could not have been foreseen. We hope you will grant us these additional days and allow us to continue putting the well-being of our students and community as our top priority. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

---



