

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House Bill 96, the FY26-FY27 Ohio Budget
Jan Resseger, Citizen, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Ohio Senate Education Committee, May 7, 2025

House Bill 96, as passed by the Ohio House on April 9, 2025, does NOT bode well for our state's public schools, the institutions that anchor our neighborhoods and communities, serve the needs of 1.6 million of our state's children and adolescents, and protect their civil rights by law.

The [Ohio House excised](#) from its version of HB96 the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, a new public school funding formula designed to ensure that all of the state's 609 public school districts can afford what the state deems an adequate public school education. The Fair School Funding Plan was designed by experts to ensure that the state portion of Ohio's public school funding would be regularly updated every two years to keep up with the pace of rising costs.

I ask the Ohio Senate to restore the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, designed to provide the actual cost of educating "typical" children and then add the costs of serving English learners, disabled children and a growing population of children living in poverty.

The Fair School Funding Plan is urgently needed to restore stability to Ohio public school funding. Without a well designed school funding formula, Ohio will return to its decades-long practice of funding public schools more arbitrarily as a "budgetary residual" or what's left as the pie is divided—something the Ohio Supreme Court deemed unconstitutional back in the original 1997 *DeRolph* decision.

[Policy Matters Ohio reports](#) that the abandonment of the Fair School Funding Plan will reduce state funding for public schools \$2.75 billion below what the new formula would have awarded over the next biennium.

For years now, experts have been diagnosing myriad problems which become evident after states divert huge investments into school privatization programs instead of funding the public schools.

In 2007, in [Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole](#), political philosopher Benjamin Barber condemned vouchers theoretically: "Privatization is a kind of reverse social contract: it dissolves the bonds that tie us together into free communities and democratic republics. It puts us back in the state of nature where we possess a natural right to get whatever we can on our own, but at the same time lose any real ability to secure that to which we have a right. Private choices rest on individual power... personal skills... and personal luck. Public choices rest on civic rights and common responsibilities, and presume equal rights for all. Public liberty is what the power of common endeavor establishes, and hence presupposes that we have constituted ourselves as public citizens by opting into the social contract. With privatization, we are seduced back into the state of nature by the lure of private liberty and particular interest; but what we experience in the end is an environment in which the strong dominate the weak... the very dilemma which the original social contract was intended to address." (*Consumed*, pp. 143-144)

In 2023, Teachers College Press published [The School Voucher Illusion: Exposing the Pretense of Equity](#), a series of expert essays on the many problems associated with school privatization. A primary problem is that, almost everywhere they have been introduced, private school tuition vouchers have become a form of welfare for the wealthy: "As currently structured, voucher policies in the United States are unlikely to help the students they claim to support. Instead, these policies have often served as a facade for the far less popular reality of funding relatively advantaged (and largely White) families, many of whom already attended—or would attend—private schools without subsidies. Although vouchers are presented as helping parents choose schools, often the arrangements permit the private schools to do the choosing... Advocacy that began with a focus on equity must not become a justification for increasing inequity. Today's voucher policies have, by design, created growing financial commitments of taxpayer money to serve a constituency of the relatively advantaged that is redefining their subsidies as rights—often in jurisdictions where neighborhood public schools do not have the resources they need. (*The School Voucher Illusion: Exposing the Pretense of Equity*, p. 290)

Another big problem is geographic inequity. There is enough population in big cities and even in more sizeable towns to support privatized school alternatives. But in the majority of rural areas, there is no place for a student to use a voucher. In Ohio [more than half the counties do not have enough population to support private schools that would take vouchers](#). Tiny towns and rural areas lose public school dollars as an increasing number of families in populated areas divert state education funding to vouchers used in private schools. In a new Ohio League of Women Voters report, [Susan Kaeser traces](#) money from the state public school foundation fund that is being diverted to private school vouchers used by families in metropolitan areas: “Most of Ohio relies heavily on public schools but (state) taxpayers are funding charter schools and private school vouchers that are concentrated in 13 counties.” “Public school enrollment as a share of (total) enrollment... is smallest in six urban counties.... They are Lucas, Montgomery, Summit, Hamilton, Cuyahoga, and Franklin counties.” In other words, most students who use vouchers or attend charter schools in Ohio live in cities—Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus—or the suburbs that surround them.

In an excellent new (2025) book whose primary topic is the history of racial bias, ideology, and censorship in education policy, [*Dangerous Learning: The South's Long War on Black Literacy*](#), constitutional law professor Derek W. Black explores what we all gain from supporting our public schools instead of privatized alternatives: “Public schools, to be sure, are far from perfect. They have never fully met the needs of all students and all communities But those shortcomings are clearly understood as problems to fix. They are seen as bugs, not features, of public education, which has operated for two-centuries on the premise that public schools are the place where children—regardless of status—share a common experience, come to appreciate the public good, and prepare for equal citizenship. The purpose of public education has always been to sustain a republican form of government. And public schools are the only place in society premised on bridging the gaps that normally divide us—race, wealth, religion, disability, sex, culture, and more. The founders of the American public education system believed that rather than inhibiting liberty, a common public education is essential to it.” (*Dangerous Learning*, p. 283)

In a May 2, 2025, presentation at the Cleveland City Club, Derek Black reminded his audience that our nation’s public schools collectively make up the largest public civic institution in the United States. “Public schooling provides the intergenerational inheritance our society provides for every one of our kids”—whether they live in remote rural areas, cities, small towns, or suburbs.