

Senate Education Committee
Amended House Bill 96
Ebenezer Vasquez Fuentes
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Members of the committee, educators, parents, and fellow students. My name is Ebenezer Vasquez Fuentes, and I'm a proud 9th-grade student at South High School in Columbus City Schools. At the moment I plan on going to The Ohio State University as I have a full ride scholarship, I attend Law school in the summer with the program LLI, as I have all intentions of becoming a Lawyer.

I'm here today to talk about something that directly impacts me and every student in our district — school funding. In Columbus City Schools, funding isn't just about money. It's about opportunity, fairness, and giving every student the chance to succeed, no matter what neighborhood they live in. Coming from a low income family of immigrants, education was everything. My parents came to this country in search for a better life- and for them, that better life started with opportunities through education. They've taught me that school is the path to a future with more choices, more freedom, and more hope. But when schools don't have the resources they need, students like me, students whose families have already sacrificed so much, are held back before we even get a chance to show what we can do.

Right now, some schools in CCS are struggling. Buildings are outdated, textbooks are worn out, and technology is falling behind. There are students trying to learn science without proper lab equipment or doing research without working computers. That makes it harder to learn — and it isn't fair. Proper funding will support better learning environments, new resources, and modern technology.

Teachers are doing their best, but without proper funding, even the best teachers face limits. Some classrooms are overcrowded, making it hard for students to get individual attention. Some teachers even spend their own money to buy supplies for their classrooms. They do it because they care, but they shouldn't have to. Proper funding will give teachers the tools to help students be successful.

When we increase funding for CCS, we're not just paying bills. We're investing in students. With improved funding, schools can offer updated technology, safer buildings, more tutoring, and more mental health support. We can keep arts programs alive, support sports and clubs, and make sure students feel safe and supported. These things aren't extras — they're essential. And in this crisis, where we have high teacher and substitute teacher shortages in Ohio, these resources are more important than ever.

Improved funding also helps teachers. It means better pay, more resources, and smaller class sizes. When teachers feel supported, they can stay longer, teach better, and help more students succeed. And when teachers succeed, students succeed too.

There's proof that funding makes a difference. Research shows that when school funding goes up, test scores rise, graduation rates increase, and more students go to college. Students in well-funded schools are more confident, more motivated, and better prepared for the future. We need that here in Columbus. For example, at a nearby school that received increased funding, graduation rates rose by over 10%, and student morale improved dramatically.

Investing in schools helps the entire community. Good schools lower crime, attract families, and create better job opportunities. When we support Columbus City Schools, we're building a stronger city — one where every child, in every zip code, has a real shot at success.

As a student, I see both the challenges and the potential every day. I know how hard my teachers work. I'll never forget the time my teacher brought in snacks, notebooks, and pencils for students who couldn't afford supplies – and paid for it all out of her own pocket. She didn't do it for praise, she did it because she knew students can't learn while they're hungry or don't have materials. But teachers shouldn't have to do that. Schools should be funded so students have what they need from the start. And I know that we can do better together.

So, I ask you today, not just to see school funding as an agenda item, but as a promise to students like me. Help me and all children in Ohio realize our dream to succeed and thrive. Help us build a future where all students in Columbus City Schools can thrive.

Thank you for your time, and for believing in our potential.