



UNITED SCHOOLS

FOR EVERY CHILD, AN OPEN DOOR.

**Andrew Boy, Founder & CEO, United Schools
Testimony before the Senate Education Committee
May 14, 2025**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a proponent of the state operating budget, House Bill 96. I am Andrew Boy, the Founder and CEO of United Schools in Columbus, Ohio.

United Schools is a locally grown nonprofit charter school network, authorized by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, serving kindergarten through 8th-grade students in Columbus. This year, we are proud to serve nearly 900 students, and we are preparing to welcome even more next year as we expand in three of the most under-resourced neighborhoods in our capital city.

Our students are remarkable. About 90% of them identify as people of color, 19% have identified disabilities, and nearly 100% are considered economically disadvantaged. But these numbers don't tell the full story. Every single one of our students is a bright, creative, and unique individual who deserves access to an outstanding public education, no matter their zip code. At United, we are committed to providing that opportunity.

Through a focus on academic excellence, intentional student supports and interventions, regular homework, and advanced coursework, we ensure that every scholar at every level has the tools they need to thrive.

United has consistently delivered strong academic outcomes. Our Elementary students outscored neighborhood schools in every subject area by up to 33 percentage points and ninety-six percent (96%) of our alumni go on to graduate high school.

We do more than close the achievement gap for low-income and high-need students. We open their minds to learning - with structure and mutual respect - and give students

the life skills to gain entrance, gain success, and gain a degree from the most demanding high schools and colleges.

These results are a testament to the hard work of our students, the dedication of our teachers, and the support of our families.

Yet the success of our schools has not come without significant financial hardships. Like many high-quality charter schools across Ohio, charter public school students are not funded at the same levels as their peers who attend other public schools. This funding disparity has forced us to make difficult choices—whether it's delaying investments in technology, struggling to offer competitive salaries to our staff, or relying on community support to maintain our facilities. While we have done everything in our power to shield our students from the impact of these funding gaps, the reality is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep pace with the rising costs of running a public school.

We are grateful for the investments that you and your fellow lawmakers have made in public education, including charter public schools, over the past budget and legislative sessions. And we are deeply grateful for Governor DeWine's commitment to support high-quality charter schools like ours in his proposed budget.

This year's proposed budget includes several key provisions that would provide much-needed support to public school students attending charter schools like ours. I ask that you maintain the following priorities, proposed by the Governor and kept in by the House.

First, please maintain the charter school facilities funding at \$1,500 per student. While it still falls short of the estimated \$2,000 per student needed to address our facilities' challenges fully, we appreciate the increased investments so that we can provide safe, welcoming, and high-quality school facilities to our students.

Second, high-quality charter schools in Columbus receive, on average, 15% less funding per student than their district counterparts. This disparity limits our ability to invest in the resources and opportunities our students deserve. While the Governor's budget proposes the charter equity supplement at \$650 per student, we ask that you help close the gap by increasing it to \$1,000 per student.

Third, please maintain the proposal to memorialize three key funding streams in code, including the charter equity grant, the charter facilities fund, and the high-quality charter grant, to provide greater stability and predictability for schools like ours. Knowing we can count on these funds annually ensures we can make critical investments, such as reducing student-teacher ratio for students with disabilities, curriculum investments, PD, leadership pipeline sustainability, and more, that directly benefit our students.

In addition to addressing funding disparities, we believe it is critical to maintain high standards for school performance and accountability, and ask that you hold the same high bar. We support efforts to ensure that academics play a greater role in charter sponsor evaluations, and we strongly oppose any attempts to weaken the laws that require consistently low-performing charter schools to close. Accountability is essential to ensuring all students have access to a high-quality education they deserve, whether they attend a district or a charter school.

Facilities support is also critically needed. Many public school buildings are under-enrolled and underused. And many districts are not following the law that requires them to make unused facilities available to charter schools. The Governor's budget proposal added guardrails to fix this problem, but unfortunately, the House removed the fix. We ask the Senate to add it back in with some common-sense amendments.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to call your attention to a long-standing transportation problem exacerbated by the Columbus City Schools (CCS) that is resulting in chronic absenteeism, significantly slowing academic progress, and deteriorating trust in our educational system. CCS systematically denied nearly 2,000 Columbus students yellow bus transportation this school year, an action they took with no warning to the families or the schools they are compelled to serve. Less than a month before our first day of school, CCS passed a board resolution naming dozens of United students impractical to transport, a decision they failed to communicate to our school and families until one week before the start of the school year. Needless to say, this created the chaos that played out in the media and resulted in pending litigation with the Attorney General. We need to change how we think about yellow bus service now. United is ready to support our state's leaders in reimagining school transportation.

In closing, I want to reiterate my gratitude to this committee for your commitment to all of Ohio's students. The work you do has a profound impact on the lives of children across our state, and I am honored to have the opportunity to share my perspective with you today. I urge you to support the Governor's proposed initiatives for charter schools, to consider additional measures to address funding disparities and uphold high standards of accountability, and to lock arms with us to drive transportation solutions for our students and communities who need it most.

Thank you for your time and dedication to Ohio's children. I welcome you to visit our schools and meet our extraordinary students and staff. In the meantime, I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me today.