

## Aila Smith - School Funding - Extracurricular Programs

Good morning, esteemed members, school administrators, and everyone here today. My name is Aila Smith, I am an 8th grader from Belmont Middle School - A *Dayton Public School*. I'm here to speak about a crucial issue that affects the overall development and well-being of our students — with the reduction of school funding Dayton Public Schools would be forced to make potential cuts to extracurricular programs such as ROTC, Arts, Band, and Choir. According to the Dayton Daily News “Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal.”

Extracurricular programs are not just after-school activities; they are integral to shaping well-rounded students. For many, programs like ROTC that teach honor, courage, and commitment, while also providing invaluable life skills. The Arts — whether it's visual arts, drama, or music — gives students a creative outlet and fosters creativity (especially in a time where kids 13-17 are encouraged to use Artificial Intelligence more than ever), communication, and emotional expression. Lawmakers, band and choir are not only about music; they teach students the value of practice, perseverance, and working toward a common goal.

Unfortunately, when funding is cut, these programs are often the first to go. In kids ages 13-17, 8/10 kids participate in extracurriculars, ranging from sports to clubs, according to Urban Institute. The impact is more than just the loss of a few hours after school - it's the loss of opportunities that help students discover their passions, build confidence, and find their sense of community. For many of us, extracurriculars are the reason we stay engaged in school. They provide a sense of belonging, and for some of us, they are even the key to staying on track academically — example: our local debate team chapter who is gathered here before you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, cutting these programs disproportionately affects students who rely on them for a sense of purpose, personal growth, and even future career opportunities. For a lot of us these programs might be the path to college scholarships, career exploration, and emotional support for students who may not find these things in a traditional classroom setting.

So I please ask you to prioritize school funding for these extracurricular programs. We, the students deserve the chance to explore our passions, develop valuable skills, and experience the full range of opportunities that education has to offer.

Thank you for listening.