



Columbus City Schools

Dr. Angela Chapman, Superintendent/CEO
Ryan Cook, Treasurer/CFO
270 E. State Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Mission: Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community.

Senate Finance Committee Amended House Bill 96 May 27, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 96.

Our names are Dr. Angela Chapman and Ryan Cook, and we serve as the Superintendent/CEO and Treasurer/CFO for Columbus City Schools. We submit this testimony on behalf of CCS to address two critical areas: sustainable school funding and student transportation.

Columbus City Schools is the state's largest district, serving over 47,000 students, including more than 8,000 students with exceptional needs and over 10,000 students from non-English-speaking households. This year, our district has welcomed 2,000 more students, highlighting the growing demand for resources, teachers, and support services. More students means more need for everything from special education to increased opportunities for career technical education, and this makes it all the more crucial that we have a fully funded school funding model to meet those needs.

In our 46 years of combined service to education, we have seen how high-quality public education empowers students to become productive members of their communities. At CCS, we've expanded early childhood education, implemented training in the science of reading, and adopted a strong literacy curriculum—before it became a statewide requirement. We're now committed to empowering our classrooms with top-tier math instruction, driving meaningful improvements in student outcomes.

We are also focused on preparing students for college and careers. The CCS Career Technical Planning District earned 4.5 stars on the state report card, with a 96% graduation rate and 97% post-program outcomes. We've launched major efforts like the Columbus Promise, which expands access to college, and we're rolling out Career Academies—small learning communities focused on high-demand fields like healthcare, logistics, and technology.

But this progress is at risk without sustainable state funding. Our community supports our work—we were among the few districts to pass a levy last year. But local funding alone is not enough. Without a stable state foundation, we may be forced to reduce services, delay improvements, or turn back to local taxpayers too soon.

Nonetheless, our unwavering priority is to educate and support every student and family in Columbus. Our team's decisions are guided by what is best for our students.

School Funding

We appreciate that Governor DeWine’s executive budget continues the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan. However, the plan’s success depends on regularly updating base cost inputs that reflect today’s economic realities. Freezing these inputs undermines the formula’s accuracy, increasing the burden on local taxpayers and misrepresenting the real cost of educating students, especially in large, urban districts like Columbus.

Under the Governor’s proposal, CCS’s state share would drop from 20% to the 10% floor, as if our district had the same resources as Ohio’s most affluent suburbs, despite serving significantly more high-need students (see Table 1). This would result in a loss of over \$45 million in state support over the next two years.

Table 1. Columbus City Schools State Share Percentage by School Year Based on the Governor's Proposal

School Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
State Share Percentage	36.77%	29.2%	30.57%	21.7% (estimate)	15.9% (estimate)	10.0% (estimate)

We also have concerns about the House’s approach to funding schools. While we appreciate that the House added more in terms of resources, its version falls well short. Most concerning is the essential elimination of the Fair School Funding Plan while simultaneously capping district carryover balances to 30 percent of the prior year’s expenditures.

The House version replaces the formula’s intended phase-in with a temporary “bridge formula,” prohibiting the use of the statutory Fair School Funding Plan and effectively sidelining the formula that moves towards full implementation. This change undermines the predictability and transparency that the formula was designed to achieve. If we do

not use updated base cost inputs and continue the phase-in of the plan, the formula’s state share calculation becomes distorted, misrepresenting both district capacity and student need.

The House also proposes capping districts’ cash balances as a way to provide property tax relief. While we support relief for those who truly need it, especially seniors on fixed incomes, this approach is misguided. Columbus City Schools has long maintained responsible reserves, generally below the proposed cap and only exceeding it briefly after voters approve a levy (see Table 1). These reserves are essential for managing inflation and ensuring financial stability over our levy cycle.

Table 2. Columbus City Schools Cash Balance as Percent of Expense

Fiscal Year	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Cash balance as percent of expenditures	46.4%	26.4%	27.7%	28.2%	31.8%

Penalizing districts for prudent financial planning risks compromising services that students rely on every day. We ask the Senate to reject this provision and consider more effective, targeted ways to deliver meaningful property tax relief.

We urge the Senate to remain committed to the Fair School Funding Plan and, at a minimum, to adopt the most up-to-date base cost inputs. Without these adjustments, the formula fails to meet its intended purpose.

Transportation

Columbus City Schools routes transportation for nearly 38,000 students daily across 233 schools. This includes 9,440 students attending 114 charter and nonpublic schools. We operate 475 CCS-owned bus routes, 105 outsourced bus routes, and more than 80 van routes supporting special education.

Last year, transportation challenges made headlines when roughly 1,500 students attending charter and nonpublic schools learned they would not receive transportation. This was due to students being ineligible for transportation because drive times exceeded 30 minutes or transportation for the students was deemed impractical, both of which are permitted under Ohio law. While the district complied with state law, we recognized that

our communication with families and schools needed to improve. We took swift action to improve transparency and coordination.

To improve partnership and efficiency, our transportation team has increased engagement with charter and nonpublic schools. This year, 81 of the 187 charter and nonpublic schools we invited participated in transportation planning meetings—up from 59 last year. We’ve expanded Q&A sessions, provided detailed information, and recorded materials for broader access.

Despite these improvements, the greatest challenge remains staffing. Before the pandemic, we had 771 drivers for 706 routes. Today, we have only 435 drivers for 475 routes. This mirrors a broader trend—according to the Ohio School Board Association, 93% of Ohio school districts report bus driver shortages. While transportation requirements remain the same, the scope of work has grown, and the workforce has been cut in half.

We support the House proposal to create a statewide school transportation workgroup (EDUCD98) and strongly support including CCS. We also support Senate efforts to explore alternative transportation models, the possibility of partnering with cross-industry logistics experts, and considering a county-wide pilot program.

In closing, we ask that the Senate remain steadfast in supporting the Fair School Funding Plan and address the critical transportation challenges facing Ohio’s school districts. Every decision we make is driven by our commitment to doing what is best for our students and their families.

Chair Cirino and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony during this budget process.