

Liz Kocher  
200 Dorland Ave  
Berea, OH 44017  
e.kocher@csuohio.edu  
330-283-8330

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Senator Tom Patton  
Ohio State Senate  
Ohio Statehouse  
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4275

Dear Senator Patton,

I am writing to you as a parent of a student in the Berea City schools district, the daughter of an educator, a past student of a public schools education, and as a current assistant professor at Cleveland State University to express my deep concern regarding the proposed changes to Ohio's budget plan, particularly those affecting Berea City Schools and public education across our great state of Ohio. As a parent of a first grader at Grindstone Elementary in Berea, I have seen firsthand how our local schools serve as vital community hubs that provide a safe, nurturing, and enriching environment for children. I briefly explained the possible changes to Ohio school funding to my 7-year-old son to see what he would say to legislators if he had the opportunity.

The following are my son's thoughts on what makes Grindstone Elementary special:

- "Grindstone makes learning fun"
- "My teachers care about me"
- "My teachers are nice and help me learn"
- "We get free lunch and some of my friends don't have much money"
- "We have different specials" (gym, art, music, library)

These experiences highlight the importance of well-funded, equitable public schools that serve **all students**, regardless of their background. Unfortunately, the current budget proposal threatens to undermine this mission.

The House version of the budget eliminates the final two years of Ohio's Fair School Funding Plan, which rightfully aims to address the unconstitutional reliance on property taxes for school funding. This change would mean Berea City Schools receives only a 4.5% increase

instead of the 7.9% we would have with full implementation—funds that are critical to maintaining and expanding programs for our students.

Furthermore, the budget proposes increasing private school voucher funding by \$500 million while only adding \$220 million for public schools. With 90% of Ohio's students enrolled in public schools, it is essential that we prioritize their needs over voucher programs that divert resources away from the majority of our children.

I am particularly concerned about House Bill 96, which caps district cash balances at 30% and redirects any surplus as property tax relief. This policy could cost Berea City Schools an estimated \$2 million in FY26—funds already allocated for vital student programs and district stability. Such measures undermine local control and voter trust in how their tax dollars are used, hampering the districts ability to plan for the future.

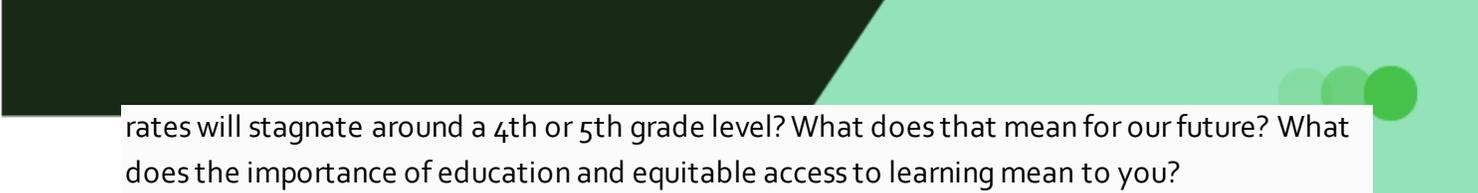
**Without the necessary funding, teachers will face limited resources to do their jobs effectively. Our students will be underserved, losing access to vital services such as mental health support and social workers. Additionally, I anticipate larger class sizes with students receiving less individualized attention, grades and test scores declining, special education services being diminished, and extracurricular activities being cut.**

As a member of the Titans Advisory Board—created by Berea City Schools to ensure community voices are heard—I have witnessed firsthand how essential ongoing investment is to our children's success. This board has fostered open communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, creating a platform where all opinions are valued to best serve our students.

Berea's district is committed to the students and the community, as demonstrated by the third annual School Showcase, which attracted families and community members while highlighting student entrepreneurship, performing arts, and innovation. In addition, the district has implemented impactful programs such as calming corners in every K-5 classroom, expanded mental health partnerships, and employs six full-time Student & Family Support Specialists. These initiatives exemplify the proactive approach to addressing student well-being, ensuring that each child has the support and resources they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Our Berea City Schools Superintendent recently shared that the district's graduation rates have improved three years in a row—a testament to the dedication and hard work of our educators and students. How do we expect to continue making such gains if we deprive our schools of the necessary funding?

Another pressing concern is the potential future of Ohio's literacy rates. If the budget prevents full funding and support, are we unknowingly accepting that Ohio's general population literacy



rates will stagnate around a 4th or 5th grade level? What does that mean for our future? What does the importance of education and equitable access to learning mean to you?

Our children are the future of Ohio—our hope, our strength, and our potential. It is your duty to educate, empower, and prepare them for a lifetime of success. Every student deserves an environment where they can flourish and reach their full potential, and that requires appropriate investment and support from our state government.

I urge you to oppose the elimination of the final phase of the Fair School Funding Plan, protect district savings, fully fund public schools, and prioritize the needs of our students over voucher programs. Investing in education isn't just a moral obligation—it's an investment in Ohio's future prosperity.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to Ohio's children.

Kindest regards,  
Dr. Kocher

