

House Finance Committee Sub-Committee On
Primary and Secondary Education

H.B. 1

February 25, 2021

Chairman Richardson, ranking minority member Troy and members of the House Finance Sub-Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony today on the transportation component of H.B. 1; what has been known as the Fair School Funding Model. My name is Dalton Summers and I am the Superintendent of the River View Local School District located in Coshocton County. I am joined here with my co-chair of the transportation subgroup, Mr. Kevin Lillie, Treasurer/CFO for the Geneva Area City School District in Ashtabula County. It has been our privilege to serve as co-chairs in this subgroup for the Fair School Funding Model. Being part of a group of practitioners that have devoted multiple years into assessment, study, and development of an actual school funding plan that answers the question of what the cost is to educate a child has been both challenging and rewarding. We believe that we are on the cusp of being part of a solution to a problem that has plagued our state for multiple decades. We are excited to share with each of you our data based determinations of what is necessary to adequately fund this crucial piece of school transportation.

Over the past three years, the transportation subgroup has reviewed the current transportation funding mechanism, evaluated the level of transportation services and funding offered in other surrounding states, compared the requirements of transportation from each state, received stakeholder input from public and private schools, and sought guidance from professionals such as Pete Japikse who has had a long career working with school transportation for both ODE and OSBA. We have compared and contrasted the challenges faced in urban, suburban, and rural transportation departments. Through all of this we remained focused on trying to identify what is required to provide students with a safe and most cost effective means to be transported to where they will receive their quality education. One very important idea that we have maintained throughout the entire study is that before an education can begin, we must ensure that the student will arrive to school and be transported safely and efficiently home. This is why we will always maintain that the funding and resources devoted to both processes must remain separated so that districts and communities are not forced to make decisions where one has a negative effect on the other.

A review of states surrounding Ohio yields the following information:

State	Pupils transported	State funding	\$/rider	Nonpublic transportation	Community school transportation	Out-of-district service
Pennsylvania	1,378,793	530,936,820	385	Local policy	Local policy	Permissive
Kentucky	393,066	430,390,893	1,094	NP pays district	None	None
Indiana	650,000	720,122,791	1,107	Only if along existing route	Only if along existing route	None
Michigan	636,344	713,844,068	1,121	No transport	No transport	Permissive
Ohio	800,000	485,000,000	606 (FY18) 530 (FY19)	Required	Required	Required

The cost of school transportation, just like the cost of our personal transportation, continues to increase. The average annual operating cost of a school bus is over \$52,000 per year. This cost goes up the older a bus gets and the more miles a bus has. The cost to replace a bus is over \$85,000. Districts like River View can easily put 30,000 miles on a bus in just one year. Drivers are harder to find based on lower competitive wages and increased mandates, which we do agree are essential for hauling children. Ohio continues to increase the requirements of transporting students outside of the local district's boundaries and to students attending any of the multiple choices other than the transporting district's schools. As these costs have continued to rise, state funding for school transportation has decreased. State funding for transportation was once at the higher of 60% or state share for many years. In FY 2016 it was decreased to 50%; in 2018, 37.5%; and is now 25% SINCE 2019. Any funds to assist in bus purchasing were eliminated years ago, however, recently some attempts have been made to begin a program to assist in this area.

These increasing costs and decreasing funds have forced communities and districts to either reduce transportation services to maintain educational opportunities, like in my colleague, Mr. Lillie's, district, or decrease educational options to maintain needed transportation like in my own district. We firmly believe that these are not choices that districts and communities should be forced to make. All children have a right to an education and all children should have the ability to have equal and safe access to it.

The following list contains the components of what we have found to be essential in developing an appropriate funding plan for the transportation of students to and from school. We firmly believe that each component is necessary based on everything I have already mentioned as well as data gathered from 3 years of study, research, and assessment:

1. Fund school transportation through a separate formula, unaffected by artificial caps and guarantees that may only distort or harm essential transportation support.
2. Restore the State's minimum share of district transportation funding to 50%. This was once at the higher of 60% or state share percentage for many years, but has now been decreased to 25% for the past three years.
3. Continue to use the previous year average per mile or per rider cost, whichever is higher, as reported to ODE, and the current year mileage or rider count.
4. Continue the density supplement payments, but change the threshold eligibility to 28 riders per mile and the median to 14 riders per mile to reflect the change to the density calculation based on riders per square mile rather than students per square mile.
5. Allow districts to report ridership based upon the higher of the morning or afternoon count, and fund the transportation of all riders, including those residing less than one mile from school, because it promotes safety and attendance and is responsive to community needs.
6. Provide for a thorough study to determine the cost of the following and to make recommendations to more efficiently provide the same:
 - a. Transporting special education students
 - b. Transporting community school and nonpublic students on days the transporting district is not in session.
 - c. Transporting community school and nonpublic school students outside of district boundaries.

7. Change the interim additional payments for non-traditional riders from the additional 10% per non-traditional rider to a weight system that adds .5 for community school riders and 1.0 for nonpublic school riders in order to help districts with the high cost of this transportation.
8. Allow a 30-minute leeway in drop off and pick up times at community and nonpublic schools to assist districts dealing with multiple bell time conflicts.
9. Revise the formula for reimbursing school districts for the transportation of special education riders by multiplying the district's actual special education transportation expenses by the greater of the district's local share percentage or the state's minimum percentage. The special ed transportation set-aside has not been increased since FY 2009, yet this expensive transportation is required by state and federal law.
10. Create a Collaboration Grant Fund of \$250,000 per year, allowing grants to districts of a maximum of \$10,000 per year to help defray start-up costs in developing efficiencies in transportation that reduce operating costs.
11. Recognize the need to assist districts with the purchase of buses and increase the set-aside for bus purchases to \$45 million per year, designating a flat grant amount of \$45,000 (about half the cost of a new bus) per bus in order to facilitate the replacement of Ohio's aging buses. Until this year, no bus purchase assistance was provided by the state since FY 2009.
12. Allow the small number of community schools that provide their own transportation to receive the basic per rider funding amount in accordance with the formula for traditional schools.
13. Create a separate district transportation funding guarantee.
14. Grant local boards the authority to operate their buses for trips other than educational purposes provided the costs for these trips are paid by the local community group or government entity requesting the service.

If this state has learned anything over the past year it's that there are no substitutes for face to face instruction. In order to make sure that we can provide that face to face instruction, it is our duty to provide the safe and efficient access to it. We believe that the implementation of the items mentioned above are essential to fulfill this obligation.

We again thank this committee for hearing and reading our testimony today. We are confident that if given the time to digest the information we have provided, you, like us, will see the importance of not only this portion of the Fair School Funding Plan, but the plan in its entirety. It is our duty as leaders and citizens to provide a quality education to all students regardless of zip codes and social status and we feel the time is now to act boldly. We hope that we can encourage each of you to embrace this same idea.

We would be happy to take any and all questions you may have. If we are unable to answer them today, we will gladly seek answers and get back to you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dalton Summers

Kevin Lillie

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Treasurer/CFO, Geneva Area City Schools