



**Interested Party Testimony House Bill 1**  
**House Finance Subcommittee Primary and Secondary Education**  
**February 25, 2021**

Chairwoman Richardson, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools (OAISS) on HB 1. We appreciate the efforts of the sponsors, this committee, and the others involved in this giant undertaking to reform school funding. However, as currently written, we are concerned that this legislation to create fair and more equitable funding for Ohio's students falls short in terms of funding Ohio's seven public independent STEM schools.

For those that may not know, the creation of public independent STEM schools was authorized by a provision in the 2007 biennium budget, tasking the schools with developing and using innovative and transformative instructional methods with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). We were created, in part, to be research and development labs for education in Ohio, and to be incubators of STEM talent across the state to meet Ohio's evolving workforce demand. OAISS schools have embraced that challenge.

Our schools collaborate with local businesses, governments and academic institutes to ensure our curriculum is meeting the needs of today's workforce. Focusing on skill-mastery and problem-based learning, we prepare students for the industries of the future. Our successes are evident by our 100% graduation rate, the high rate of students that pursue STEM post-graduation, the fact that our demand far exceeds our capacity, the number of educators, businesses and elected officials across Ohio and the country that are interested in learning how to replicate our programs, and the testimonies of students, parents and alumni of our schools. We take an innovative approach to education, and are happy to share best practices and training to educators across the state and nation. We want to see all students succeed.

Today we are testifying to voice our concerns with HB 1. As written, it does not provide equitable funding for Ohio's independent STEM schools. Since our inception, independent STEM schools have had the lowest per pupil foundation funding of any educational model including the traditional public, career tech, community/charter schools. In fiscal year 2019, the average per pupil expenditure of \$12,473 in traditional public schools compared to independent STEM schools' average expenditure of only \$7,927 per student. This legislation creates a framework for school funding that would continue to promote inadequate funding for independent STEM schools.

In fact, HB 1 proposes to fund public community and independent STEM schools at 90% of our traditional school counterparts. This does not create equity, but continues to underfund innovative, high-quality, high-demand, public school choice. While under this new model our schools are projected

to see a slight increase, by building a reduced funding percentage in the framework independent public STEM schools will never be fully funded, and will likely see the gap continue to widen. Furthermore, independent STEM schools, by designation, emphasize personalized learning and real-life experiences and exposure to the workforce and emerging careers. Schools provide pathways in a variety of innovative fields, for example engineering, health, agriculture and more. Each classroom is essentially a lab, and our teachers have deepened knowledge and experience in these areas. The unique mission and fundamental requirements of independent STEM schools should be funded differently than community and other schools. The proposed funding increase in this bill falls short of the additional \$3,150.82 per student that we need to remain sustainable, and to support our robust career exploratory programs designed to inspire and prepare future STEM professionals for the emerging workforce.

Over the years, we have utilized every process at our disposal to increase our school funding and lower our costs. We have leveraged community partnerships and have built our curriculum and programs in order to qualify for weighted funding through career technical education. We have done all of this while protecting and preserving the independent STEM educational model, steeped in project-based learning, that has been instrumental to our success. Regardless of how fiscally conservative we operate, our schools are facing fiscal cliffs and both the current funding and that proposed in House Bill 1 is inadequate to allow us to continue to fulfill our mission as education incubators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate your leadership in reforming Ohio's school funding. We encourage the committee to amend HB 1 to ensure an equitable and sustainable funding formula for independent STEM schools to continue to fulfill our mission and support schools.. Innovation will be key to rebuilding our economy after COVID-19. Independent STEM schools and our will be an integral part of that solution.

Respectfully,

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President  
Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools