

March 1, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairman Richardson, Ranking Member Troy and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education.

My name is Dave Cash, and I am President of Charter School Specialists. Charter School Specialists provides support to community schools, working in partnership with St. Aloysius Orphanage we provide sponsorship oversight, monitoring, and technical assistance to schools they sponsor. A community school sponsor since 2005, St. Aloysius also operates a large mental health facility in Cincinnati, serving children and families in the tri-state area for 180 years. St. Aloysius Orphanage earned a rating 'exemplary' based upon performance as measured by Ohio's sponsor evaluation system. I have been engaged in community school sponsorship for 21 years, having my initial experiences with the Ohio Department of Education.

As a community school sponsor and advocate, I would offer proponent testimony regarding H.B. 1 and suggest several important modifications and additions.

As a community school sponsor, our charge from the General Assembly is to foster effective educational options for Ohio's families. Additionally, sponsors evaluate, monitor, and provide technical assistance to schools we charter. Essentially, sponsors are the key to maintaining and expanding compliant, cost-effective schools that offer a quality educational option to Ohio students.

St. Aloysius has faithfully discharged these duties at the highest level for 15 years and is considered one of Ohio's highest performing sponsors. Ohio's community schools are improving at an accelerating rate. Attention to the issues raised today is the key to continued improvement by the sector.

First, we appreciate that the co-sponsors of H.B. 1 are open to addressing the equity issues that exist between traditional public schools and public community schools. As you likely know, most community schools operate in school districts that meet specific performance criteria. Like Ohio's urban districts, Ohio community schools enroll and serve a significant percentage of low-income and minority students. Not surprisingly, community schools face many of the same challenges as districts. Based on the recent Fordham report, we believe that the General Assembly's original vision was justified. Community schools are delivering on the promise even as community schools have substantially fewer resources.

Besides educating primarily low-income, minority, and special needs students, community schools often serve as incubators, developing quality educators, only to lose those educators to traditional districts that can pay vastly higher wages. Lack of access to local revenues and state facilities funding forces community schools to spend their limited funds designed for operating schools on facilities, and transportation (when neglected by the districts). Although a common myth is that community schools operate free of regulation, nothing could be further from the truth. To better address community schools funding and continue to drive improvement, we would respectfully request the following modifications:

- Increase Base Cost amount for community schools to reflect 100% of all components
- Include all activities and minimum staffing ratios in base cost amounts
- Increase Facility funding
- Allow community schools to opt-out of district transportation and provide the full cost
- Continue the pilot funding for dropout recovery community Schools until the funding study is complete (HB 123)
- Allow community schools to participate in the Bus Purchasing Program and the Transportation Collaboration Grant
- Provide the full value of Targeted Assistance Funds equal to the maximum amount any district receives

Initially, the tradeoff for funding community schools at a lower level was tied to less regulation. Unfortunately, the lower funding level was too little, and the regulation has grown to a burdensome level. For years, regulation of community schools and their sponsors increased, with much of the regulation implemented without benefit of review by JCARR. We are not suggesting that regulation is unnecessary. Too often, the additional regulation was ill-conceived, duplicative, or just plain unnecessary. We've reached a point where burdensome and unnecessary regulations and the compliance costs that come with them eat into already limited resources.

While my colleagues are far more expert in speaking to school funding complexities, I will touch on some of these legislative issues we believe are serving as obstacles to our work.

Please note that included with my testimony is a list of 11 issues that we believe need addressed. I would like to highlight a few of these issues in my remaining testimony.

#### Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The EMIS system is an essential appendix, establishing guidelines for collecting data relative to all public schools in Ohio. The system contains nearly every type of data related to the operation and performance of public schools. It is a box that the Department of Education uses to define education; it is how the Department controls funding. Ohio asked community schools to be innovative and efficient; however, the EMIS' box' rarely encourages innovation or efficiency. The EMIS rules change, sometimes midway through the year. We ask that the General Assembly thoroughly review the EMIS system and that all future EMIS changes go through a process that includes review by the legislature.

Next, we respectfully request a review of all the Department's business rules and policies. These requirements, often developed outside of legislative requirements and the publicly-accessible rule-making process, negatively impact community schools' performance and efficiencies. In recent years much of the ever-increasing regulation has not come from legislative requirements. The business rules and policies that affect both community schools and districts come from guidance, technical documents, and business rules. The rule-making process includes a review called the Common Sense Initiative or CSI to ensure there are no unintended impacts. Department guidance and business rules have no such review process. We believe a review of these business rules and policies would help weed out any unnecessary and burdensome regulations and better protect the use of taxpayer funds.

Ohio paused report card accountability for the 2020-2021 school year, and continues the debate about pausing accountability for the 2021-22 school year. Community schools are the only public schools with the potential for closure due to performance. Three consecutive years of failing performance results in the automatic closure of a community school. Although most community schools continued to serve students in person, our students, too, have been negatively affected by COVID. We request a reset of all accountability measures and make the 2021-22 school year the 1st year for automatic closure.

Dropout recovery schools have the tremendous responsibility to meet students' needs that failed to graduate from the traditional education system for various social, economic, and academic reasons. It is the charge of these schools to help these children to find their way to graduation and a life of increased opportunities.

We oversee several high-quality dropout recovery schools. These schools graduate hundreds of students each year. Unfortunately, based upon the report card used for these schools, they are currently unable to receive funding through the Quality Schools Grant. We ask that dropout recovery schools that achieve a rating of 'Meets' or 'Exceeds' standards on their report cards be eligible for this grant. We further request that whatever mechanism is used to determine quality in the wake of the pandemic be extended to these schools.

Thank you for your time. I am available for your questions.