



HB 1 Interested Party Testimony
Jennifer Howard, Chair of the Board of Breakthrough Public Schools
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Chair Tracy Richardson
March 1, 2021

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Troy and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today as an interested party on HB 1, sponsored by Representative Jamie Callender and Representative Bride Sweeney, to reform school funding in Ohio. My name is Jennifer Howard and I am the chair of the board of Breakthrough Public Schools. Breakthrough Public Schools is a network of 12 nonprofit, high performing community schools in Cleveland, most of which are sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Our student population is 99% minority and 70% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Breakthrough Public Schools continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio, consistently outperforming our urban counterparts as well as many suburban school districts.

I began my career in education and have served in various roles over the past 16 years- teaching positions in both district and charter school systems, recruiting leaders from local colleges and universities to the teaching profession, and serving in education-focused nonprofit leadership roles in Cleveland and Cincinnati. I have been a Breakthrough Public Schools board member since 2015 and currently serve as the Breakthrough Public Schools Board Chair. I am so proud of what we have accomplished over the years. In our first decade of operation we've grown from serving 800 students per year to serving 3,600 students per year. We've intentionally sought locations in the highest need communities in Cleveland- the city with the highest childhood poverty rate in Ohio and the nation- to ensure that *all* students in the city have access to a path changing education. A core tenet of our academic belief system is that *everyone learns, everyone grows- together*. I see evidence of this every day. I am so inspired by our talented team of leaders, teachers, and staff who work tirelessly to provide rigorous and culturally affirming experiences for our students. As a former teacher, I know how important it is to embrace excellence in all aspects of schooling.

During the 2019 budget process, we worked closely with Governor DeWine on the inclusion and passage of the Quality Community School Support Fund. This program provided \$30 million each fiscal year distributed on a per-pupil basis for students who attend a "quality" community school as defined in law, with more resources being allocated to economically disadvantaged students.

The initiative went a long way towards closing the severe funding gap between district schools and charter schools. This is critical because for far too long, the lack of sufficient charter funding has made it nearly impossible for the top charter schools to expand to serve more students. The increased funding has allowed our networks to identify and train more teachers, retain our existing teachers, and reduce our reliance on generous philanthropic support from our community.

In his as introduced budget last month, the Governor increased funding for this program to \$54 million per year in recognition of its success. More children qualify for funding because more schools have attained the definition of "quality" as contained in the fund. Included with my testimony is a document produced by the Fordham Foundation which describes the success of the program and serves as evidence of its importance to the charter school funding system.

Unfortunately HB 1 does not include the Quality Community School Support Fund. We feel this is a mistake. Ohio has come a long way in providing more rigorous oversight and accountability to its community school system. As a result, bad schools have been closed, results have improved for several years and most important, our children scholars are receiving an education that prepares them to succeed. The Quality Community School Support Fund has played a significant part in continuing this trend.

Please consider including the Quality Community School Support Fund in HB 1 at \$54 million per year. I will be happy to take any questions you may have.