

Larry Keough/Catholic Conference of Ohio
Interested party testimony
Finance Subcommittee on Education
March 1, 2021

I. Introduction

Good afternoon Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Troy and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. My name is Larry Keough. I am the associate director in education at the Catholic Conference of Ohio and the legislative advocate for Catholic schools.

We thank each of you for your public service, especially over the past year with monumental challenges in education with a plunging-now recovering economy during a pandemic.

As each of you may know, Catholic schools assist the public interests in providing educational opportunities for more than 108,000 students enrolled in 369 Catholic schools.

But the role of Catholic schools serving the needs of families arguably has been even more important in the past year. The science is clear -- there is no substitute for in-person learning. To that end, Ohio's Catholic schools have persevered to deliver in-person education or a hybrid approach while protecting the health and safety of our school employees and students.

II. School Choice

As school tuition and the total cost to educate students continue to ascend, scholarship amounts have remained fixed over the past couple of budget cycles. This problem is mitigated when parents whose income is over 200 percent of poverty contribute to the difference between the scholarship amount and tuition.

But asking parents to pay the difference as the gap widens between the scholarship amounts and tuition/total cost to educate is not sustainable.

We also rely on financial assistance, grants and contributions from benefactors. But again, this is not a long term solution as more and more funding is needed to make up the difference.

This problem is particularly so at the high school level where the median tuition ranges from \$9,200 to \$12,000.

Our request:

Increase the scholarships amounts at the high school level for performance-based Ed Choice, Ed Choice Expansion and the Cleveland Scholarship Program from \$6,000 to \$8,000;

Increase the scholarships amounts at the K-8 level from \$4,650 to \$5,500 in each of these programs.

We ask that this request be seriously considered as revenue streams ascend and language in HB 1 for school-choice funding to be paid outside of districts' funding' is on a track for favorable passage.

Increase the cap – The number of students who are awarded scholarships from performance based Ed Choice and Ed Choice Expansion is nearing the 60,000 cap. A provision in the 2019 budget bill (HB 166) allows for the cap to increase by 5 percent when 90 percent of available scholarships are claimed.

We recommend that the cap be raised to 75,000 students or removed altogether.

III. Auxiliary Services & Administrative Cost Reimbursement

Our longstanding advocacy is based on the parity principle: As state aid increases for public school students, the same percentage increase should be provided from GRF 200 511 Auxiliary Services and GRF 200 532 from Administrative Cost Reimbursement for Catholic and other chartered nonpublic school students.

We are hopeful the House budget will reflect increases in Foundation Funding, Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Reimbursement beyond the executive budget as revenue streams ascend.

We support the permissive language in the executive budget for Catholic and other religious chartered nonpublic schools to have the option of receiving direct state aid from Auxiliary Services.

Raising the ACR cap to \$475 per pupil – This is not a request to raise the appropriation for ACR. It is an adjustment such that schools can absorb the full appropriation approved by the General Assembly – number of students/ADM by cap.

IV. Bus Transportation

We support the transportation provisions in the executive budget, especially the following: ;

Students enrolled in chartered nonpublic schools are to be provided transportation, regardless whether the district's own schools are open for operation. However, transportation is not to be provided on weekends, unless a board of education and chartered nonpublic school have an agreement to do so before the first day of July of the school year;

A student transportation plan shall not result in a student arriving at a chartered nonpublic school more than one hour before the school's start time and not more than one hour after the end of the school day;

Transportation plans, which are to include transportation routes and schedules, shall be provided to the chartered nonpublic school by July 1;

Eligible K-8 students shall not be transported in vehicles operated by a mass transit system, unless the district enters into an agreement with that school authorizing such transportation;

If a district board or governing authority declares impracticality to transport a student, parents are to receive a detailed explanation of the decision;

In addition to the provisions in the executive budget, we request that as the state obligation for transportation increase to where it was several years ago, then that threshold is a trigger to repeal impracticality.

V. Wellness Grants

We believe wellness grants are beneficial for select students. However, they are outside of the formula, which skews percentage increase when comparing Foundation funding with line items for chartered nonpublic school students. And, the grants exclude chartered nonpublic school students.

We have students who are in need of mental health counseling, mentoring and wrap around services. Our request is to include these services based on need, not what school they attend.

VI. Special needs Students/Graduation Requirements

We support the language in the executive budget for special needs students to have options to meet the state's new graduation requirements.

VII. Conclusion

At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions.