



**The Alliance for High Quality Education
Interested Party Testimony – HB 110
Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
April 22, 2021**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding HB 110. My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of The Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE).

The Alliance for High Quality Education is a consortium of 74 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio including the Toledo, Cleveland, Akron-Canton, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati areas. The Alliance for the last twenty-nine years has represented its members' interests on matters of state education policy and funding, as well as contributing to fostering high quality educational opportunities for students in their districts and those across the state.

School Funding

I begin my testimony today by addressing the Alliance's school funding priorities. We support the majority of the HB 1 provisions of the Fair School Funding Plan that were amended into HB 110 by the House. I want to acknowledge the bi-partisan work of House Leadership, the HB 1 bill sponsors, the previous HB 305 bill sponsors, and members of the Cupp-Patterson working group. The Alliance applauds continued efforts to recommend a new and improved funding formula for Ohio's schools. Several Alliance-district superintendents and treasurers were active members of the Cupp-Patterson working group and have testified before both the House and Senate during last two years.

The collaborative effort I just referenced culminated in the development of comprehensive school funding plan. With limited exceptions, the Fair School Funding Plan provides a rational, transparent approach for determining the cost of educating students and demonstrates how the funding of education should be shared between the state and local taxpayers.

The Alliance supports the base-cost funding methodology and proposed distribution model contained in HB 110 As Passed by the House. We also support the budget bill provisions that would direct fund both community school students and students receiving state vouchers.

And because we understand the challenge the legislature faces in determining the best way to fully fund and/or phase-in a new formula not only in the upcoming biennium but in the future, the Alliance supports the House provision that would create the School Funding Oversight Commission.

One concern we do have with the Fair School Funding Plan as included in HB 110 relates to the proposed continued use of a 5% minimum funding floor. The Alliance believes that the current minimum funding level contained in HB 110, (5% of the state share index), is an arbitrary figure established in existing law that should not be continued without re-evaluation as part of budget and school funding formula deliberations. We believe that the proposed formula contained in HB 110 should set the funding floor for traditional public-school districts not less than the amount a parochial/private school receives from the state for required auxiliary services/reimbursements.

I would like to also address today a few concerns related to education-policy proposals included in the As Introduced version of the budget bill and address changes made by the House.

Transportation

HB 110 contains many changes related to the rules on transporting students that will ultimately have significant impact on the daily operations carried out by districts. Those include:

Changes the deadline for community schools to notify districts that they intend to transport their students to July 1.

The July 1 deadline will for most purposes, occur after the district has finalized their route designation and assigned drivers. Districts normally begin their work in March to determine routing decisions as well as staffing and bus inventory needs. The current deadline is January 1. If a date change needs to occur, a more reasonable selection would be March 1 to coincide with the district's preparations for the next school year.

Requiring that students with late enrollment in community or private schools be scheduled on a bus within 14 days.

Transportation routing systems are both complex and contain interrelated components that sometime result in multiple changes when requests involve a route change. For example, if a new student does not live along an existing route, a route must be modified which then results in the other students riding that bus possible having their stop and pick up times changed. In addition, this issue can be magnified depending on the time of the year it is requested. We recommend that rather than the 14-day placement requirement, the language state that transportation assignment should occur as soon as possible.

Restricting the use of public transit.

This change will remove a resource that has been available for public schools since school transportation was first mandated. While in a perfect world, we would like all students to have access to yellow school buses, there are simply not enough yellow school buses or drivers available to absorb all the students that currently ride public transit. If this change occurs, school districts will have to divert yellow buses currently used to transport high school students and K-8 students who live less than two miles from school to instead serve students currently riding public transit. This will result in a net loss of transportation service for many students and their families, both public and private.

Require the impractical to transport parent notification be copied to the State Board of Education.

This notification is already required to be provided to ODE when a parent files an objection to the resolution. Requiring the letter to be copied to the State Board when issued simply creates an additional, unnecessary step in the process.

Student transportation has been a challenge historically because it is an area that has been adversely impacted by a school funding formula that relied on guarantees and caps and a lack of funding subsidy for the purchase of replacement buses. In most cases, any changes to the transportation numbers via ridership were not recognized due to the funding formula restrictions.

We firmly believe that the provisions and funding provided in the HB 110 Fair School Funding Plan will provide the needed changes to make available greater efficiency and increased service.

Computer Science Education

While we appreciate Governor DeWine's foresight to provide opportunities for students in computer science education, without appropriate funding it will be difficult for districts to create new programming while meeting the staffing requirements for these courses. I also think that we need to pause and evaluate how any additional credit or course requirements in high school can be coordinated with existing high school graduation requirements. We urge the committee to remove the provisions related to computer science from the bill, and instead introduce separate standalone legislation that can be crafted with input from stakeholders while providing the resources necessary to implement programs and courses that will serve students well.

FAFSA Completion and Graduation

HB 110 As Introduced included several changes to Ohio's graduation requirement system. One such change would have required students to complete the FAFSA as a prerequisite for being able to graduate. We support the House's elimination of this requirement. While there is merit in having most students complete the FAFSA to see what types of aid would be available to them to make post-secondary education a reality, making it a graduation requirement or those who have no intention of completing the form because they realize they will not qualify for funding or simply do not want to share financial information places those families and districts in a difficult position. Penalizing districts for something out of their control is inherently unfair and will ultimately lead to data that is not accurate.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. The Alliance looks forward to working with this Committee and the Senate as the budget process moves through legislative process. I am happy to address any questions Committee Members have at this time.