



**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**HB 110 Interested Party Testimony**  
**Presented by Melissa Cropper,**  
**President Ohio Federation of Teachers**  
**April 22, 2021**

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, and ranking member Fedor and member of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses, higher education staff and faculty, and public employees. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on school funding in this year's budget.

In Ohio, we believe that everyone should be treated fairly, no matter where they live. But that is not what is happening in our local public schools. As the state Supreme Court has ruled multiple times over the last quarter century, school funding in Ohio is unconstitutional because it doesn't provide adequate funding, and it unfairly disadvantages rural communities and communities with higher shares of Black and brown students.

Ohio children have already waited too long for a school funding formula that lives up to the state's constitutional responsibility to fairly and fully fund local public schools.

We strongly supported the Fair School Funding Plan as it was written in HB 1, and while we are currently evaluating the changes that were made when it was inserted into the House budget bill, the bottom line remains the same. Every Ohio student deserves a fully enriching public education with music, art, foreign language, and other elective courses; guidance counselors and nurses in every school; reasonable class sizes; and cutting-edge career and technical education programs. Every district deserves to have a formula that is transparent, provides long-term predictability, and is based upon a methodology that takes into account the components of a quality education. We must put into place a funding formula that builds a solid foundation for all public schools, ensuring all students have the resources they need for their future.

In addition to meeting the constitutional requirement to fully and fairly fund public schools, legislators also have a responsibility to address the issue of charter and voucher school deductions, a problem that was created by a web of policy decisions including a broken state report card system and multiple rounds of expanded voucher eligibility.

Because Ohio's voucher program deducts more money per student than is actually provided by the state, it forces communities to use local funding to offset those losses. For the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District, that added up to a \$7.2 million loss last year alone. To add insult to injury, the vast majority of voucher recipients in the district had never attended a

public school. Cleveland Heights is just one of many Ohio communities that are struggling due to these unjust deductions.

This is not about students opting out of a school district, it is about harming the education of kids in local public schools because of decisions that other families make. Ohio must stop pitting communities and parents against each other. Address this problem by funding charter schools and vouchers through separate funding rather than as deductions from local public schools.

We know that one funding policy that is on the table is the idea of funding charter schools at the same level as traditional public schools. If that were enacted, it is essential to also require additional accountability for charter school management companies, because their financial records are not currently subject to the same transparency rules as traditional public schools. The public has the right to know how public dollars are spent.

We also urge you to add an amendment creating a Community Learning Centers Technical Center. Community Learning Centers recognize that public schools are natural neighborhood hubs of educational, cultural, and health resources. By coordinating these resources and wraparound programs, Community Learning Centers help meet the needs of the whole child. Nationwide, Community Learning Centers have been shown to improve physical and mental health, boost student achievement, close racial and economic achievement gaps, and lead to better attendance and disciplinary outcomes.

Currently, fifteen states have an organization providing technical assistance to schools on making the most efficient use of wraparound programs and community resources. Now is the time for Ohio to join these states, and use the existing in-state expertise from the Community Learning Center Institute of Cincinnati to help more districts and schools meet students' needs so that they can show up at school ready to learn.

We recognize that there are many considerations that go into budget legislation, but after decades of failing to uphold Ohio's commitment to students and families, it's time for your committee and the full General Assembly to act.

We need a fair and equitable school funding system that reflects what it actually costs to provide a good education. We need to end local school deductions for charter and vouchers. We need to ensure public money is being spent responsibly and hold charter schools to the same transparency and accountability measures as traditional public schools. And we need to meet the challenges that our students face by investing in the Community Learning Center model of education.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions.