

HB 110 Testimony/John Patterson

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and distinguished members of the Senate Primary/Secondary Education Committee, my name is John Patterson... former “State Rep. Patterson,” or the titles I cherish the most that my students used—“Mr. Patterson” before I earned my doctorate, or “Dr. P” after that. I truly enjoyed my time as your colleague, but the decades I spent in the classroom remain the most precious to me. My students helped to shape and mold me more than I ever could have hoped to do the same for them.

For 29 years I taught the gamut of U.S. History courses offered at Jefferson Area High School. From General U.S. History to College Prep, Honors, and AP, I interacted with students of all levels of interests and abilities. For 28 years I served as Model United Nations advisor and Academic Challenge advisor; I coached baseball, golf, girls’ basketball, and for the last 12 years, boys’ cross-country; I was a junior high student council advisor, chaperoned countless dances, homecomings, and proms; and for 21 years of my career, I served my colleagues as the chief negotiator for our union. I mention this because all of these endeavors allowed me the distinct privilege and high honor of interacting with the most precious natural resource we possess—our children.

Most teachers and former teachers are typically interested in the whereabouts and well-being of those students with whom they shared a small, but significant, sliver of time. Many of you know three of my former students: Assistant Minority Leader Kristin Boggs, Legislative Service Commission member Linda Jacobsen, and Senior Legislative Aide to President Huffman, Isaac Northrop. I share this in the hope that my efforts to provide them loving support, appropriate encouragement, and proper affirmation, have contributed to the intersection of their God-given talents with their unique and personal callings. When that occurs, “work” as some describe it, ceases to exist while one’s vocation becomes one’s “mission.”

For nearly three decades, I was thoroughly engaged in my life’s mission—*“To love, serve, and educate all students so as to pass on the gift which was given to me.”*

And then came the Great Recession and the cuts to public education. I chafed. I stewed. I became increasingly frustrated as my district, as did other districts, made difficult and life altering decisions to balance their budgets as all must do by law. Those courses or classes not tested by the state were cut first. Consumer Science, engineering drawing, shop class, Vocational Agriculture, elementary art, music, and physical education all became casualties of budget cuts due to the uncertainty of state and local funding. And who was hurt most? Not the teachers who lost their positions. Not the school districts who lost special programs. It was the students, Ohio’s youth who lost—those very souls who were, and remain, our most precious natural resource.

Was it any wonder, then, that some students became disinterested in school when certain programs were cut? Did it come as a surprise that absenteeism rates increased? Were we shocked when some students became disenchanted with education as those courses or programs that nourished their unique skill sets and interests were sacrificed upon the altar of balanced

budgets? It was for these reasons, for my former and current students, and for the profession I loved, that I chose to retire in 2012 and run for the Ohio House of Representatives.

My overarching mission, from my official announcement of my intentions, through my eight years in the House, and to this very day of testimony, was to help develop, promote, and make manifest, a school funding formula that was fair, predictable, transparent, and sustainable.

Some of you remember and answered my call for the creation of the Education Funding Caucus. A group of us met with practitioners and various interested parties to begin that difficult discussion. That was in 2013, during my first term in office. By my second term, I was granted a request to be placed on the House Finance Committee—and more specifically, the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. It was here that I met, worked alongside, and grew immense respect for, my chairman of three terms and dear friend, Representative and now Speaker, Robert R. Cupp.

The real turning point for the Fair School Funding Plan came in 2017. We fixed and patched the previous budget even given an unworkable and certainly mysterious “formula.” But during hearings in the spring of 2017 we faced again a number of difficult challenges. Revenues were not as we had hoped, more and more districts were either on the guarantee or the gain cap, and other districts faced enormous deficits due to closures of major employers coupled with the loss of property wealth. One district in particular, Manchester Local, testified before us. This district was suffering the closure of not one, but two power plants. If I remember correctly, the districted needed to pass an operating levy of 120 mils just to open the doors. Chairman Cupp and I were horrified. Though we were able to push enough money to this district (and others in similar straits), it was at this time that we made a mutual pledge—that we would work together on a school funding formula that would work for all.

First, Speaker Cupp and I fully understood that no two legislators or a subcommittee meeting for a few scant weeks every other year, could ever match the expertise and knowledge of those whose very professional lives center on student instruction and school funding each and every day of the year. Hence, the creation of the workgroup and our reliance upon them.

Thus, in the fall of 2017 was born the School Funding Workgroup. This august group was organized by Jim Betts and after more than three years, its work continues unabated. To be frank, his insights and persistence were, and remain, absolutely invaluable. If not for Jim Betts, we would not be where we are today. Under his leadership, 8 superintendents and 8 treasurers from around the state were assembled to co-chair and dive deeply into the 8 various components of a true comprehensive funding formula; the base cost; distribution; transportation; the economically disadvantaged; technology; ESCs, STEM, and career tech funding; open enrollment, vouchers, and community schools; gifted, ELL, and special education. They did so with great enthusiasm and commitment.

Second, we purposely wanted a diverse group to better understand all perspectives of such a complicated task... and they answered the call. From rural districts to large suburbans, from districts of relative wealth to those of relative poverty, from the shores of Lake Erie to the banks of the Ohio River, they came. They toiled. They learned. We learned. You have recently met

and interacted with this august group and now fully realized how professional, dedicated, and unselfish they are. Speaker Cupp and I were honored to work with such a group.

Third, and most importantly, they were charged to develop a formula that was fair to all, based on research and best practice, one that was transparent enough to be predictable, and one that was best for all and not for one. In fact, to this last point, no member of the group saw the district simulations for then HB 305 until hours before they were first released to the public. None of us did, for our goal was a “pure” formula defensible by mathematical calculations alone.

We quickly heard from the critics—though the base cost calculations met the test of adequacy, the distribution component did not. We heard. We listened. We went back to work. And herein lies one of the greatest strengths of the formula. When a component is not working they way it should, needs adjustment, or must change to adapt, that component, and that component alone can be “lifted out,” re-examined, adjusted, and re-inserted without disrupting the entire formula. Over the years we have patched the existing formula to a point where there are more patches than formula. The Fair School Funding Plan permits us to actually “fix” the problematic component of the formula in isolation—a more strategically precise method of adjustment.

When we dove deeper into distribution it was determined that the “floor” for local capacity simply was not needed. As Dr. Howard Fleeter argued, by allowing the floor to float downward we could arrive at a true basis for local capacity and by so doing meet the test of equity.

We also discovered late last year, that open enrollment could potentially cause a disruption. Though another one of our tenets was, and remains, that funding follows the student, to transition from a broken formula to one that is fair with respect to open enrollment, we would need to allow for a temporary funding stream to be used. Once more, the adaptability of a single component of the formula was proven to be a strength.

Thus, when HB 305 became Substitute HB 305 the changes were included, the explanations were based on reason and calculation, and the bill passed out of the House 87-9. Similarly, SB 376, a companion to 305 was heard in Senate Finance at nearly the same time—an effort to “beat the clock,” if you will.

But sadly, the that clock ran out on HB 305 and SB 376, but the will did not.

And so, the burden of navigating the Fair School Funding Plan through the 134th General Assembly now fell to Rep. Jamie Callender and Rep. Bride Sweeney. More subtle changes would follow as evidenced by the amendments made to HB 1 in the House Finance Committee. All seemed set, interested parties seemed satisfied, HB 1 was ready to be inserted into the operating budget. Then came SAL.

Just days before Sub bill 110 was to be introduced, I received a call from the Speaker. Challenges created by the State Allocation Limitation were prohibiting the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan as originally intended. “Could we offer a solution?”, he asked. Once more, the ask was made and a subgroup offered a solution—to hold DPIA funding steady at \$272 per student for the first year and then begin to phase-in that component in FY 2023. The challenge

was, however, that some districts would potentially lose money and so a transitional guarantee was made—again due to the realities of moving from a broken formula to one that is stable and predictable.

Then, one more challenge emerged. During the phase-in period, the remainder of the funds cut by Governor DeWine due to the pandemic needed to be restored. Again, the subgroup went to work in the last hours before the omnibus amendments to craft a solution to this problematic issue.

The point is, at every turn, during every challenge, when things seemed to go “off the rails,” this dedicated and devoted group was able to offer solutions pertinent to the issue at hand that were logical, defensible, and wholly within the spirit of the group’s original directive.

What you now have before you is the work of countless hours of gifted and caring practitioners. As you have heard, all aspects of the formula are data driven, transparent, and justifiable. Further, should additional adjustments need to be made—and they will as no formula, including this one is perfect—we have asked for various studies to be completed to guide and direct the School Funding Oversight Commission in making recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly.

The Senate is now being asked to study, review, and ultimately approve a school funding formula that is fair, data driven, predictable and flexible. For decades Ohio’s schools have waited patiently for such a formula that will allow them to better predict a five-year forecast predicated, in part, on a two-year state budget. Such predictability will better prepare districts to go to the ballot only when absolutely necessary and justified. And when that day of predictability comes, districts will be able to restore, create, or sustain programming, courses, and classes that best reflect the culture of the district while, most importantly, offering what districts believe is what is best for their students.

The plan is right. The time is now. The rocky past can be put behind us while a bright future lies before us. So I ask you, for our schools, for our state, for our students, to offer critiques where need be, ask for advice where should be, and pass this plan as ought to be.

I will take any questions at this time.