



## UNITED SCHOOLS NETWORK

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United Schools Network

Testimony before the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of United Schools Network. I am Andrew Boy, the Founder and CEO of USN. United Schools Network is a locally-grown non-profit charter school system of four schools, all authorized by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, serving kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in Columbus. We are serving more than 900 students this year and we will be serving more than 1,000 students next year in three of the most under-resourced boroughs in our capital city. About 85% of those children will identify as people of color, and about 14% will have identified disabilities. Nearly 100% of those students will be identified as economically disadvantaged. Every single one of those children is a bright, creative, interesting person who deserves outstanding educational opportunities, regardless of their zip code. That's what we provide at USN. Our focus on academic excellence, including intentional student supports and interventions, regular homework, and advanced work, ensures that every scholar at every level thrives.

Need continues to outpace opportunities in our students' neighborhoods; every year, waitlists for a seat at USN schools grow, even as we increase the number of students we serve. Our reputation as a network that invests deeply in our neighborhoods, from breathing life into vacant school buildings to building family resource centers at every campus to bringing outstanding partners in to spark student creativity, has earned us support ranging from local neighborhood associations to national accolades. The proof is in our results: students arrive at USN an average of 2-3 grade levels behind, and they grow 1.5-2 grade levels each academic year. USN 8th graders outperform their district counterparts in every tested subject area. Our flagship elementary school is the highest-performing, high-poverty urban elementary in the state. What we're doing is working, and it bears investing in.

USN is grateful for the commitment by the members of the Ohio General Assembly, as well as Governor DeWine, to ensure that quality community schools are provided increased opportunity through the Quality Community School Support Fund. All four of our schools qualified for these funds, which has helped us serve more of the students on our waitlists and to continue to provide high quality education to our students by making needed investments to enhance the learning experiences of our students. In FY20, our schools received a total of \$1,355, 502. In FY21, our schools received \$922,038 for a two year total of \$2,277,540.

These much-needed and necessary funds allowed us to better serve our students and to grow our student body. Across our network of 100 staff members, we created space for nine staff positions to reduce the student:teacher ratio for students with disabilities, to provide more resources for families experiencing non-academic barriers to success, to invest deeply in proven curriculum and the time and talent of academic leaders in our network, to strengthen our engagement events with families, to build sustainable leadership pipelines through the addition of teaching fellows, to enhance professional development for staff and reward their outstanding work. These funds allowed us to strengthen student support at each campus and increase the number of students we serve by 10%. We invested these funds carefully and with the needs of our students in mind, and your continued support of this fund is a direct investment in the academic and life outcomes of our city's most under-resourced children.

As the Ohio House and Senate continue to discuss the funding plan for Ohio's schools, we urge you to consider restoring the Quality Community School Support Fund to \$54 Million, as appropriated in the Governor's introduced budget. At stake here is not the wellbeing of an organization, but the life outcomes of vulnerable students and families who receive less per-pupil funding if they exercise their right to choose a school that better meets their needs.