



Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and Members of the Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired public-school teacher and president of Public Education Partners, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit this written testimony to the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee in support of the Fair School Funding Plan.

On March 24, 1997, the Supreme Court of Ohio ruled that the state funding system "fails to provide for a thorough and efficient system of common schools" as required by the Ohio Constitution and directed the state to find a remedy. As you are well-aware, the problems with our school funding system remain to this day.

Instead of creating a system that is no longer overly reliant on the passage of local operating millage, our state leadership continues to expand private and parochial school options. By design, charters and vouchers divert state funding out of school district budgets and force voters to replace this funding with additional local operating levies.

How is that fair and equitable?

Please remember this: Representative Robert Cupp and Representative John Patterson convened a statewide workgroup several years ago, made up of eight practicing school district CFO/Treasurers and eight practicing Superintendents (the "Cupp-Patterson Workgroup"), to devise a new school funding formula. The workgroup spent over three years determining the inputs necessary to fund a "thorough and efficient system of common schools" that reduces the over-reliance on local property tax and creates equity in the state foundation system.

The Cupp-Patterson Workgroup analyzed national research, best practices, actual Ohio school district spending data, and drew on their own extensive experience in educating students and operating school districts to make recommendations for a school funding system that meets the needs of all Ohio's students in the 21st century.

The Ohio House included the Fair School Funding formula into its version of the annual state budget bill, which has to be passed before July 1, and then sent its budget to you at the Senate.

Please pass it as written by the Cupp-Patterson team of education finance experts.

We sincerely hope that the Ohio Senate won't want a high price in return for supporting the funding plan by demanding even more school voucher expansion or other political favors.

There are some among you who believe that the Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding plan is too expensive and that a big difference between the House and Senate is the involvement of private and charter schools. "School choice" distractions have been the major hindrance to the development of a thorough and efficient system of common schools as required by the Ohio Constitution.

Some senators have said that they've been trying to design their own school funding plans. It does not make sense for legislators to think that they have the knowledge and expertise to replace a funding plan that was created and vetted over the course of three years by a bipartisan team of elected leaders, school treasurers, and education finance experts. The Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding plan was made in Ohio by Ohioans, unlike many bills that are sent to the Statehouse by out-of-state interests.

Derek Black, author of Schoolhouse Burning, summarizes trends about the lack of adequate and equitable school funding- many that have occurred here in Ohio: "Public education cuts initially looked like a response to the recession—overzealous and foolhardy, but understandable. In retrospect, the cuts look sinister. They came while states exponentially grew charters and vouchers—and remained in place well after the recession passed and state revenues were booming. To add insult to injury, various legislative mechanisms driving charter and voucher growth come at the direct expense of public schools. The contrasting reality of public schools and their private alternatives looks like a legislative preference for private school choice over public school guarantees... The most troubling thing is that it doesn't take a constitutional scholar or education historian to recognize that something strange has happened. Politicians and advocates have taken on an unsettling aggressiveness toward public education." (Schoolhouse Burning, pp. 226-227)

It is time to fix the school funding system. The Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding plan, as passed in the Ohio House version of the biennial budget, satisfies Ohio's obligation to provide every public school in the state with the resources it needs to deliver a high-quality education to every student. Please support it as written to ensure that no student or public school is disadvantaged because of income level or location.

Please remember, esteemed Senators: funding public education fairly is one of your primary constitutional responsibilities. You have the opportunity right now, at long last, to fulfill that responsibility. Please do.

Thank you.

Jeanne Melvin and the Board of

Public Education Partners