

Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee  
Substitute House Bill 110  
Testimony in Support of the Proposed Fair Funding plan for  
Ohio's Schools  
Madelon T. Horvath, president  
Board of Education  
Chardon Local Schools  
May 6, 2021  
Time 1:00 PM

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing Ranking Minority Member Fedor and members of the Senate Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, I am Madelon Horvath, President of the Chardon Board of Education, Chardon Local School District in Geauga County. I have been a board member for eight years and was a high school English and drama teacher for 30 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of Substitute House Bill 110, specifically, the proposed Fair Funding Plan for Ohio's Schools included in the House of Representatives version of the budget bill.

I have been listening to testimony from agencies promoting this bill as well as superintendents and treasurers who have been working on it for the past three years, and I believe that you are well aware of most of the important arguments in favor of the proposal, so I am going to talk about history of school funding as I know it personally. I think it might be helpful for you to know what lack of funding does to school personnel as well as parents and board members who are trying to do the best we can for the students of our districts.

I graduated from Williamsburg High School in the sixties and am a product of a system (though very small) that was relatively well-funded. I grew up in Clermont County and we had a small school with approximately 65 students in my graduating class. I attended a brand-new building when I was in second grade. We never had operating levies, so tax payers were likely to vote for building construction at the time.

However, by the time my own children were ready to attend school in the 70's, things had changed significantly as a result of HB 920 which was passed in 1976.

My children went to elementary school in Grand Valley, in Ashtabula County. I worked on my first levy campaign as a PTO president and general volunteer in the schools, and it was abundantly clear that all districts were not created equal. I soon learned that lack of a local business tax base was a real detriment and we had to tax ourselves at a much higher rate in order to stay solvent. In 1997 after the DeRolphe decision, the legislature created the Ohio Facilities Commission which helped the poorest districts to build new buildings. Both Williamsburg and Grand Valley now have new buildings. Chardon does not.

In 1980-81 I started teaching high school English and Drama in Chardon Local Schools. This was a larger, wealthier district in comparison to Grand Valley. Chardon had classes of over 200 students, excellent academic ratings, a long-standing drama program, both symphonic and marching bands, a choir program with a separate vocal teacher and several choral groups, and sports teams that ranged from cross country to football, tennis, volleyball, etc. Our kids were great, our parents loved our programs and attended regularly with Friday night football being the pride and joy of the whole town. My theater performances were well-attended and often filled our space to capacity.

But as I worked at Chardon I began to realize the problems related to financial issues. My classroom was in a part of the building that had been added in the early 70's. When it was full of 30 desks, there was barely room to walk around the students. It was smaller than most so when I taught theater arts, we never had enough space to move around effectively and had to move all the desks to the walls in order to do anything at all. (Sometimes if the choir room was empty I would take my students there.) There were no windows and no air conditioning in that room. When we put a computer lab into a nearby room, the computers had to have air conditioning, but there wasn't enough electric capacity for the other rooms, so the people didn't get that luxury. At some point we were able to get ceiling fans, but all they did when it was really hot was move that hot air around a little. Without windows the room never cooled at night enough to even give us a fresh start in the morning. After the Columbine tragedy we were no longer allowed to keep the end hallway doors open to get fresh air, so we cooked. I can tell you it's hard to keep the attention of 25 juniors on Shakespeare in 80 degree weather.

The after-school theater program was held in the Park elementary building more than 3 blocks away. This meant I could never begin rehearsals right after school. We had to wait till the elementary classes ended and the buses cleared – at least an hour later. The theater space was what is known as a gymnasium – a gym with a stage on one wall. By day the elementary students had gym there and by afternoon/evening we moved in. Our crews could not build sets or run lights

during acting rehearsal because of the noise, so we had to work at different times including Saturdays in order to run lights and build sets. The costume room was upstairs, and space to build our sets was a room that had been a locker room for the high school teams when the building was new in the 1930's. We had to paint large sets on the gym floor and were constantly in trouble with the elementary principal and gym teacher because the kids would spill paint and not always clean it efficiently. We have a women's restroom up a flight of stairs and a men's down a flight on the other side of stage – no handicapped access, and I would have to wait while they cleared to restart the performance after intermission. The only thing good about this space was that I didn't have to fight with the coaches for gym space at the high school building.

After hearing this you might be surprised to learn that Chardon is considered a “wealthy district” – certainly we are able to fund ourselves more easily than a Grand Valley or a Williamsburg. But it's not easy. Our share of the State's allotted \$6200 per person is approximately \$1100. When we lose students to charter schools our taxpayers pay the difference between what we get from the State and the \$6200 Charter tuition. In FY 2019 we lost in excess of \$500,000 to Charter School students.

Our oldest building is Park Elementary where the theater program is housed – it was built in the 1930's. Our newest building is the Middle School which was built in the 1960's. The high school was built in the 50's and has had 5 additions, the last in the 70's. Since I began teaching in 1980, we have run 20 general levy campaigns (9 passed), 6 PI (permanent improvement) levies (3 passed) and 3 bond issues (none passed).

I think it's important here to talk a little about what it takes to run a levy campaign. First we have to raise money - at least \$60,000– we can't use school funds to run levies. We have to get a committee together of people who are willing to raise these funds, meet at least weekly for several months, find more people to put up (and take down) yard signs, knock on doors and make phone calls. It is stressful and frustrating work and necessitates hundreds of hours and many months. If a levy is to pass, it needs the full attention of the superintendent and treasurer, as well as help from other administrators and teachers. Our superintendent has to go out and speak at countless local meetings, PTO's, and Facebook Live events as well as keep the committees going and informed. This leaves little time for them to focus on other educational priorities.

When I came on the school board in 2014 we had finally passed an operating levy after 6 tries over a period of 3 years. Since then we have passed one further

operating levy and made a valiant attempt at another bond issue. That failed once again, so we have borrowed money against our PI funds to put roofs on our buildings - at a cost of \$3.2M. We still have the same old, outdated, unairconditioned buildings we've been using since time began, but they will no longer leak.

To be fair, the State legislature has tried through the years to remedy problems with the funding, but it is a patch on a patch on an arbitrary formula. Nobody is able to explain how it works, why it starts with \$6200, and what ever happened to the Lottery money? Currently, not one school district is actually on the State formula – it simply doesn't work!

When our superintendent Dr. Hanlon told me about his work with former Representative John Patterson and House Speaker Robert Cupp, I was so excited. I thought that at long last we would have a financial base that we could count on, so that we could spend less time on levy campaigns and focus on the enormous and ever-changing needs of our students. We would be able to explain the system to constituents who already feel overburdened and want to know why the State isn't giving us more money.

I am asking as someone who has been in the “trenches” for more than 45 years that you pass this legislation and get Ohio in a position to properly educate our students. We need this legislation for the sake of our taxpayers. As a board member I find it nearly impossible to explain the reasoning behind Ohio's funding of schools. It would be incredibly helpful if I could explain the formula as presented because it's transparent, it treats all districts equally, and it is based on actual costs to educate a student as determined by professionals in the field.

Most of all I would like to see this for the students of Ohio who deserve the best education we can give them. They are our future. Our Founding Fathers recognized the importance of PUBLIC education and stipulated that we create schools that would be free to all students and funded by the citizenry. This bill, HB 110 does its job: it's fair, it's been created by educators who know what is needed, and it's explainable to taxpayers. Please pass this legislation as it has been presented by the committee. Thank you, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the committee. I am prepared to address questions from the committee at the pleasure of the Chair.