

**OHIO SENATE**  
**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**May 6, 2021**

by Eric Resnick, Member  
Canton City School District Board of Education

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, members of the committee and staff, I am honored to be here this afternoon to talk about the *Fair School Funding Plan*, formerly known as *Cupp-Patterson*, as it makes its way through this process.

As a Board Member in a school district where this matters I have watched this plan unfold. I have attended working groups since 2018, been in close consultation with our district Treasurer, and I gave testimony in the House in April 2019. My testimony was added to the weight of others that ultimately sent the plan back the drawing board.

Until April 21 of this year when simulations were released to district treasurers, I remained skeptical, and even in the opposition column, because high poverty urban school districts like mine were getting short shrift in this plan. I was clear that no matter how strongly I supported the goals and aspirations of the plan's architects, Representatives Cupp and Patterson, I could not support something that did not benefit my school district.

Our district treasurer has assured me that when the governor's Health and Wellness funds were made part of the formula, many of our concerns were cured, and that the net dollars we would be allocated would not amount to a loss compared to where we are now. This makes my full support attainable, recognizing that there are still concerns.

Looking out over the horizon, my first concern is big picture and structural, and it has less to do with the architecture of the plan, and more to do with the will of this general assembly and future general assemblies.

No matter how good this plan may be, if the general assembly does not fully fund it, it fails.

The promise, and I believe the best part of the *Fair School Funding Plan* was supposed to be that it established how much money was needed to meet the state's constitutional obligation to provide for a thorough and efficient system of common schools first, then appropriate the amount of money necessary for that to happen. It was supposed to be first money,

and driven by data and need. It was supposed to guarantee that all aspects of the formula were equitable, and funded.

The Canton City School District, my district, is a very high poverty urban district with very little property tax base from which to draw.

100 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged.

Nearly one in five have disabilities.

We have a substantial and growing population of students who don't speak English as a primary language.

Lack of housing stability is a huge challenge for us, with around 1,000 students every year becoming homeless as defined by McKinney-Vento standards. Student transience is a huge challenge for all our elementary schools.

Hunger and food insecurity are huge problems for our families. We feed 100 percent of our students free of charge lunch, breakfast, and offer dinner after school.

Preschool is still unfunded by this general assembly, still, we need to find the resources to pull off high quality preschool across the board. It is necessary to ameliorate the huge performance deficits our students start with as a result of poverty, instability and lack of enrichment.

Only resources in the form of money allow us to meet these students' needs.

The Canton City School District, like other high poverty urban and rural districts, relies heavily on the mechanisms in the formula that target assistance in the form of more funds for economic disadvantage.

And from what I understand, it is those targeted funds that make the plan more expensive than what this general assembly seems willing to pay for.

Because of those targeted funds – funds over and above the base, Canton City Schools currently receives \$8,732.88 per general population student.

If this general assembly is not going to live with the high cost of these targeted funds to districts that need them, and we cannot be assured that future general assemblies will, Representatives Cupp and Patterson's good intentions are undermined.

As a district we cannot be sure what will happen biennial budget to biennial budget, which is exactly where we are now. The general assembly must be willing to appropriate the cost of meeting Ohio's constitutional requirements as its first priority, or it is fair to ask, "What's the point?"

The fact that the current proposal calls for a six year phase in of this plan, even if passed, is not a good sign.

Can you, sitting here today, promise my community that the next two general assemblies will commit to appropriating the funds necessary to making this work? The price tag cannot be too big. Other budget priorities cannot come first. You have to raise the revenue to cover the cost, period.

K-12 education is more than a fifth of the state general fund. If the commitment to the promise of the plan is absent, Ohio, by default, devolves to a pre-DeRolph situation where only wealthy districts, able to raise lots of local money, will thrive. Where is the fairness in that?

The objection of members of this chamber, if you believe news reports, is that the price tag for the plan is said to be too high. That means it is vulnerable going forward, rather than fulfilling the promise of stability. I am not sure that's a win for school districts, and it makes me nervous. It certainly does not make Ohio's funding of public schools constitutional.

While many are pleased that the funding for charter and voucher schools is outside this proposed plan, it is also a potential sleight-of-hand.

Money is fungible. Can you assure the taxpayers of my community that appropriations for private and for-profit schools will not interfere with what is needed to run our school district, or will their appropriations continue to grow at the expense of the public schools? Accounting tricks aren't going to cut it here, and the promise of the architects of this plan is that public schools will be priority. Are you prepared to fulfill that promise, or are you willing to set it up to be broken later?

Finally, for this plan to be durable, it has to be protected from the whims of general assemblies when it comes to accountability. You will be hearing testimony on report cards later today. I will be returning at a later to speak to you about report cards.

Future general assemblies can weaponize accountability measures for the purpose of harpooning this plan, and threatening school districts'

ability to pay for such services as I referenced earlier. It's not like this sort of thing has never happened in Ohio.

For the *Fair School Funding Plan* to be durable and successful, this urge must be resisted, and our communities need to have assurance.

Finally, because I care that our constitutional obligation to provide for a thorough and efficient system of common schools is uncompromisingly achieved, I am expressing my objection to the House version for this biennial budget, which has a two percent income tax reduction on top of the reduction resulting from the alignment of the state tax code with federal law.

According to the Associated Press reports, these tax cuts will cost the general revenue fund half a billion dollars. Of course, the biggest benefit of tax cuts of these sort go to people who are pretty well off, and are not asking for it.

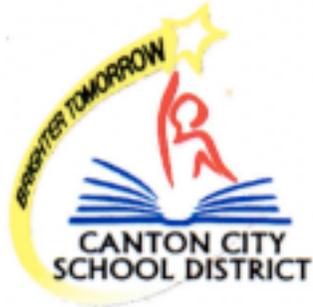
It's this kind of thinking that is going to ensure that the high price tag of this school funding proposal will never be met, causing the plan to fail, and school districts like the one I represent, to be hurt.

I have come a long way in my acceptance of this plan, but the only way we make this work is for general assemblies to appropriate what's needed to fund it.

I don't see a commitment to doing that coming from this body, and it continues to give me pause.

Wealthy districts will always find a way. People love their schools and want them to succeed.

School districts without the means are still part of the state of Ohio, and I am not seeing commitment to all of Ohio's children, regardless of zip code, from this body yet. Can you prove me wrong, or at least give me some reassurance?



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