



**Opponent Testimony House Bill 305**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**November 17, 2020**

Co-chairmen Oelslager and Callender, Vice- Chairman Scherer, Ranking Minority Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools (OAISS) on HB 305. We appreciate the efforts of the sponsors, this committee, and the others involved in this giant undertaking to reform school funding. However, as currently written, we are unable to support this legislation. This legislation to create fair and more equitable funding for Ohio's students falls short in terms of funding independent STEM schools.

For those that may not know, the creation of independent STEM schools was authorized by a provision in the 2007 biennium budget, tasking the schools with developing and using innovative and transformative instructional methods with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). We were created, in part, to be research and development labs for education in Ohio, and to be incubators of STEM talent across the state to meet the workforce demand. OAISS schools have embraced that challenge.

Our schools collaborate with local businesses, governments and academic institutes to ensure our curriculum is meeting the needs of today's workforce. Focusing on skill-mastery and problem-based learning, we prepare students for the industries of the future. Our successes are evident by our 100% graduation rate, the high rate of students that pursue STEM post-graduation, the fact that our demand that far exceeds our capacity, the number of educators, businesses and elected officials across Ohio and the country that are interested in learning how to replicate our programs, and the testimonies of students, parents and alumni of our schools. We take an innovative approach to education, and are happy to share best practices and training to educators across the state and nation. We want to see all students succeed.

Today we are testifying in opposition of HB 305. As written, it does not provide equitable funding for Ohio's independent STEM schools. Since our inception, independent STEM schools have had the lowest per pupil foundation funding of any educational model including the traditional public, career tech, community/charter schools. In fiscal year 2019, the average per pupil expenditure of \$12,473 in traditional public schools compared to independent STEM schools' average expenditure of only \$7,927 per student. This legislation creates a framework for school funding that would continue to promote inadequate funding for independent STEM schools.

In fact, HB 305 proposes to fund public community and independent STEM schools at 90% of our traditional school counterparts. This does not create equity, but continues to the underfund innovative, high-quality, high-demand, public school choice. While under this new model our schools are projected

to see a slight increase, by building a reduced funding percentage in the framework independent public STEM schools will never be fully funded, and will likely see the gap continue to widen. Moreover, the proposed funding increase falls short of the additional \$3,150.82 per student that we need to remain sustainable, and to support our robust career exploratory programs designed to inspire and prepare future STEM professionals. Innovation will be key to rebuilding our economy after COVID-19. Our students and schools will be an integral part of that solution.

Over the years, we have utilized every process at our disposal to increase our school funding and lower our costs. We have leveraged community partnerships and have built our curriculum and programs in order to qualify for weighted funding through career technical education. We have done all of this while protecting and preserving the independent STEM educational model, steeped in project based learning, that has been instrumental to our success. Regardless of how fiscally conservative we operate, our schools are facing fiscal cliffs and both the current funding and that proposed in House Bill 305 is inadequate to allow us to continue to fulfill our mission as education incubators.

Furthermore, we want to voice our concerns that HB 305 creates a new line item for community and independent STEM schools. By separating our schools out, this legislation will make our students and schools unnecessarily vulnerable to being singled out for higher cuts and reductions in tight budgets, and susceptible to political pressures. This creates another layer of uncertainty for our schools, students, and families we serve, and must be avoided.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate your leadership in reforming Ohio's school funding. We encourage the committee to oppose HB 305 as written. We ask that you ensure all public schools are fully funded and have the resources they need to fulfill their mission to support Ohio students, and avoid opening quality public schools up to uncertainties and vulnerabilities of politics by creating a new line item.

Respectfully,

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President  
Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools