



Stephanie Eichenberg
Board Member
Toledo Public Schools
1609 N. Summit Street
Toledo, OH 43604
seichenb@tps.org

Testimony for HB 305 Create a New School Financing System

Stephanie Eichenberg, Toledo Public Schools Board of Education, November 17, 2020

Chairman Oelslager, Chairman Callender, Vice Chair Scherer and Ranking Member Cera, thank you for the opportunity to express my support for House Bill 305, as it stands today.

I believe everyone who has given any thought to school finance in Ohio today recognizes that the current funding system is a patchwork that is neither logical nor predictable. Despite originating with a formula at some point this century, the cumulative impact of ad-hoc adjustments has resulted in districts leaders such as myself having only a vague notion of the direction school funding will take for each fiscal year, frequently understanding the impact several days or weeks into the fiscal year beginning.

District leaders cannot explain to our constituents how the state determines our funding currently, preventing us from telling a clear story to our communities about the financial decisions we make. It's difficult to explain our needs for local funding with clarity when the state funding decisions derive from murky logic and cause substantial fluctuations.

It's difficult enough for urban leaders such as myself, but when a suburban parent friend inquired with me about her district's levy request, I nearly tied myself in knots explaining what her relatively affluent, quickly growing district was facing financially and why her district did indeed need more local funding. Keep in mind that parent was also a CPA who audits public entities for a living. Almost no one understands Ohio's current system of school funding.

The School Funding Workgroup with the support of Speaker Cupp and Representative Patterson have arrived at a proposal that is logical. The inputs to the base cost may not represent how every district chooses to operate, but they reflect a logical model that districts can assess for similarities and differences as they seek to understand local decisions and the needs that drive local costs. This transparency will help districts explain themselves to constituents.

House Bill 305 also contains important supports for economically disadvantaged students. These students face additional challenges that disrupt learning in ways many of us in Ohio can only vaguely understand if we've had the good fortune never to have been counted in this population. A number of our students don't have secure housing, and they look forward to school meals as the predictable source of food in their lives. For these students, extra measures of support that help them to focus on learning are critical.

Additionally, House Bill 305 takes a comprehensive look at other students' needs most likely to require extra support. There is a focus on understanding adequate measures for preschool and students with disabilities, as well as English Learners. Ensuring adequate education for these populations, while also provisioning equitable technology is critical if we as a state want to take the long view and invest in students.

Starting with a good foundation regardless of background and ability will help all of Ohio's students, our future workforce, to compete for the jobs of tomorrow. At the end of the day, we all share the same goal, to graduate students who can be productive adults that contribute to society. It's tough to say that we are committed to our students' futures when we cannot describe how we currently fund education. House Bill 305 takes a giant step in the right direction and sets a path forward to refine and improve Ohio's school funding.

I urge you to support this version of House Bill 305.