

**Testimony from Jan Resseger, on Senate Proposal for House Bill 110**  
**Ohio Senate Finance Committee, June 3, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Committee: As a member of the Heights Coalition for Public Education, I write to comment on the school funding plan your committee inserted into the Senate Budget and announced on Tuesday. It is unfortunate that you turned away from the [Fair School Funding Plan](#), which the Ohio House passed by a large margin as part of HB110. I regret that, [according to Plain Dealer reporter, Laura Hancock](#), your committee's substitute for the Fair School Funding Plan reduces new public school funding over six years to about a third of the House version, increases school privatization, and cuts personal income taxes by 5 percent.

I believe a tax cut is not the right move at a time when Ohio school funding is failing our public schools and our children. Public education is enshrined in all the 50 state constitutions with the recognition that it is one of the primary responsibilities of the state. The Ohio Constitution defines public schools as an institution at the center of the social contract; public schools epitomize our mutual responsibility to each other as fellow citizens and to Ohio's children. Under the language of our state constitution as interpreted in *DeRolph*, it is our state government's responsibility to provide a system of well-funded public schools to serve every child—rich or poor; Black, Hispanic, white or Native American; English language learner or disabled. Paying taxes for government services including public schools is a civic responsibility of individuals and businesses, with the greatest obligation assumed by those with the greatest financial means.

The Ohio House gathered a committee of experts who drafted the Fair School Funding Plan over three and a half years for the purpose of ensuring that Ohio school finance would be adequate to cover the costs of the most basic educational services and to ensure that students in Ohio's poorest communities would attend schools with enough guidance counselors, school social workers, school nurses, school libraries, enriched curriculum, art and music programs, and small classes. State taxes from wealthier communities would help the state provide funding to support such necessities in poorer communities where the local property tax base is inadequate. State school funding formulas are designed for the very purpose of enabling state governments to ensure that our society provides access to quality public schools for every child as a matter of basic decency.

State tax cuts in Ohio have over time shifted the responsibility for funding public schools onto the residents of local school districts themselves, a practice *DeRolph* called "overreliance on local property taxes" and found unconstitutional. Overreliance on local property taxes is extremely disqualifying, because the residents of a wealthy community find it much easier to pass local property taxes on their often much higher property tax base while the residents of poor communities are simply forced to increase class size, lay off guidance counselors, and cut urgently needed programs.

**The Ohio Senate Budget will not provide adequate public school funding.** Ohio needs a new funding formula because currently none of the state's school districts has been receiving the amount of funding the old formula should have been delivering. The majority of school districts have either been capped or on hold-harmless guarantee for several years, but in the current FY 20-21 biennium, state funding for schools has been frozen at the FY 2019 level. Policy Matters Ohio's [Wendy Patton adds](#): "By 2020, the state share of school funding had fallen to its lowest point since 1985."

The *Dispatch's* [Anna Staver reports](#) that the Ohio House Budget's Fair School Funding Plan, when fully phased in over six years, would provide an average of \$7,020 per pupil to be adjusted by categorical funding for disabled students, English language learners, and students living in poverty. The school funding plan you substituted in the Senate's budget would add more money up front in the next two years (the upcoming biennium) than the House's Fair School Funding Plan---\$6,065 per pupil for next school year and \$6,110 in the second year of the biennium, but your plan would not provide for any further phased-in increase after FY 2023.

Howard Fleeter, a long time expert on Ohio school funding, explains that your new Senate plan does not adequately compensate for inflation. Fleeter says you are using a formula similar to what was known as the Building Blocks approach back in FY 2008 and FY 2009. He further explains: "A conservative estimate of updating the FY 09 building blocks-based base cost amount of \$5,732 for inflation would get us to nearly \$7,000 per pupil. So \$6,065 per pupil seems low." Experts designed and fine-tuned the Ohio House's Fair

School Funding Plan to respond to what school districts actually need for providing sufficient services at today's prices. Fleeter believes that your proposed substitute formula would be inadequate to cover necessary costs school districts face.

**The Ohio Senate Budget expands school privatization at taxpayer expense.** The Ohio Constitution does not envision education as part of a marketplace where individual parent consumers seek the perfect educational choice for each individual student. There is no provision under our state's constitution for private school tuition voucher programs or for charter schools.

- [\*Gongwer reports\*](#) that in the Senate's new budget proposal, you would increase the amount of taxpayer funded, private school EdChoice tuition vouchers and Cleveland Scholarship vouchers for students in grades K-8 from the current \$4,650 to \$5,500, and for students in grades 9-12 from \$6,000 to \$7,500. The size of each high school voucher as proposed in this plan would actually exceed the proposed public school per-pupil base cost by \$1,435 in the first year of the budget biennium and \$1,390 in the second year of the biennium. Why do you endorse paying significantly more tax dollars to private schools to educate high school students than you propose to invest in the students enrolled in the state's public high schools?
- *Gongwer* adds that you have inserted what appears to be both a small tuition tax credit neo-voucher program and a small education savings account neo-voucher program into the Senate's budget proposal: "Another private school-related change would create a tax credit of up to \$2,500 per year for non-chartered nonpublic school tuition for families with income below 300% of federal poverty guidelines. A \$250 tax credit for educational materials and supplies would be available to parents who home-school their children." In other states, such programs have persistently grown after initially being introduced as small programs. These additional programs will only add to the growing public expense of a panoply of voucher programs and charter schools.
- Ohio has in the past prohibited the widespread scattering of charter schools across the state. *Gongwer* reports that you propose to remove geographical limits on the siting of charter schools in the Senate's proposed budget: "Another charter-related change eliminates the restriction that prevents new charters from opening outside of a 'challenged school district.' The policy would allow such schools to be established outside of the major eight urban districts and school systems that perform poorly on state-issued report cards." Ohio already has too many poorly regulated charter schools.

I do support your decision to eliminate school district deduction funding for vouchers and charter schools. According to *Gongwer*, "The Senate school funding model, similar to the House proposal, would also see the state providing direct funding for students who attend charter schools and use private school vouchers such as EdChoice Scholarship Program awards." The plan for the state to fully fund school privatization has become especially urgent because the state now limits eligibility for EdChoice vouchers to students who live in the attendance areas of Title I schools, which are federally designated because they serve concentrations of children in poverty. Currently the EdChoice voucher program extracts the cost of the vouchers exclusively from the local budgets of school districts serving concentrations of children living in poverty, and very often the cost of the voucher is far greater than the amount the state awards these districts in basic aid for each of these students. School district deduction funding for EdChoice vouchers has become an increasingly significant source of school finance inequity since the program's eligibility was limited last November to students in living in Title I public school attendance zones.

The Ohio Constitution provides for adequate and equitably distributed public school funding, rejects overreliance on local property taxes, and omits any provision for tax supported private school tuition vouchers or charter schools. I urge you to support the Fair School Funding Plan as passed by the Ohio House in HB 110.