



AN ALLIANCE OF OHIO'S URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS AND TEACHER UNION PRESIDENTS

House Finance Committee  
Interested Party Testimony HB 33  
Offered by Paul Palomba

Co-Chair of the Ohio 8 Coalition & President of the Canton Professional Educators Association  
04/19/2023

Chairman Edwards, Vice-Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Paul Palomba, Co-Chair of the Ohio 8 Coalition and President of the Canton Professional Educators Association. I am here today on behalf of the Ohio 8 Coalition, which is an alliance of the Superintendent and teacher union Presidents for Ohio's eight urban school districts. We are an interested party testifying on HB 33. For brevity, our testimony begins with six succinct priorities and related positions that outline matters that are of most interest and concern. The balance of our testimony goes into more detail on each of them if needed.

**Budget Priorities & Positions**

1. **SUPPORTS the Fair School Funding Plan:** specifically, to update the base amount from 2018 to 2022; complete the study related to costs and economically disadvantaged students and to make the existing temporary law permanent to ensure the plan's long-term viability.
2. **AGAINST Vouchers:** and any continued expansion of any and all voucher programs. Vouchers never been proven to improve academic performance, further inequities, and establishes a costly and redundant set of operational and administrative burdens for all parties involved.
3. **With specific changes SUPPORTS Science of Reading:** including continued funding to support existing professional development efforts and establishing specific standards to qualify as an ODE literacy coach. All of the Ohio 8 school districts engage in pedagogy reflected in the Science of Reading pedagogy.
4. **SUPPORTS changes to School Transportation Policy:** the present system is broken. The Ohio 8 and other K-12 advocates have worked together to build a comprehensive set of solutions that are outlined in detail in my testimony but also via multiple letters to the Ohio General Assembly during the last year. In short, all students regardless of where they are educated must have safe, reliable, and efficient transportation and that begins with home school districts determining bell schedules and revising key terms and actions related to calamity days, due process and related penalties, and impractical transportation.
5. **SUPPORTS Student Wellness and School Based Health Center funds:** as outlined the Executive Budget including partnerships between ODE and ODH to further support student and staff wellness needs.

6. **SUPPORTS School Resource Officer:** funding (which is partial based on State share) to help curb the cost of these positions but the legislature must be clear that this is only for a portion of an SRO's salary.

*I am happy to go into more detail about any of these priorities and/or answer questions from the Committee.*

### Detailed Positions

1. **Fair School Funding Plan:** The Governor's Executive Budget has suggested a continued phase in of Years 3(50%) and 4(66%) of the 6-year Fair School Funding Plan. We appreciate the House's plan to update the base year. We urge you to also complete the study related to costs to educate economically disadvantaged students, which is the only study that has not been completed.
2. **Vouchers:** For the past 20 years, the voucher program has expanded from a limited program for students of a particular income level to one that, at 400% of FPL, would include 80% of all students in Ohio.
  - a. Vouchers remain unproven and are counter to the concept of public education.
  - b. Voucher funds can be used for private, parochial, and charter schools which do not have the same accountability regarding the use of public funds.
  - c. Voucher expansion further inequities, and establishes a costly and redundant set of operational and administrative burdens for all parties involved
  - d. Under this expansion, some children already in non-public schools will use taxpayer dollars to supplant their existing tuition payments.
  - e. The cost of this expansion could be as high as \$172 million per year but only \$25 million is included in the budget.

### **POSITION:**

1. Ohio 8 does not support the continued expansion of vouchers.
  2. There must be accountability for public funds used for vouchers including but not limited to reporting the use of those funds by each school building that receives them.
  3. Require that public record laws apply to school buildings, charter school, private school and parochial schools that accept voucher funds including but not limited to organizational budget documents, board meeting minutes, and any financial information that is required of traditional public schools to produce within the context of public record requests.
  4. Reporting of academic performance of students receiving voucher funds.
3. **Literacy Initiative: Science of Reading:** The Governor's Executive Budget recommends the use of evidenced based literacy instruction and educator professional development; funding to support literacy coaches; educator and administrator professional development and dyslexia screenings.

### **POSITION:**

1. The Ohio 8 already utilizes evidenced based literacy instruction and educator professional development utilizing the science of reading pedagogy and is supportive of this recommendation.
  2. Funds dedicated to literacy instruction and professional development should be allocated to districts already deploying science of reading including \$1,200 stipends for K-5 teachers, English language arts teachers in grades 6-12, intervention specialists, and instructional coaches and \$400 stipends for middle and high school teachers in other subject areas.
  3. Literacy coaches deployed by ODE should have at least:
    - a. 10 years of teaching reading as a reading specialist
    - b. Proven track record of successful experience as a literacy coach
    - c. Proven and successful experience is defined as higher-than-average peer reviews as well as at least annual unannounced observations of that coach during that experience timeframe.
    - d. Experience must be in the same type of school districts in which they will be placed
- 4. Transportation:** Existing state law and rules do not allow for the most efficient transportation possible. The following recommendations can help address some of the challenges that presently exist including but not limited to:
- a. Utilize standardized bell schedules for all buildings
  - b. Do **not** levy transportation penalties until due process is completed by ODE. Presently fiscal penalties accumulate every single day until ODE makes a due process related decision, this has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollar penalties which is crippling to local school district operations.
  - c. Revise communication deadlines and requirements (details attached)
  - d. Better define “Calamity Days” to include local emergencies, extreme weather conditions, and major issues impacting the condition of bus fleets (i.e.: theft)
  - e. Redefine consistent and prolonged noncompliance to Consistent: 10 days and Prolonged: excess of 20 days.
  - f. Revise Impractical Definition to ensure consistency in the following manner:
    - Time and distance required to provide transportation: The emphasis should be on distance covered. Buses are routed at a 3-mile perimeter from the neighborhood school. Students outside that perimeter are considered parent transports and will not receive transportation. The same criteria are used for all our non-public schools, and students beyond that are considered impractical. Language should be tailored to how districts route students.
    - Number of students to be transported: Emphasis on this requirement should be placed on the size of the bus and a minimum capacity of 40% usage. If student rosters are not provided on a regular basis, this language should allow districts to remove a bus from a school that is underutilized.

**POSITION:**

1. Revise existing school transportation laws to reflect the provisions supported by multiple K-12 school districts and leaders as outlined above.

**5. Student Wellness and School Based Health Center funds:** Funding in the Governor’s Executive Budget provides funding for mental health services, including telehealth services and physical health care services, including telehealth services. Additionally, The Department of Education will support school-based health centers in partnership with the Ohio Department of Health with a line of \$15M per year.

**POSITION:**

1. The Ohio 8 supports the Governor’s Executive Budget Student Wellness funding for student behavioral and physical health needs around the state.
2. The Ohio 8 supports Governor’s Executive Budget funding to support school-based health centers in partnerships with ODH.

**6. School Resource Officers:** The Governors Executive Budget supports funding (\$194 million) for new School Resource Officer hires. This funding is commensurate with each school district’s state share of their school funding.

**POSITION:**

1. The Ohio 8 supports funding to help support costs related to hiring School Resources Officers.
2. The legislature must be clear that this is one time funding and is only for a portion of an SRO’s salary.

*[The Ohio 8 Coalition](#) is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio’s eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition’s mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor, and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to shape education policy.*