



Chair Dolan, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and Members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired public-school teacher and president of Public Education Partners, a statewide all-volunteer advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit this written testimony to the Senate Finance Committee in support of continuing the Fair School Funding Plan as the House has done in its version of the biennial budget.

Let us begin with some Ohio History.

On March 24, 1997, the Supreme Court of Ohio ruled that the state funding system "fails to provide for a thorough and efficient system of common schools" as required by the Ohio Constitution and directed the state to find a remedy. As you are well-aware, the problems with our school funding system remain to this day.

Representative Robert Cupp and Representative John Patterson convened a statewide workgroup around 6-7 years ago, made up of eight practicing school district CFO/Treasurers and eight practicing Superintendents (the "Cupp-Patterson Workgroup"), to devise a new school funding formula. The workgroup spent over three years determining the inputs necessary to fund a "thorough and efficient system of common schools" that reduces the over-reliance on local property tax and creates equity in the state foundation system.

The Cupp-Patterson Workgroup analyzed national research, best practices, actual Ohio school district spending data, and drew on their own extensive experience in educating students and operating school districts to make recommendations for a school funding system that meets the needs of all Ohio's students in the 21st century.

The Fair School Funding Plan was created and vetted over the course of those three years by a bipartisan team of elected leaders, school treasurers, and education finance experts. The Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding plan was MADE IN OHIO by Ohioans, unlike many bills that are sent to the Statehouse from out-of-state entities.

In 2021, a biennial budget with the Fair School Funding Plan passed both chambers of the legislature, but only two years of the six-year phase-in of the plan were funded.

Fast-forward to 2023, and Ohio school funding is in a similar predicament.

In April, the Ohio House passed its version of the biennial budget that would continue implementing the school funding formula that lawmakers passed in the last two-year budget. The House also passed an

amendment which updated the formula with fiscal year 2022 data compared to fiscal year 2018 data, and then sent its budget to the Senate.

It's up to the Ohio Senate to continue improving our school funding system by including the Fair School Funding Plan, as the Ohio House did, in the state budget and updating the school district data to provide a current basic cost level.

Caution: Don't be misguided by Senate colleagues who question whether school districts even need the increased state funding from the Fair School Funding Plan, because "school districts are operating with carry-over balances." One does not have to be a school funding expert to understand the fact that school districts have to maintain carry-over balances- otherwise districts have no way to accommodate inflation between school levies. Ohio HB 920 requires that each local school operating levy produces the dollar amount approved by the voters on the day the levy passed, so school leaders must make that levy last several years. They do so by managing a carry-over balance to ensure that they do not have to go back to the voters with a new school operating levy every year.

Funding public education fairly is one of your primary constitutional responsibilities. The Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding plan satisfies Ohio's obligation to provide every public school in the state with the resources it needs to deliver a high-quality education to every student. You have the opportunity right now to continue to fulfill that responsibility by voting to fully fund it.

Please consider improving the House plan and strengthening education funding in the state by discontinuing the use of our public funds for private and parochial education and charter schools.

Derek Black, author of Schoolhouse Burning, summarizes trends about the lack of adequate and equitable school funding- many that have occurred here in Ohio: "Public education cuts initially looked like a response to the recession—overzealous and foolhardy, but understandable. In retrospect, the cuts look sinister. They came while states exponentially grew charters and vouchers—and remained in place well after the recession passed and state revenues were booming. To add insult to injury, various legislative mechanisms driving charter and voucher growth come at the direct expense of public schools. The contrasting reality of public schools and their private alternatives looks like a legislative preference for private school choice over public school guarantees... The most troubling thing is that it doesn't take a constitutional scholar or education historian to recognize that something strange has happened. Politicians and advocates have taken on an unsettling aggressiveness toward public education." (Schoolhouse Burning, pp. 226-227)

We request that you support and fully fund the continuance of the Fair School Funding Plan to ensure that no student or public school is disadvantaged because of income level or location.

Thank you.

Jeanne Melvin and the Board of Public Education Partners

