



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

**OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
SCHOOL FUNDING EQUITY AND FUNDING FOLLOWING THE STUDENT TESTIMONY  
EXTENDED SUBCOMMITTEE ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
June 28, 2012**

Good afternoon Chairman Amstutz and members of the extended Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding school funding and specific issues regarding equity and the concept of “funding following the student.” I am Russ Harris of the Governmental Services Division of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of our 124,000 members, we look forward to working with you to develop a constitutional public education funding formula that puts students at the center of the reform and invests in classroom priorities that build the foundation for student learning.

Currently, the school funding system in Ohio represents a patchwork of fixes that is overly complex and unexplainable. It relies far too much on the local property tax base to finance public education. The foundation formula base amount is unrelated to any measure of educational need.

OEA believes that quality public education and a school funding formula that supports it should be Ohio’s top priority. Quality public education is key to strengthening Ohio’s economy. All of us must be held accountable to ensure that our children are prepared for the challenges and opportunities in a global workplace. However, elected officials have the primary responsibility to provide adequate funding for such a system. To that end, OEA supports developing an objective method of school funding that supports strategies that build the foundation for high quality education for all students regardless of where they reside or economic status.

Equity

It is important to recognize that there are two types or dimensions of equity. There is student equity – all students are entitled to high quality educational opportunities regardless of where they live in Ohio. Each student should have access to district resources based on their individual needs. There is also taxpayer equity – taxpayers should not have to pay vastly different amounts to provide high quality educational programs and opportunities in their communities. Although it is appropriate to use local property taxes to support public education, it’s the over-reliance on property taxes that makes the system unconstitutional because it causes such a disparity in available resources that students from poor communities can’t possibly have access to high quality educational opportunities that students in wealthy communities take for granted. The state funding formula should provide a sufficiently large share of the total support for students to offset differences in local wealth.



Equity is only half of the picture on school funding. State funding systems must be both equitable and adequate. School finance litigation began with the claim that the state funding system was inequitable, and, therefore, unfair. In most cases, it was fairly easy to prove that not enough money was going to offset differences in local wealth and address the problems associated with poverty. Over time, the litigation turned to the question of adequacy and, specifically, the question of whether there is enough money in the system to meet all of the educational needs? No school funding system will achieve an adequate education for all students unless the amount of funding is sufficient to provide the resources to help students learn.

Maintaining equity and adequacy in school funding also involves planned periodic review of the funding system. Ohio's previous School Funding Advisory Committee was an excellent example of how the state could manage this difficult task in a non-partisan manner. OEA recommends that any school funding formula established should have a similar process.

### "Money Follows the Child" Concept

The undefined "money follows the child" concept is not a school funding formula. This idea is simply a means to distribute funds. It does not ensure high quality educational opportunities for all students. It fails to address the key question of defining the components of a high quality education and the cost to provide them.

OEA has serious concerns and is doubtful about the viability of this concept. Depending on how it is implemented, this idea could serve to undermine support services important to a student's education such as counseling, health care, food services, transportation and building maintenance due to the potential flow of students and resources in and out of districts. For example, if a child does not have safe transportation to and from school, the educational attainment of that particular student will suffer.

Secondly, OEA believes this distribution method will serve to undermine the public education system where the vast majority of students are educated. Ohio has a constitutional responsibility to provide a thorough and efficient state system of public education. It does not have a constitutional responsibility to provide resources for those entities not held accountable to Ohio's taxpayers.

Further, any money that follows the child should never include local tax dollars that are levied to support students that attend the local school district. These local funds are critical to providing a high quality education for the community's students and the expenditure of these local taxpayer dollars should remain in the control of the locally elected school board.

Chairman, this concludes my testimony. OEA officers, members and staff look forward to working with the legislature on this most important topic. We welcome the opportunity for our members to voice their concerns and recommendations at regional hearings to be held around the state this summer. I'm available to answer any questions you may have.