



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

**Senate Finance Committee  
Remarks Regarding 2020-2021 School Year  
Scott DiMauro – President, Ohio Education Association  
May 19, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chair Dolan and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Scott DiMauro. I am in my 29th year in education, which includes 16 years in the classroom as a high school social studies teacher. I currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the OEA's 122,000 members, thank you for this opportunity to share OEA's views on what we believe it will take to re-open schools in Ohio.

I would like to begin by thanking members of this committee and the legislature for its swift action to address the urgent needs presented by the pandemic and closure of schools. The coming school year is unlikely to look like anything that has preceded it. We will need the legislature to continue to be part of the decision-making on how we might need to adjust testing, state report cards and other education policies as we adapt to the new realities we face to keep our schools safe.

Many school districts are completing the school year this week. OEA members have deeply missed interacting with their students in person. While this is not how educators pictured the end of the school year, educators have risen to the challenge and overcome many obstacles to provide students with quality distance learning and other needs such as nutritious meals. I'm confident that educators have and will continue to do all that we can to ensure the wellbeing of Ohio's students.

OEA's top priority remains the health and safety of our students, members, and the communities we serve. OEA believes that any decision on re-opening schools next year must be driven by guidance from public health officials. Any plan should include input from educators through local collective bargaining agreements, administrators, and should provide flexibility to meet the needs of local school districts. OEA appreciates the continued work by the Ohio Department of Education and other stakeholders on how to best create a state-level tool to inform local conversations and plans for next school year.

In my conversations with OEA members, they have indicated they are worried about safety and the feasibility of maintaining social distancing in classrooms and on school buses, having adequate staff to do the cleaning and sanitizing in spaces between students, and having an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students. OEA believes that if PPE is required, it needs to be provided by the school district.



Additionally, OEA members are concerned about being able to continue to provide a high-quality public education when students are receiving instruction through a hybrid approach of in-school and online learning. The challenges of a split schedule and blended learning are likely to require greater resources and support. We understand the challenges this presents in the face of declining state revenues. But I would emphasize that if we are to reinvigorate our economy as we ask people go back to work, parents need to know their children are safe. The adequate funding of public education must be a priority.

I would be remiss if I didn't address the deep inequities in our education system that this crisis has exposed and exacerbated. School districts need time to assess the needs of all students—including students with special developmental needs; students with health challenges; and students whose circumstances deprive them of access to technology, adequate nutrition, mental health support or other essential supports—and work together to support them in the best way possible. Ohio can't overcome these inequities without sufficient and reliable funding resources.

Schools will and should reopen when public health standards can be met. When that happens, we look forward to welcoming our students to a more equitable, safe and dynamic learning environment that meets the promise of public education that all students, parents, families and educators deserve. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.