



Dr. Darlene Chambers
President & CEO
Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools
Interested Party—HB 64

Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice-Chairman Sawyer, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education for allowing me to provide testimony with Tony Gatto from ACPA, Dr. Judy Hennessey from DECA and Greg Brown from Graham Schools as an Interested Party today on House Bill 64.

The “As passed by House” version of House Bill 64 is different in many ways than the Governor’s proposed budget. Most of the policy provisions surrounding community schools were stripped out, but after the dust settled some very important policies remained. The Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools (OAPCS) continues to advocate for increased facilities funding to allow our schools the ability to direct more of the money to the important expenses such as teachers, kids and classroom materials. Being funded at sixty-five cents on the dollar makes it difficult to apply funding to the important business that charter schools are in- quality education and classroom instruction.

The budget proposal increased facilities funding per-pupil from \$100 - \$200, which is a great step in the right direction, but it still leaves our schools underfunded. Another highlight is the *Community School Classroom Facilities Grant* funding of \$25M. Allowing access to allocation will help support the replication of high-performing schools and give them the ability to serve more students. The only caveat we have with this grant mechanism is that we would recommend the language be expanded to include a two pathway approach allowing individual schools or school networks the ability to access the incentivized funding if they have an exemplary sponsor or if they are high performing schools. This will ensure that the providers of quality education have the chance to take advantage of the program, when in some cases they would be unable to because of their sponsor’s rating.

I would now like to turn it over to Tony Gatto from the Arts & College Preparatory Academy to provide testimony.

Tony Gatto

Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice-Chairman Sawyer, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education for allowing me to testify on House bill 64.

My name is Tony Gatto and I am principal of the Arts & College Preparatory Academy (or ACPA as we call ourselves). ACPA is a high performing charter high school on the east side of Columbus. The past three years at ACPA have been years of growth... growth of our student body, growth of our staff, of our progressive arts and academic programs, and of our facility. In the past three years, ACPA has nearly doubled in size to accommodate the growing number of students looking for a safe school to attend. With this growth, came new expenses. The recent allotment of \$100 per pupil in facility funding was much appreciated, as were able to shift general budget dollars (approximately \$36,000) to our instructional budget and use the facility funding for general upkeep, repairs and other common facility issues that build up as our building ages and takes a beating from our 360 creative and amazing students. An additional \$100 per pupil allotment would surely be helpful in continuing to grow our program by allowing more dollars to be diverted to the classroom and to teacher salaries.



The proposed additional \$25 million in facility funding would support continued growth for ACPA. Having access to these funds would allow us to expand our physical space in order to add grade levels and serve more students in central Ohio who need a safe place to attend school. ACPA also has a goal to build a performing arts center that our singers, dancers, musicians and actors can perform and grow in. We intend for this to be a public space as well. Currently, we have to travel to perform on a professional stage, as our current building cannot accommodate space for a stage and a large audience. Our students work hard and would benefit from having a home space in which they can learn real career skills for running a performing arts theater.

Thank you for your time and consideration for ACPA students and all charter school students in Ohio.

Dr. Judy Hennessey

Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice-Chairman Sawyer, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education for allowing me to testify on House bill 64.

My name is Dr. Judy Hennessey and I am the CEO and Superintendent of Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). We are an early college high school that offers Dayton Public School students a one-of-a-kind opportunity to excel academically and succeed in their goal of graduating from college.

We are appreciative of the Governor's proposed and House kept provisions around per-pupil funding. The increase from \$100 - \$200 for facilities funding will continue to help us grow and replicate high-performing schools. When we wanted to open an elementary school, we looked at 27 existing buildings. The conversion from an office building to a school is very complicated from a code standpoint. There are also a lot of environmental issues: asbestos abatement, freight elevators, air quality, etc. It seems counterintuitive that Dayton would have so many empty office buildings and yet no suitable space for a school. We finally located a Catholic school that was consolidating and we could lease one of their two schools.

Also, the *Community School Classroom Facilities Grant* that allows school to apply for \$25M through the School Facilities Commission will also be helpful in our replication efforts. It is difficult for charters to borrow the needed capital from other sources. We have been working with two non-profits attempting to borrow to make some major improvements to the elementary campus. It is a long process and the amount we can borrow is restricted by the appraisal. A certain percentage of the appraised value is the limit for the loans. It is difficult to accurately appraise a 90 year old school building because the comparables don't exist. The rates and terms of going to a traditional bank are prohibitive. This becomes a major obstacle in expanding. Also, since Ohio does not qualify to get Federal start-up money directly, this is another hurdle. It is difficult to secure money through the national RFP.



Greg Brown- Graham Schools

Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice-Chairman Sawyer, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education for allowing me to testify on House bill 64.

The Graham Family of Schools serves 950 students in four schools...two high schools, a middle school, and an elementary. Additional funding from the state of course is crucial to all our schools as we work to be efficient stewards of public money on one hand, and still be able to hire the best possible teachers and staff. We compete for staff with traditional districts whose funding is far greater due to the local share via property taxes and so further state support helps keep good teachers in all our classrooms.

Just now, I want to focus on one of our high schools. The Charles School at Ohio Dominican is an early college high school serving mainly students of poverty and first generation college goers. Were it not for our school and our college partner these students might never attend and/or graduate from college. We take funding from our state allocation and pay Ohio Dominican a much reduced tuition and our students can earn up to an associate's degree...but all earn some college. We work together to leverage the public funding so it works on behalf of our students and the community.

As noted, our cohort of students at The Charles School includes many children who have no one in their family who's attended college. Consequently, a great deal of our work is to support them not only with mastering writing and researching an eight-page essay, but also teaching study skills, managing time, attending to the faster pace of college classes, and tutoring and mentoring them in to personal confidence and success.

This is all very personnel intensive work. The newly proposed money from the state would help us increase our ability to hire and retain teachers and other staff who make this transition from college as a dream, at best, to college as a reality. They in turn become leaders in our community and world. We are leveraging public dollars to help raise all boats, and your support is making this dream of professional growth a reality for so many Ohioans. Thank you.

Thank you for allowing us all to testify and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.