



River View Local School District

"Building Educational Excellence for Tomorrow. . . Today"

Office of the Superintendent

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Written Testimony

to:

The Joint Education Oversight Committee

Let me begin by thanking each of you for allowing me the opportunity to provide this testimony on behalf of the River View Local School District. I would have preferred to present this in person, however, due to an important district/community commitment, I needed to stay in the county on October 13th.

My name is Dalton Summers and I am the Superintendent of the River View Local School District in Coshocton County. The River View Local School District is currently the 8th largest geographical school district in our state, covering 376 square miles. Our current enrollment is 2084 students. There are no major towns or cities within our district, we have a 52% free and reduced lunch population, and the average medium income is around \$32,000. We operate 4 elementary buildings that range from 80 to 101 years of age. Our high school is 52 years old, and our newest building, the junior high school, was built in the late 70's. In short, we define the "rural school district".

Despite having one of the highest unemployment rates in our state, low average incomes, and increasing poverty statistics, we are classified as a wealthy district in terms of property and land value. Unfortunately, this does not translate into what our residents have the ability to pay in local support for their schools so we are very unsuccessful in generating any new money revenue through local levy attempts. This was most recently evident in our failed, but highly needed, building bond issue that went down 80% to 20% this past August. We had attempted to use the Ohio Schools Facility Commission and their 19% contribution.

In the face of these rural challenges, we have been consistently rated as a high achieving district. Our graduation rate has averaged 94% over the past twelve years. We were offering over 33 college credits prior to the College Credit Plus legislation which opened the door for even more opportunities for our kids. We have taken advantage of a Straight A grant through the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative. We are a district that has proven to adapt, overcome, and succeed while learning how to do more with less.

While there are several components to the current school funding formula that have negative impacts on our district, I wish to only speak to the challenges of transportation and the continued need for fully funding these operations outside of the existing formula, so it is not subject to the guarantees, caps, and other factors that end up having negative effects on districts like ours. I am also asking you to reinstate the bus purchasing program.

We are very grateful for the adjustments that have already been made to help address the costs of transporting students. Any assistance for a district like ours that spends approximately 1.6 million dollars (8% of operating budget) a year just to transport kids to the school is appreciated. This cost is real and should not be factored into the cost of educating the student. Due to the 376 square miles and the low density population, we are spending approximately \$1,200 per student just in transportation. We believe that every child, whether 1 mile away or as in our case, 20 to 30 miles away from the school, is entitled to the quality education we continue to provide. A fully funded method outside of the existing state formula

would assist us in providing the resources we need. It would reduce the amount of funds currently being drawn away from educational needs. We are suggesting that this separate funding plan consider those districts, like River View, who have taken every effort to achieve maximum efficiency through methods such as double routing, enabling us to run the 8th largest geographical operation with just 24 buses and full time drivers. We wish only to be funded on the job being done and the students being transported rather than factors beyond the district's control. This funding should and could be based on understood, transparent, and available data that would encourage good local policy, be fully funded, and allowed to work, not subject to caps and guarantees.

Finally, we are asking that components be included for the assistance in purchasing buses suitable for the terrain they have to travel and the districts that need them most. In order for a district like River View to remain as efficient as we are, we have to replace our fleet on a regular basis. Many of our buses travel double the state average per year. (2,910 miles a day, further than driving to Disney world and back) Our roads are mostly secondary and gravel back roads with steep inclines, curves, and bends. These conditions have an increased wear and tear on our fleet causing us to maintain a strict bus replacement program. The cost for a new bus suitable for our conditions exceeds \$85,000 per unit. This causes us to draw money away from funding that should and could be used for instructional technology and even facility maintenance for our aged learning environments.

In conclusion, The River View Local School District has always and will always work with whatever resources we have to provide our students with the best education and opportunities we can. We ask that you please continue to look at this very important component to the educational process and find a way to increase the support to districts like ours who struggle to just get the kids to and from the school. Our efforts to maximize efficiencies and transport students safely are not enough by themselves without drawing funds from what is necessary to give our boys and girls an appropriate 21st century education. Our community and our students deserve your consideration, support, and efforts in this most important issue.

Thank you again for this opportunity and please feel free to contact me for any additional information or clarifications.

Sincerely,

Dalton Summers
Superintendent, RVLSD