

Testimony from Dr. Greg Harris, State Director, StudentsFirst Ohio
Senate Finance Subcommittee, 5/1/13

Chairman Gardner, Vice Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Turner, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee, on behalf of StudentsFirst and our nearly 70,000 members in Ohio, I am glad to stand here today with the Fordham Institute and representatives of several high performing charter schools to take a stand on quality.

StudentsFirst supports a funding formula where all students are funded equally, regardless of public school type. But a money-follows-the-child formula—built on a foundation of parent empowerment and quality choice options—must be met by strong accountability measures. Ohio is making strides in this area, but must go further.

In 2011, Ohio introduced strong quality provisions for charter schools that were scaled back.¹ They included the requirement that the majority of charter operators must have more above-C schools than below-C schools within their portfolio. This must be restored. Furthermore, no operator of a charter school that was permanently closed should be allowed to operate another charter school in the state. We ask the legislature to take action to ensure our K-12 system of public schools give parents and their kids' *quality* options, not lousy options.

Within the context of greater accountability, however, those charters that outperform district averages and/or have a proven impact on (value added) student outcomes need to be funded more equitably. Short of equal funding, the facilities allowance is a step in the right direction. But the current \$100 per pupil allowance is very modest

¹ In 2011, Governor Kasich put forward a budget bill (HB 153) that included a provision to amend ORC 3314.016 so that community school sponsors and operators may not sponsor any additional schools if a community school under their watch was placed in either of the lowest 2 categories of performance. This was amended in the House so that the operators were excluded from the original amendment. Furthermore, HB 153 repealed 3314.014, which held operators accountable to a high performing portfolio of schools.

compared to other states that fund facilities. Massachusetts, for example, has a facilities allowance of \$1,000 per pupil. Washington D.C. is at \$3,000 per pupil. As StudentsFirst testified before the House Finance Subcommittee, we believe the facilities allowance should begin at \$1,000 per pupil. If the cost is too high at this point, then at least increase facilities allowances for charters that outperform district averages. The state should also give the Ohio School Facilities Commission, and not school districts, the authority to allocate vacant school buildings, with quality charters granted right of first refusal.

After nearly two decades, charter schools are no longer an "experiment." They are part of the fabric of the public education system, and their students need to stop being treated as second-class citizens within Ohio's K-12 system. That said, charter operators that consistently fail to provide better options for our public school children need to be put out of business in Ohio. The quality ones, however, have earned the right to equitable funding, and the state should be doing what it can to invest in the best, bring quality charters to scale, and create better options for our kids.