

## Testimony on House Sub Bill 59-Biennial Budget

Education Finance Subcommittee, State Senator Randy Gardner, Chair

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United Schools Network

Good morning Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Minority Member Turner and members of the Education Finance Subcommittee. I regret that I cannot provide this testimony in-person. As the Executive Director of United Schools Network (USN), I have seen what is possible when schools infuse a strong culture with a laser-like focus on rigorous course work. With the right combination of culture and academic rigor, all students – regardless of their zip code – can achieve academic excellence.

The flagship school of USN, Columbus Collegiate Academy (CCA), has been the highest rated stand-alone public middle school in Columbus since opening in 2008. In 2012, CCA received an Excellent rating from the Ohio Department of Education, making us 1 of only 5 schools to accomplish this within the Columbus City Schools district boundaries. CCA has also received national acclaim by winning the prestigious EPIC Award in 2010 and 2011. In 2011, we received the EPIC Gold Gain Award making us the nation's highest performing middle school in the field of eligible applicants.

While we are excited by our accomplishments, we are saddened by the fact that nearly 30,000 Columbus students are attending failing public schools. Because of this appalling reality, we are primed and eager to serve more students. We intend to grow our small network so that more students have access to a free and excellent education. Our goal is to serve more than 1,200 students by 2018. To do this, we need the help of our states leaders.

First, we ask that our state leaders restore the Straight A Fund to \$300 million, lift the caps and make it clear that supporting high-performing community schools is a worthy investment. We are excited by the opportunity to compete for these funds and believe it will drive the kind of innovation that will benefit all students in Ohio. A clear focus on innovation and replication of the best practices will ensure all students have access to excellence.

Secondly, we ask that our state leaders increase the facilities allotment to \$300 per student for community schools. The additional funds will cover nearly fifty percent of our annual facilities expenses and allow us to direct much needed dollars to our classrooms. Far too often, we find ourselves struggling to dedicate more resources to our classrooms while maintaining an acceptable learning space for our students. Increasing the allotment to \$300 per student will go a long way to make sure we don't have to choose between fixing leaky pipes and purchasing computers for our students.

In closing, I believe our great state has the opportunity and an obligation to invest in best. There are examples of traditional district schools and community schools accomplishing success at high levels across our state. It is time for us to encourage innovation at all levels and to foster the growth of these great schools so that all students have access to excellence. Restoring the Straight A Fund and increasing the facilities allotment for community schools will have a profound and positive impact on the educational landscape in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. I am available to answer any questions you have via phone (614-205-0250), email ([aboy@unitedschoolsnetwork.org](mailto:aboy@unitedschoolsnetwork.org)), or in-person.



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