

May 6, 2021

Dear Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee. I am writing to express the urgency to affirm, implement and fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan concerning HB110:

My name is Nneka Slade Jackson. I am the proud parent of Kingston Jackson – 7th grader at *Richmond Heights Secondary School*. I serve as the current President of the *Richmond Heights Local School District* Board of Education. I stand in support of the Fair School Funding Plan at a time when the GainCap, Unreliable Report Card Measurements, and State Share unjustly penalize our schools without adequate support for calculations. As a mother of three African-American boys I understand first-hand how critical choice is for parents. I am grateful for the opportunity to choose the best fit for my children, and I choose public school. I choose Richmond Heights. However, current legislation as it stands today, provides many disadvantages for my family and countless others for making the choice of public school.

While you may review our district's state report card and would like to believe that our schools are failing, parents tend to know better. Our school district has been well known for its award-winning wrestling program for decades, and recently you may have taken notice of our championship basketball team who was a recent state contender yet again this school year. But I would like to affirm that Richmond Heights Local Schools offers far more. Our district was awarded the *Community Connectors Grant* in which our students – beginning in the 5th grade - had the opportunity to learn computer science, coding concepts and other career readiness skills associated with 21st century digital opportunities. The entire community exhibited much excitement around our collaboration with long-standing community partners to make this program a success for our students. The birth of the *Richmond Coders* was just one example of the spark that inspired residents in our community to double down.

Residents believe in the vision of our district's leadership. In 2017 they demonstrated their support by passing one of the state's largest levy issues. The Richmond Heights Community showed their support for PUBLIC SCHOOL in passing a 12.8 mil levy for the construction of new secondary school. Residents voted to provide dollars for our schools to build a brand-new community learning center – deemed by residents – the community's *CROWN JEWEL*. Our brand-new state of the art *CROWN JEWEL* is now the new home for our secondary school students, the upcoming aviation program (in collaboration with private partnerships like Flex Jet), the Cuyahoga County Public Library, and space to provide programming for the local YMCA. Not only did residents approve dollars to build this new amazing project, but attached to the issue were funds for our district to operate successfully. It is difficult to overcome the obstacle of the manufactured crisis that has been placed upon our district based on the flawed accountability practices in Ohio. Nonetheless, our students and teachers work hard to share the successes of our district despite the black cloud of the report card. Residents now BELIEVE. In fact, our Superintendent, Dr. Willis, has coined the term, *Circle of Believers* as the support for our schools has been consistently strong for the past 6 plus years. Not only are they confident in the success of our students, but the residents and business owners in Richmond Heights are savvy, and they trust that there are no world class communities with failing school districts. Therefore, they go above and beyond to support by way of their time through volunteerism, and dollars through property taxes because they know that the success of our entire community is contingent upon the success of our schools.

District leadership – Superintendent Dr. Renee Willis, Treasurer Cooper Martin and the School Board have worked extremely hard to gain and keep the trust of the community especially when it comes to

district finances. We were recently awarded the Auditor of the State Award - being recognized for our efforts to place a clear emphasis on our obligation to the residents to responsibly protect their tax dollars. The current state of affairs relating to school funding greatly hinders our ability to not only provide the quality improvements that our students deserve, but unstable financial planning creates massive barriers to the kind of financial protection that citizens who live here deserve. The fact that we are unable to use residential tax dollars as promised (in both the constitution and during our levy campaigns) because the funds are being diverted to private and charter schools who are held to lesser standards and accountability is highly unacceptable. Why would parents continue to choose our schools if we lack the financial resources to maintain and provide quality education? Even bigger, how do we continue to ask for residential support when the dollars cannot be used for what is intended – our public schools in RH? I often hear that many of the legislative consequences that we experience in RH are unintended. But when you are impacted by it daily it feels very intentional and in fact purposeful. Please prove me wrong and make this situation right. Uphold your primary constitutional responsibility as a Senator by funding public education fairly. Please support the Fair School Funding Plan described in HB110.

Best,

Nneka Slade Jackson
Richmond Heights Local School District
Parent and Board President