

Good afternoon Chairman Amstutz and members of the extended Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding school funding. My name is Jeff Rhodes, and I teach at North Royalton high school.

I always tell my students you're only what your actions say you are. I believe that statement a great deal and preach it even more. We can all say we want to be or do things, but at the end of the day it is what we actual do that matters. I think this is an important lesson for my students to learn. They can say they will do their homework or project, but at the end of the day what they actual do is what they are capable of. I have spent my career doing, instead of talking. I have been recognized for my teaching on the national, state, and local level. This year I received my master teacher designation. To say I love what I do is an understatement.

My story is that of many teachers in the state of Ohio. But what I actual teach is a little different than most teachers. I am a technology education teacher, though most of you would probably refer to me as a "shop teacher." While most of you in front of me have that image of 9<sup>th</sup> grade class making clocks, we are preparing kids for the workforce. Along with woods and metal shops across Ohio, we also teach the engineering programs, the drafting programs, and robotics programs. When people talk about Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), they are talking about technology education. We are STEM education. Simply stated, we teach direct employment skills. My discipline represents the 31.7 percent of Ohio high school students who do not enroll in college out of high school. Unfortunately, for many of these high school graduates little is done to prepare them for the world of work.

Whenever we have the education reform conversation, and we have it a lot, we say we want funding to make sure that our students are prepared for the 21 first century and to be workforce ready. Yet programs like mine, which directly service those 31.7% who do not enroll in college or two year school out of high school. My program is the only preparedness they have for the workforce and to become productive self-sufficient adult's. It is at the core of what we are trying to do in education. Prepare students for their future, whatever that might be.

Now, knowing my class is probably the best preparedness for close to 1/3 of our population, we continue to cut the funding to it.

Within the past 10 years, out of just over 30 school districts in Cuyahoga County, 50% (half) of the Tech Ed programs were downsized or eliminated and most likely very similar results across all 88 counties in Ohio.

Most of the programs cut were in districts that with a lower percent of students going to college. Schools like:

Bedford City School District - downsized

Berea City School District - downsized

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, - downsized

East Cleveland City School District - eliminated (HS)

Euclid City School District - downsized

Fairview Park City School District - eliminated (HS)

Parma City School District - downsized entire program

Richmond Heights City School District - downsized

Wealthier districts didn't fare much better with cuts to schools like:

Brecksville City Schools - downsized  
Bay Village City School District - downsized Rocky River City School District – eliminated (HS)  
Mayfield City School District - downsized  
North Olmsted City School District - downsized  
Olmsted Falls City School District - downsized  
Shaker Heights City School District – eliminated (HS)  
Solon City School District, Solon - downsized  
Strongsville City School District – downsized

I don't need to give you numbers, look around us. We say or hear it every day, these kids aren't prepared.

I think we all “hear” about stories like this, programs like mine being shut down, but let me tell you how that personally impacted the education AND students in Ohio at North Royalton High School. I started and taught a very successful robotics program alongside our physics teacher, Mr. Nestoff. Our kids designed and built every part of our robots, and these were not small robots. These are 120 lbs 4x4 sleek and fierce aluminum you would not want to be in the way of. We had AP college bound students and dropout risks working side by side. In our first year we won the “rookie of the year” award and qualified for the prestigious FIRST *national* robotics competition. We traveled down to Atlanta to compete against the best and brightest in the nation in a robotic competition, not football or basketball, it was robotics. It was one of most humbling experiences I have had in my career to work with those kids. We were one of only 10 teams from the state of Ohio to compete that year. This program cost roughly \$15,000 to run, in which I have to privately fund raise. Let me repeat that, it was all done by donations. The school wanted, but didn't have the funding to spare, and I promise you that is nothing uncommon in this state. I did this for several years. We left that competition due to the financial requirements of the Robot Fighting League, which was *only* a couple thousand dollars. We were one of only 10 high schools to compete in this state wide competition. This just wasn't a high school competition; it was open to anyone who wanted to join from the NASA engineer down the street to basement hobbyist. It was cheaper, but a lot more competitive. In the end we got more students involved and that was our goal.

After a couple of years we then switched to an underwater robotics. I know it is probably something that you have never heard of it, but it is one cool program. My students actual built an ROV, think of what fixed the BP oil spill, that maneuvered with a joystick controlled with a circuit they built from scratch. Students did it all; they built and programed everything on it, like every other robot my program ever built. That was until 2008 when my robotics program was cut to due to a failed levy. The school closed at 3, and all after school programs were cut. It was just one year, but it was enough to end the program. *It was just 1 single year until we passed the levy.* In that year, a large group of seniors graduated, taking with them the energy and wisdom in that club. See, students didn't learn just from me, they learned from each other. They fed off each other. When that dynamic left, I couldn't attract kids back to the program. After a couple unsuccessful attempts to revive the program, it was decided that we had to shelve the program for the foreseeable future. I have since started a speech and debate club, which again, isn't funded by the school and I work on voluntarily basis. Again, no money for new programs or clubs. This was our first year and we were literally 1 point short of qualifying for the state competition, but the teacher in my school who donated the painting I auctioned off to fund the club, real life kid, who I would like to add was so helpful to my students, knocked us out. I told him we need a better painting this year.

Now, I know you think that story is anecdotal. That was one story I have had over my nine years of teaching. Well it is far from it. The funding doesn't only impact the students; it impacts the teacher's ability to teach as well. We always hear about that teacher who takes money to buy

their own supplies. Well, I would like to you one of my many stories. On top of an engineering class, a machining and welding, drafting, and graphics program I also teach a home maintenance class. I take freshman through seniors, boys and girls, and teach them home skills. You know, that dream we want everyone to achieve. I never understood how we inspire people to own a home, but never teach them how to take care of it. Well I teach my students how to frame, wire, drywall, and paint a corner of a house. This is no small project; groups of 4 build 4x4x8 sections of a home, door and window included. Last year, due to rising costs of everything I was about \$400 short on my projected budget for my project. Again, due to no fault of the school, there was no extra money. The money in the grand scheme isn't much, but it is enough to illustrate my point.

**Conclusion:**

We cannot provide the best opportunities for student learning because we are not supported, and that is why we are having this conversation today. Few, if anyone in this room thinks education is adequately funded. No one is here claiming that school funding works in Ohio – it is not working. I will tell you the answer to the problem, and it has little to do with millage adjustments, tangible property taxes, or shifting cost from state to local or back to the state. It deals with understanding that it is not a one size fits all system. That the students from Cleveland need different things then the students from North Royalton, and there is a cost difference.

Though that is where what we say and what we actual do are two different ideas. We all know we have been fighting poverty through the education system. It is working, slowly, but it is expensive. Every time a community program gets cut, the school picks it up, no matter what community you are in. Admitting we are doing more than just teaching kids the three r's is the first step. Next, give us real access to materials and resources, I know you say we have that, but those are highly limited and highly competitive programs. When only 10-20 of schools qualify for a program, it is hardly resources we can count on. If I wanted 20 robotics kits to teach students real life applicable physics, where would I get that money if my local district doesn't have it? It is an investment in the future, not wasteful spending today. Instead we get expensive mandated tests from one or two selected companies.

At the end of the day, after you drive back to Columbus hundreds of thousands of students from around the state are getting ready to start school this week. Some will walk into state of the art facilities; some will be walking into older buildings where learning and technology is limited because there is inadequate electricity. The students are counting on us to provide a statewide system of high quality public education to every student in Ohio regardless of where they live.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. The teachers of Ohio look forward to working with the legislature on this most important topic. We are thankful for the opportunity to voice our concerns and recommendations at these regional hearings

Thank for Mr. Chairman, I'm available to answer any questions you may have.