

Good Evening,

My name is Annette Zell. I am a third grade teacher at Heritage Elementary and a parent of three students who attend Lima City Schools.

I became a teacher because I wanted to teach children. I feel that there is no greater gift we can give our children than a wonderful education that expands the mind and opens doors to opportunity. I chose to teach in and send my own children to a public school because I feel that a great education should be offered to every child equally and public schools provide that opportunity. I chose to teach in Lima City Schools because it is where I felt I could make the most impact as a teacher. However, as school funding reductions take place and the burden of funding public schools is placed on local property taxpayers not all is fair and equal for all schools, and my already difficult job becomes even harder.

In my district, we have seen the last several of our levy attempts go down to defeat. This has meant that there has been nothing to make up for the cuts to our district made by the state. This has caused cuts in programs and an increase in class size diminishing the experience for the students. Because of these cuts, some families chose to leave our school and enroll in charter schools or to apply for vouchers and attend private schools. The teachers do the best they can to do more with less, but at the end of the day our students are not receiving the quality of education in which they have a right to and deserve.

I had an opportunity to teach in what I consider a classroom that works. Several years ago at my building we established an alternative room in my school in which the class size was kept low and resources were abundant. This room was for students who were struggling in Kindergarten and were not quite ready for first grade but were also not good candidates for retention. The class size was kept under 16 students, an aide was appointed to my room, every student had a computer, school psychologists held parent classes on how to help the students at home, resource teachers, such as speech pathologists, visited my classroom weekly, and I received training on a plethora of strategies to help these students learn the skills needed to continue on to 2nd grade. At the end of the year, we found that these students excelled. They were able to not only learn what they struggled with in Kindergarten but also the first grade skills they were required to master. I would love to say that this is a testimony to what a great teacher I was, but the fact is I would not have been able to lead those students to such great gains if one of the elements listed above would have not been available to me. Unfortunately, all those resources had a cost, and we could only continue the program for one more year before we had to return to larger class sizes due to cuts.

This type of classroom is what our students deserve. Every student struggles at some time during their academic journey, and our public schools should be equipped with the staff and the resources to handle every need. Public schools should be striving to provide children with a myriad of opportunities that engage and inspire, rather than worrying about how to make up for lost funding or passing a levy to get by. I would ask this committee to please find a fair and equitable solution that will allow Ohio to raise the revenue necessary to fund great public schools. I ask this for my own children and the children I teach.