

Testimony of Catherine Monteiro, Second Grade Teacher,  
Emerson Elementary School, 44 North Vine Street,  
Westerville, OH 43081 to the Ohio Finance Committee/  
House Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

July 18, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Hello! I'm Cathy Monteiro, a second grade teacher at Emerson Elementary School in Westerville, Ohio. I also own a home and pay taxes in Westerville.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about school funding.

I beg you to increase funding for schools.

The State cut \$15 million from our District's budget last year. This has had a devastating effect both on our school district and on our community.

We have suffered through two bruising levy elections that divided our community into those who support the schools and those who oppose increasing property taxes. This conflict followed us into our churches, our businesses, our streets and our schools. Brutal comments spewed daily through social media sites, on the streets, and in letters to the editor. Now a movement is afoot, The 1851 Center for Constitutional Law, which is trying to roll back a previous levy by the amount of the Emergency Levy, passed in March. The fight continues at least through November.

For me, the most devastating effects were felt in the classroom. Emerson was a World Languages and Cultures Magnet School. It was a school of choice within the Westerville School District. Students "applied" to get in and were chosen by lottery. Students had the benefit of learning

Spanish through their elementary years. They also focused on global and inquiry learning. Emerson also is the oldest school in Westerville, built in 1897. This beautiful brick building looks like a castle. Emerson was rated one of “The Top Public Schools” ranked number 5 in Franklin County. (See Columbus Monthly, 3/2009.) (Longfellow, another Westerville magnet school ranked number 1 for all of Central Ohio. It is now closed.) The day after the November levy failed, students came streaming in the classroom in tears. They knew that the magnet school program was on the chopping block if the levy didn’t pass. I can’t tell you how difficult that day was. I was trying to comfort my children, comfort my coworkers, and hold myself together. As it is now, Emerson is in limbo. Two of our magnet schools have shut their doors. We are in a “bridge year” while the district decides what to do with our program. The magnet school program was a great way to give students and parents choices about education within the public school system. These choices are now eliminated due to cuts in public education funding.

This is a partial list of what has been lost just at Emerson:

- Our Spanish teacher no longer teaches at our school. At a time of global competition when most of the world recognizes the need for a second language and that the best time to teach this is when children are young, this is devastating and short sighted.
- Our PTA invested thousands in training teachers so that we could become an International Baccalaureate school. Our staff invested countless hours in training and meetings trying to meet the rigorous requirements of this program. We are forced to abandon plans for Emerson to become an IB school.
- Our related arts program has been gutted. Next year we will have very limited art, music, P.E., and library. The

science is clear that integrating the arts improves overall academic achievement. At a time when our students are facing record obesity rates and related health problems, cutting PE classes is anathema. How can I possibly meet the rigorous reading standards demanded of the Common Core without frequent access to a well-stocked library and knowledgeable librarian?

- We have already lost our night custodian. This has forced me to clean my classroom every other day. I agree that this work isn't beneath me, but it takes precious time away from my schedule so that I have less time to answer emails, phone parents, grade papers, or plan lessons—the job I was hired to do.
- Teachers are dipping deeper into their own pockets to buy needed school supplies that the District and many parents simply cannot afford.
- The most pernicious effect that I feel is an overwhelming pessimism. In a typical year, teachers continually evaluate their lessons thinking, "How can I do this better next year?" Now there's so much doubt and uncertainty, that fewer of us are doing this or doing it well. Also, I've been to several of our PTA meetings where both parents and teachers are throwing up their hands. What's the point of raising money for a school or program that might not exist next year?
- Our District has seen a record number of retirements this year. We are losing years of experience and those who have mastered the art of teaching. This cannot be replaced.

Ohio's method of funding education has been held to be unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court four times since 1997. (DeRolph v. State. ) Each of those cases found that

Ohio's overreliance on local property taxes creates an unequal education. The quality of education that a student receives should not depend on the zip code in which he or she lives. The state's cuts in aid to local school districts have exacerbated this problem.

The state has effectively shifted the tax burden from the state to the local municipalities. Local governments are forced to choose between paying for cops or paying for teachers.

Much has been said about closing the achievement gap. Many of our minority students have special needs that require funding to meet. Teachers are frustrated when they are blamed for failing to close this gap when they aren't given the tools we know we need to do this.

I'm tired of hearing people say that we just don't have money to educate our kids. As a former Public Defender in the Juvenile Courts, I never heard a judge say that we don't have money to lock up a kid. We have a choice to make: invest in our schools or pay for the cuts in education in our society.

Thank you.

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