

Testimony of Eli Hurwitz, Ninth Grade Teacher, David H. Ponitz Career Technology Center, 741 Washington St., Dayton, Ohio, 45402-8446 to the Ohio Finance Committee/ House Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

July 23, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Eli Hurwitz. I am a ninth grade English teacher at Dayton Public Schools' career technology center.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about technology and regional shared services.

Before I begin, I would also like to thank you for having this dialogue in the first place. Over the weekend I went perusing through the previous bits of testimony this committee has heard. Actually, it was quite a bit of information for a weekend, but before anything else, preparation is the key to success. And since you are making decisions on what is roughly 54% of the GRF based on these discussions, I applaud your research.

Research is a great segue for why I am here. I am a product of public education. I graduated from the Dayton Public Schools and Wright State University. I was taught how to research in these two public institutions by public school teachers. Many of you had a similar public education and it brought you to these illustrious seats of public service. In school, you learned how to find the information you needed and how to use it.

Times are tough. My family is on a budget like everyone else, right now we are deciding between cellphones and cable television. Both are luxuries, both increase our quality of life. The state and school districts are dealing with similar issues. Not enough money to go to the things that increase quality of education.

Since 1997, Dayton has been steadily losing more and more of its funding to the community school or "charter" school programs in the city. When I left the private sector to teach in 2001, Dayton had become the charter capital of the country, only to lose that inglorious title later through the efforts of Hurricane Katrina.

I live right outside of an affluent community. My daughters struggled with the comparison between what the families and children in their school had and could do with what we don't have and couldn't do. Likewise it is difficult for DPS to reconcile what the "community schools" can do, and get away with and what DPS can not do nor wants to get away with.

To illustrate this I like to point to the Dayton Early College Academy. This is an amazing charter school. Their outcomes are, if not the best, close to the best in the state. This is the power of effective teaching plus a selective student body. They have great results even with a majority of kids coming from poverty. How do they do this? How can Dayton Public emulate this program? In 2008, DECA had 99 freshmen according to the ODE. In 2010 they had 45 juniors. If Dayton Public had the ability to not count over half

of its lowest performing students, I am sure it could look more successful than it currently is. But that is not public education. In public education, we take and keep all comers.

This is especially true when many if not most of those students make their way back to DPS from DECA and other charters. In the mix of my six English classes, with around thirty kids in each class, roughly 50 students are returnees.

It is my job to teach these kids how to read. The breakdown in my class last year was 20 of my 165 kids started the year reading at or below a 3rd grade level, 60 read between a third and 5th grade level, 50 read between a 6th and 8th grade level and 35 read at or above a 9th grade level.

It is my job to teach them how to write. After our first pretest, more than half the kids couldn't identify a noun in a sentence nor could they write a complete paragraph.

And I have to teach them how to research on the internet and in those things we call books. For DPS students, their freshmen year is the first year they have access to a trained librarian that focuses on the resources they need. In your positions, I am sure you recognize the importance of a research specialist.

My previous statement shows many of the issues facing urban education, but I in no way am I pointing at DPS teachers and blaming them. We have amazing teachers. On a daily basis they are taking the most disadvantaged students in the area and helping them see that tomorrow can be better; that the day after can be even better. We are helping give them the advantages a public education should provide all Ohioans and all Americans.

I want to come back to the topic of research, because it is the instrument of a critical mind. Research creates new knowledge. When all you know is the corner of Salem Avenue and Malvern Street, new knowledge takes you around the world. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts and money flowing out of the district to charter schools, DPS loses needed resources. Forty seven million dollars leaves the district to charter schools every year. We lost our LD tutor this past year at Ponitz, a position that was providing needed help to my low readers. We lost intensive ESL services at all but a few schools, which means my ESL students at Ponitz do not get all of the resources they would if they went to our ESL high school. If they choose to go to the ESL high school, they do not get the job training of the CTC or the Sinclair scholarship we have worked out with the community; this is a tough decision. Arts education is threadbare, one teacher to almost 600 students in the elementary grades. When the charters moved in, one of the first things we lost were librarians serving elementary schools. Research has shown that like effective teachers, effective elementary librarians (and they are teachers) are a vital support to early literacy and critical thinking skills and improve student success throughout their education.

Another effect of reduced funding is I can barely scrape together a class set of novels for my 30+ students and we have a textbook that is 13 years old, Google just turned 13 so you can see that things have changed a little over the last 13 years. The plan is to update the text book in about 5 years, but the budget projection shows a huge deficit for the district then, so I will let you imagine how that will work. Just like I will leave you to imagine the logistics of effectively teaching the same novel to 165 students while only letting them read the book in class during the 45 minutes of instructional time.

I want to tie this all together under the umbrella of regional shared services and technology. Technology could provide our students and system a solution for out of date textbooks, and many districts are moving towards BYOT (bring your own technology) programs and open source (free or inexpensive) textbooks. But in a district that has over 90% of its students living in poverty, if the choice is between food or a computer, food is going to win. They can use a computer at the public library but they can not eat books.

Sadly, Dayton suffers even more from the effects of poverty in its property tax problem. Less than 90% of the property owners in Dayton are paying their property tax, which leaves the school system with less money than it budgeted. Here is an opportunity to use shared regional resources, perhaps a regional district textbook or tablet purchasing program, so entire regions explore and adopt texts and technology at reduced bulk prices. Or we could continue to follow the technology model that INFOhio affords our schools, adding textbooks into their on line offerings.

In the end I want to emphasize that regardless of the struggles our students face, we as teachers are constantly working to help them overcome their personal obstacles and be as successful as they can be. Our students do not know the resources they are lacking because they have been lacking them for so long. Only when students come in from outside the district do they and their parents notice what they lost. Even then it is only minimal, because like good parents, we teachers try to hide the struggle from the kids. We are effective teachers and Dayton's scores have been going up year after year at a steady clip. The teachers doing this have seen hundreds of their peers lose their jobs due to budget cuts. We have not had a pay raise in five of the last seven years and health care costs have gone up over that time, so our most experienced teachers are actually doing this work for less money.

More with less.

Our children in Dayton are not getting what they deserve. We continue to become more effective as teachers while our resources keep dwindling. In Dayton, student success could be greater. Our own representatives have spoken out about the problems "bad" teachers cause in schools; have blamed unions for making it impossible to remove "bad" teachers. The media has picked up on these statements, and often drops the word "bad" and unfortunately blames teachers and their associations outright for the problems with education today. You have heard plenty of testimony that shows there is a systematic problem instead of a specific person to blame. Through the dressing down teachers received in the press and in the state house during the SB5 debate, Dayton teachers have still improved. In the face of financial hardship, we are constantly moving forward. Imagine what we could do with more resources.

Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Eli Hurwitz. I teach ninth grade English at the David H. Ponitz Career Technology Center at 741 Washington Street in Dayton Ohio. You are welcome in my classroom at any time; my kids would love to meet you. School starts again on August 15th. You can reach me by email at [ehurwitz@dps.k12.oh.us](mailto:ehurwitz@dps.k12.oh.us).

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again.