



House Finance Committee

Written Testimony

March 30, 2017

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Brian Rose and I am here on behalf of Learning.com. Founded in 1999, Learning.com helps students, teachers, and schools excel in a digital world by providing K-12 solutions to support districts as they transition to digital content and build students' digital literacy skills.

Learning.com has spent the past 17 years partnering with educators to help ensure that students can use technology safely and effectively. We currently work with 2,500 districts and serve 5.6 million students across more than 20 countries.

OHIO PARTNERSHIP

Through a partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, Learning.com is in its 4th year of providing districts and students in the state of Ohio with access to online safety curriculum, which ensures that students are instructed on how to be safe online, while enabling the Ohio Department of Education to fulfill federal e-Rate funding compliance requirements associated with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

With an investment of \$350,000 per year, 256 Ohio districts serving approximately 400,000 students are utilizing Learning.com's online safety curriculum. This investment has provided Ohio school districts and libraries with over \$1 billion in Internet and telecommunication service discounts.

PROPOSAL: To ensure this return on investment is continued, we are proposing an amendment to further clarify this investment's intended uses to comply with the aforementioned e-Rate funding requirements. This language will continue to protect the funding provided to Ohio's school districts while providing our children with the necessary training to remain safe online.

OHIO'S DIGITAL LITERACY CHALLENGES

The terms digital literacy typically refers to a broad set of knowledge and skills critically important to success and effectiveness in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces. While definitions may vary, the list of skills often comprise areas such as technology operations, information and media literacy, digital citizenship, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, creativity and innovation.

In many school districts today, digital literacy skills are not being taught systematically, which has resulted in varying skill levels within student demographics. Unfortunately, the student population most typically challenged is those students that attend low-income and rural school districts. Many of these schools lack consistent access to educational technologies often utilized by more affluent

schools to teach these crucial skills. This inequity of access to educational technology and the instruction of necessary digital literacy skills, as well as absence of intentional instruction of and digital skills is creating a “new digital divide” that threatens to negatively impact the ability of low-income and rural students to perform academically, and in the future, succeed in college and compete for careers in the workplace.

According to the 2016 Ohio Poverty Report, 80 of Ohio’s 88 counties, which include a vast majority of its urban population, experienced an increase in poverty rates from 2010-2014. **School districts residing in these 80 counties contain approximately 70% of the total K-8 statewide enrollment.**

As evidence of the need for intentional digital literacy skills instruction throughout the state of Ohio, Learning.com conducted an assessment of elementary and middle school students. The assessment aligned to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards, a well-recognized and respected authority on digital literacy skills. **The assessment found that 82% of elementary students and 87% of middle school students scored below Proficient in their digital literacy skills.**

The economic welfare and long-term success of Ohio depends on improving the instruction and learning of all students. Closing the new digital divide holds tremendous promise toward this objective.

PROPOSAL: In order to provide equity and access to high quality digital literacy instruction for low-income and rural students in Ohio, we are proposing the development of a digital literacy pilot program that will deliver a scalable, digital learning model throughout Ohio resulting in measurable performance improvements for students no matter where they reside or their socio-economic status. This program will focus on:

- Supporting current state initiatives for effective use of technology in the classroom;
- Assisting educators to integrate digital resources in the classroom and providing access to digital literacy content and curriculum that is aligned to Ohio standards;
- Ensuring measurement of student progress;
- Strategic planning with administrators to ensure flexible learning and implementation within each district and school.

Investments in closing the new digital divide are critical as technology-enhanced teaching and learning has begun to fundamentally reshape education at all levels, contributing to improved student engagement and academic performance, as well as preparing students for success in college and careers. It is critical that all students are equipped with necessary digital literacy skills to benefit from this new educational approach. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important educational matter.