February 22, 2016

The Honorable Andy Brenner, Chair
Education Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives
Riffe Center, 13th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chair Brenner:

On behalf of our associations, we are writing as interested parties with regard to Amended Substitute House Bill 410, which addresses the challenging problem of student absence and truancy.
First of all, we support the necessary changes to the definition of truancy by altering current language defining truancy in terms of days to a similar calculation reflecting hours (since school instructional time is no longer expressed in days.

Also, we support the concept of intervention to address the root causes for a student's absence from school. We believe that the intent of the legislation is to escalate those interventions if the student and his or her family do not follow the plans to improve school attendance. Certainly, earlier individualized interventions emphasizing collaboration with parents and with community agencies should produce positive results.

We also appreciate the requirement that the State Board of Education is to develop a model policy for violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior (the last of which would include excessive absences). This should permit a more uniform enforcement among all school districts and therefore attract a more common understanding among Ohio parents.

We also support moving the effective date to the 2017-2018 school year since we feel that this will allow sufficient time for staff training and for development of templates or guidelines for the required intervention plans.

At this point, our principal concern is the resources available to many school districts and various agencies in the community (including the county juvenile courts). We would note that many smaller districts do not employ their own full-time attendance officers but often share them with other districts. Since the attendance officer is a required member of the absence intervention team, this could present a challenge in meeting the requirements of developing plans in a timely manner and in monitoring those plans. We also have no way to estimate the time that will be required of administrators (who are also mandated members of the team).

We would also note that the concern over resources is not limited to smaller districts. While larger districts generally have the services of full-time attendance officers, we would note that the sheer caseload is potentially daunting. For example, if 10% of an urban school's enrollment of 700 students eventually is under an absence intervention plans, this would require monitoring 70 separate plans.

While it is our understanding that all county juvenile courts have a diversion program, it is our experience that there are considerable differences in the resources available to implement and monitor such programs. We understand the importance of reducing the determination of children as unruly and of not overcrowding the dockets of our juvenile court system. We simply hope that resources will be adequate to implement the worthy goals of this effort.

If we can answer additional questions, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully submitted,

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