

Proponent Testimony for H.B. 108
House Education and Career Readiness Committee
March 28, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 108, The Financial Literacy and Informed Student Document Act.

My name is Tom Rutan and I am retired (Dec. 2013) from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) where I worked as an Associate Director in the Office of Curriculum and Instruction. One of my many duties there was to serve as point person for the agency for financial literacy. Prior to my retirement, we successfully presented the first set of Academic Content Standards for Financial Literacy to the State Board of Education for approval. I chaired that effort and along with a very diverse development team composed of content area teachers, business professionals, Ohio Chamber of Commerce representatives, representatives from the State Treasurer's Office and along with several of my associates from the ODE, we researched existing standards from other states and other related organizations (e.g. JumpStart Coalition, Jr. Achievement) and crafted a set of standards that can be used by all schools in Ohio.

I am a career educator and served 13 years as principal of Grove City High School. I was fortunate enough to be selected as Ohio's Principal of the Year in 1991. Following my 31+ years of public education service, I headed two non-profits that focus on financial literacy and business planning, the Ohio Business Week Foundation and Jr. Achievement of Central Ohio. After a decade of non-profit work, I transitioned to ODE and spent seven years there revising existing standards, creating new standards and assisting schools with the implementation of the same.

Thus, I have personally witnessed the integration of financial literacy in Ohio's schools from many different perspectives. I can say unequivocally, that students today receive inconsistent instruction in financial literacy depending on the decisions of their individual school districts and the emphasis (or lack thereof) that is placed on financial literacy, including the assignment of teachers for that content. For example, we have districts in Ohio that teach stand-alone financial literacy/personal finance courses for academic credit taught by well-trained educators in the areas of Family and Consumers Science, Business Education and/or Social Studies. Other districts include a unit of personal finance within an already crowded semester long American Government course. Some include it in math courses. One that I know of includes personal finance as part of their Wellness Program with Health Teachers delivering the content. It's much like a popular ice cream store; thirty-one different flavors. You pick 'em!

There are three licensure areas authorized to teach financial literacy/personal finance; Family and Consumer Science, Business Education and Comprehensive Social Studies. The Ohio Core (Am. Sub. SB 311) legislation, which was the first law to require the teaching of financial literacy to all students prior to graduation, permits financial literacy to be imbedded within the context of another course allowing ANY licensed teacher to teach the content as long as he/she is licensed to teach that particular course. It also allows outside organizations such as Jr. Achievement to provide that instruction to students. It is silent on the granting of credits.

HB 108 provides consistency to an otherwise inconsistent landscape. It stresses alignment with the approved standards and establishes a common course length taught by a properly prepared, fully licensed educator. Plus, as a graduation requirement, it mandates that every child take and pass the course to earn a one-half credit toward graduation. (NOTE: That is not in addition to current credit requirements, but rather is taken from the credit electives simply reducing that number by ½ credit.)

At a time when young people are facing challenges paying off college loan debt (Ohio average just over \$30,000), coping with mounting credit card bills, wrestling with home mortgages/rents, car loans, etc., they need the financial wherewithal to handle those challenges. In the past, the responsibility for teaching young people personal finance often rested entirely with parents. Some parents handled those tasks very well. But at other times that proved inadequate at best. Single parents, in particular, working two or more jobs to meet household budget needs often cannot provide proper instruction in this important area. Many times, even they (the parents) need better instruction on budgeting and handling personal financial challenges. The same is sometimes true of our new Americans who have migrated here from other countries. They need all the help that they can get understanding our American free enterprise system.

Schools are better positioned to provide quality, consistent instruction. This should be the same instruction anywhere in the state regardless of Zip code. A trained teacher, delivering content based on standards that yields a ½ credit toward graduation is a big step in the right direction toward a more financially competent younger generation.

We owe it to our young people to provide them with this content and the skill set that they will use every day for the rest of their lives. It will enrich them, their families, their communities and our state. Many students will matriculate to college where these skills will better position them to be successful students and productive citizens after graduation.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of this legislation, and thank you also for thoughtfully considering support of HB 108.

Thomas D. Rutan
Retired educator