



The Alliance for High Quality Education
Testimony – House Bill 544
House Education and Career Readiness Committee
June 19, 2018

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee. Thank you for the opportunity today to offer written testimony for House Bill 544, legislation that prescribes standards for school safety enhancements in new Ohio school facilities.

My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of The Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE*). Prior to joining the Alliance as its executive director, I served as superintendent for the West Geauga Local Schools for thirteen years. I earned my doctorate at Cleveland State University in the area of Urban Educational Administration.

I would like to offer my support for the provisions associated with HB 544 that would assist school districts when they are considering incorporating new safety measures into their building design planning. In my discussions with members in my organization as well as other superintendents throughout the state, the need for guidance and direction in this area is both timely and critical. As school personnel begin to review numerous ideas and improvements related to safety and security measures, having a clearinghouse of ideas developed by professionals with expertise in this area would be extremely beneficial.

In addition to using these recommendations in the design of new buildings, schools considering facilities renovation and upgrades would also be able to reference the information to assist them in making decisions at the local level. The recently created Alternative Facilities Assistance Program (AFAP), which allows districts to complete smaller renovation projects utilizing OFCC resources would also benefit from this enhanced review regarding safety and security measures.

The OFCC is in the best position to provide guidance in this area since they have already addressed this topic in their building construction manual. While ODE and the State Board of Education may also serve as a resource in this area, I don't believe they are in the best position to lead the discussion. ODE can assist in connecting local school personnel to OFCC to be keep the recommendations and rules current and reflective of present district needs. The Alliance would also recommend that OFCC work with the Department of Public Safety and other stakeholders.

While the legislation allows for districts to choose from a list of recommendations requiring a minimum amount to be included in their project, we would recommend that districts be allowed the latitude to make that determination at the local level. With the ever changing landscape related to school safety, having the flexibility to address specific conditions will be critical to meeting local needs. For example, the list provided in HB 544 does not address enhancements such as those related to securing building grounds, entrance and exit areas, and vehicle circulation.

HB 544 provides an opportunity to refocus resources in the development of guidelines and recommendations related to security and safety measures for school facilities. In cooperation with the Department of Public Safety, ODE, the State Board of Education, local school districts and other state agencies, the OFCC will be the best situated to facilitate these important conversations and adopt rules and recommendations. Such a collaborative process will allow all parties to use their expertise and experience to enhance present and future recommendations related to safety and security through a systematic process.

The Alliance looks forward to working with the bill sponsors as this proposed legislation works its way through the legislative process.

*The Alliance for High Quality Education is a consortium of 73 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio including the Toledo, Cleveland, Akron-Canton, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati areas. The Alliance for the last twenty-five years has represented its members' interests on matters of state education policy and funding, as well as contributing to fostering high quality educational opportunities for students in their districts and those across the state.