

Matt Norton
President, OHVA Board of Trustees
Education and Career Readiness Committee
June 26, 2018
Proponent - SB 216

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Ohio House Education and Career Readiness Committee, my name is Matt Norton and I chair the Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA) Board of Trustees, the nonprofit charter school governing board that oversees OHVA. Unfortunately, recent articles in the media have mischaracterized the position of OHVA's governing board in relation to the "safe harbor" proposal that was before the Ohio legislature. The position of the OHVA governing board is that any legislative solution should protect *all* public schools - charter or district - that took in high numbers of ECOT transfer students from unfair sanctions for doing the right thing.

The sudden, midyear closure of ECOT created an emergency situation for more than 12,000 students who were left without a school. In response to this emergency, the OHVA Board of Trustees voted to extend the midyear enrollment period to help provide these students and families a public school option. It was not without risk or cost. The more than 4,200 former ECOT students who transferred to OHVA created a significant financial, academic, and operational challenge to our school - but it was the right thing to do for these kids. Many were at-risk students. They were not fully engaged learners and arrived at our school significantly behind. Our educators are working hard to help acclimate these students to new learning programs, new engagement and attendance policies, and a different school culture, but it takes time, and can't be done immediately.

While this amendment is designed to help all public schools that took on large numbers of ECOT transfers, state officials have expressed concerns that the system simply cannot absorb all of these ECOT transfers as there are approximately 2,300 students that remain unaccounted. Moreover, it is clear that the vast majority of these student transfers did not want to go back into the traditional public school system as well over half of ECOT's former students chose to attend one of the eight all online community schools.

The original legislative proposal would not have avoided accountability, prevented disclosure, or "excluded" performance of former ECOT students from a school's overall report card. The goal was to protect schools that took in very high numbers of ECOT transfer students from facing unfair sanctions, including school closure. These students - like all students - would continue to participate in state tests and comply with attendance policies. Their scores would be factored into schools' overall performance outcomes.

The amendment before you today does several things. First, it protects traditional public school districts that experienced an increase in enrollment of more than ten percent in the 17/18 school year as a result of the enrollment of displaced enrollees and protects them from becoming a new challenged school district. Second, it excludes any displaced enrollee from being included in the sponsor evaluations for the 17/18 and 18/19 school years and allows for protection from closure through the 19/20 school year if the community school had an increase in enrollment of more than ten percent in the 17/18 school year.

Again, the OHVA governing board's position is that any legislative solution should protect *all* public schools that took in high numbers of ECOT transfer students, because no Ohio school or district should be unfairly punished for helping kids during an emergency.

Sincerely,

Matt Norton
President, Ohio Virtual Academy Board of Trustees