



Findlay Digital Academy

1219 West Main Cross Suite 101, Findlay, Ohio 45840
Phone 419-425-3598 Fax 419-425-3588

Executive Director/ Superintendent

Rosemary Rooker
419-425-8379
rrooker@findlaycityschools.org

Coordinator/Principal

Larry Grove
419-425-3598
lgrove@findlaycityschools.org

Counselor

Linda Huffman
419-429-8935
lhuffman@findlaycityschools.org

Board Members

Kimberly Bash
President

Dr. Edie Wannemacher
Vice President

Pastor Alfred DeLaCruz

Melissa LaRocco

Jeffrey Martin

Bill O. Miller

Rev. Will Miller

Senate Education Committee Proponent Testimony on HB 21 April 11, 2018

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on HB 21. I am Sandra White and I help coordinate Findlay City Schools, the sponsor, and Findlay Digital Academy, the school, in fulfilling the massive obligations of the Sponsor Evaluation System. Findlay Digital Academy is a Dropout Prevention and Recovery school that serves 150 ninth through twelfth grade students in Northwest Ohio. The academy is a consistently high performing school that had a 73.3 % graduation rate and Exceeded Standards on the 2016-2017 report card. Findlay Digital Academy is also a member of a coalition of district sponsored Dropout Prevention and Recovery schools, which has spent months working with legislators on possible changes to HB 21.

I am here today to urge your consideration of a proposed change to HB 21 that would help ensure stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) proposed sponsor evaluation standards. Such stakeholder engagement will ensure fair, reasonable, and stable scoring of sponsors of community schools.

A specific situation recently arose when ODE proposed increasing the sponsor rating scoring threshold for the 2017-2018 school year. This scoring increase was highlighted in a presentation given by ODE in November 2017. Under the revised scoring standard, a situation would have been created where an overall score of 7 points would result in an "ineffective" rating. Consequently, a sponsor could "meet standards" on the Academic Performance (2 points), be "effective" in Compliance (2 points), and "meet standards" on Quality Practices (3 points) for an overall score of 7 points. Despite meeting standards or being effective in all categories, a sponsor, under ODE's proposed scoring increase, would receive an overall rating of "ineffective." Establishing a situation where a sponsor could meet all standards yet still be rated "ineffective" simply defies all logic.

Shortly after we began trying to find a legislative solution to this questionable scoring standard for sponsors, ODE released a revised guidance document for sponsors in late March 2018. In this revised document, ODE announced that it was reverting back to the 2016-2017 scoring thresholds for sponsor evaluations. While this certainly was a welcomed change, it is concerning that ODE has the ability to make changes to the sponsor evaluation process in March of the current school year. In other words, ODE waited until well into the second half of the school year to finalize the standards sponsors would need to

meet in order to continue operating. The ODE could have just as easily increased the standards at the 11th hour without any opportunity for stakeholder input.

We have worked diligently with legislators and have also engaged ODE on drafting language to HB 21 that would ensure this situation is prevented from occurring in the future. The solution being proposed would ensure that sponsors are aware of, and have the opportunity to comment on, changes to the evaluation standards PRIOR to the start of the school year. We hope that engaging stakeholders as ODE develops the evaluation standards will help identify challenges with the sponsor evaluation system, which ODE could then revise prior to finalizing the standards in July.

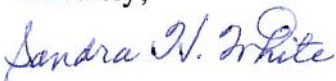
Findlay City Schools, who sponsors Findlay Digital Academy, was one of three Exemplary Sponsors in the state for 2016-2017. We are not asking for special treatment or an exemption, we are just asking for a fair scoring system and the opportunity to provide feedback on the standards ODE requires us to meet prior to the start of the school year.

As I mentioned earlier, the Sponsor Evaluation System is a massive undertaking and has a number of inherent flaws. First, let me show you how massive the documentation is – this is one of four folders of documents Findlay City Schools will be submitting to ODE this year. Three of the folders address the Quality Practices component and the fourth folder addresses the Compliance component. In Quality a sponsor must earn 96 of the 128 points to earn a score of 3, which Meets Standards. In Compliance a Sponsor must earn 18 of the 22 points to earn a score of 2 which is Effective. However, one of the 22 points has over 250 items associated with it and only three of these items can be missed to score the point. So, you can see the magnitude of the challenge. Second, the Academic portion becomes even more demanding this year, as the AIR End of Course Exams come into play, and you have likely heard plenty about how challenging those are for all schools. All of these changes necessitate a fair and stable scoring rubric for sponsors. We look forward to working with ODE and lawmakers on addressing these issues as the sponsor evaluation system evolves over the coming years.

I have been a successful and nationally recognized educator for 49 years, and never in my career has been setting a bar so high that no one can obtain the highest rating been considered an educational best practice. Nor is constantly moving that bar year-after-year best practice. It simply isn't sustainable nor is it good policy. I feel the proposed amendment would allow quality sponsors and schools to work better with ODE in establishing challenging, yet obtainable targets. Such cooperation will hopefully result in an evaluation system that will maintain quality, while also allowing sponsors and schools to spend less time on paperwork and more time educating students.

I would like to thank Chairwoman Lehner and other members of the committee for taking interest in this issue. I look forward to working closely with ODE in the future and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Sincerely,



Sandra H. White
Program Director