**Senate Education Committee**

**Testimony**

**Proponent for HB 154**

**September 17, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Terhar and members of the Senate Education Committee.

I am Dr Tom Lasley, currently CEO of Learn to Earn Dayton and formally Dean, School of Education and Health Sciences at the University of Dayton.

I believe that what is being proposed in this legislation does represent a positive step forward for the underperforming schools in the state of Ohio. That is: A means of creating stronger, better schools for students who are currently in weak, failing and significantly under-performing schools.

Those of us who have been studying this issue of turning around failing schools would suggest that Ohio’s approach to school transformation needs to be more nuanced and grounded on the following principles:

1 SEEKING ways to place the State in a partnership with local communities in the decision about identifying the right local leaders to lead the transformation process.

2 CONDUCTING a thoughtful and in-depth root cause analysis to ensure that the educators and stakeholders involved at each school and school district fully understand the reasons for student failure and who needs to own and address that failure.

3 ENSURING the presence of a committed team of local leaders (i.e., school board, school superintendent, building level educators, civic and community leaders) working together on school transformation and creating and implementing the plans necessary for meaningful systemic change.

5 CREATING an entity ( i.e., some type of state level oversight board or panel ) that has the ability to thoughtfully work with schools to oversee a root-cause analysis of the problems and issues that are fostering failing school practices AND that can approve and oversee the implementation of a transformation plan that has the continuous improvement metrics needed to track and document positive student academic progress.

Like you, I care very deeply about the success of Ohio’s students. Ohio is an under-producer of intellectual capital ( i.e., persons with marketable credentials or degrees). That situation MUST be changed for Ohio’s economy to be viable and vital. It can only be changed if we have schools that are structured to foster student success.

The elements for meaningful change are clear:

1 Require each “distressed” school or school district to complete a thorough root cause analysis that identifies the primary and secondary reasons for the poor performance of the school and the underperformance of the students. This is not easy….and the state will need to be purposeful in making certain that there is fidelity to the root cause analysis process.

2 Require each school district to develop *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plans* that address the root causes for school failures. This will not be easy…. and the state will need to be vigilant to ensure that crafted plans are implemented with fidelity.

3 Create a state-level **oversight panel** that reviews and approves each distressed school district’s Transformation and Implementation Plans. This will not be easy….Ohio needs to be purposeful, not political in making the panel appointments.

4 Identify specific state-approved technical assistance providers that have a demonstrated track record of success in transforming under-performing schools and that can align their services with a school district’s *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plan.* This will be essential… to ensuring that underperforming school districts have the assets that they need to experience success.

5 Provide resources that enable distressed school districts to secure the services of a state-approved technical assistance provider. This will be essential….to ensure that school districts have the financial resources that they require for success.

My point is simple: You have an opportunity to enact legislation that will help students who need your advocacy. Ohio cannot afford underperforming schools.

In conclusion, I looked at recent research out of Tennessee about the key guiding principles that needed to be evidenced in order to turn around low performing schools…they included:

*Identify and address barriers to improvement*…your provision for a root cause analysis provides for this outcome.

*Increase instructional and leadership capacity*…your focus on a high quality transformation plan engenders this outcome.

*Implement processes and practices to maintain stability*…your attention to the provision of resources, financial and through technical assistance, fosters this outcome.

What you propose is not perfect, but it represents a great step forward for the students who are in Ohio’s underperforming schools.