



FINDLAY DIGITAL ACADEMY

Where Learning Fits You™

Rosemary Rooker, Superintendent ♦ Stephen Earnest, Treasurer ♦ Michael Brand, Principal

Senate Education Committee SB 319 Testimony

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner and Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide comments today on the need to reform the funding formula for Dropout Prevention/Recovery E-schools (DOPR). While not currently contained in SB 319, this is vitally important to schools like mine who face uncertainty heading into the upcoming school year. My name is Rosemary Rooker, and I am the Superintendent of Findlay Digital Academy (FDA), a DOPR E-School. We are a district sponsored community school located in northwest Ohio in Hancock County, where we serve students ages 14-22. Our students originate from 15 surrounding school districts, and our enrollment ranges from 150-170 students.

Over the last 16 years, Findlay Digital Academy's method of delivery has proven to be successful for students that have chosen a non-traditional approach to education. The majority of these students have experienced trauma in their lives and are at-risk of dropping out of school. Motivation and engagement for this group is a constant challenge. Without alternatives such as our program, many of these students would be high school dropouts living in our communities depending on our community services or be involved in the opioid crisis. Even so, we have been able to meet the many needs of our students. We have consistently earned ratings of Meets and Exceeds Standards on the Dropout Prevention School Report Card. Our graduation rates have been some of the highest in the state for similar schools. Over just the last 5 school years, FDA's 4-year graduation rates have ranged from 50.5% to 81.7% when the state average for like schools range from 21.7% to 26.8%. We have found this success by offering an intensive program that uses mentors to build relationships with students and supports them not only academically, but also with their social/emotional needs. Our community recognizes the value of our school and has been supportive of our mission.

In 2019, there were only 9 DOPR E-Schools left in the state. These DOPR E-schools are tied to a participation-based funding system that does not support the cost of educating some of the most vulnerable students in our communities. Over the past four years, FDA along with other DOPR E-Schools have been limited in the amount of funding received to operate. This

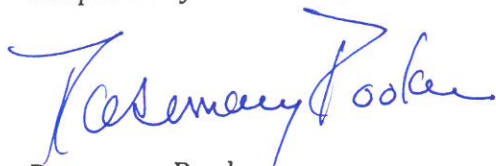
funding model is unique to E-schools as traditional brick and mortar schools receiving funding based on enrollment, even during the most recent COVID-19 pandemic, where schools were closed and forced to provide online classes. Our schools experience many similar costs as traditional schools and we also provide technology and access for students to participate. Supporting the social emotional needs for this at-risk group of students presents itself to be a challenge when appropriate funding is not available.

In the 2019 “Study of Internet- or Computer-Based Community School Funding Models” report from the Ohio Department of Education, it was stated that Dropout Prevention E-Schools acquired only 73.1% of their maximum FTE’s because of conditions set in documenting learning opportunities. How long can any school, let alone a Dropout Prevention E-Schools continue to provide this much needed educational alternative? Our dropout prevention schools educate and provide support services to over 7,000 students and they are only received 73.1% of their funding!

SB 319 currently addresses multiple educational issues which will have a direct positive impact on students and our educational system. Similar to traditional schools, we have many unknowns facing us for the 2020/21 school year. Could this be the time to consider an amendment to include revisions to the funding model for the DOPR E-schools while we work together on a longer-term solution? If this issue is not addressed, I am fearful that more dropout prevention schools will not be in existence for the start of the 2020/21 school year. The three-tiered funding model that has been proposed could be part of a larger long-term fix that applies multiple measures for more equitable and fair funding calculations.

I believe that we have the same ultimate goal for ALL Ohio students....to complete their education, earn a diploma and be a proud productive member of our community. So, it is important for you to remember that the Dropout Prevention Schools often serve as the final safety net for students who have left the traditional system. I ask that you not leave these students behind and that you support a fair and equitable solution that will meet the needs of these vulnerable young people.

Respectfully submitted,



Rosemary Rooker
Superintendent, Findlay Digital Academy