

SB 358

Ohio Senate Education Committee

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, the members of the Greater Recovery And Dropout-Prevention Schools (GRADS) Coalition, which consists of Dropout Prevention and Recovery (DOPR) Schools, would like to express their support for the provisions included in SB 358. This important legislation would provide much needed flexibility to schools and students during this unprecedented time.

Since Governor DeWine made the school closure announcement in March, schools have done their best to adapt and adjust their operations in order to best serve their students. This has been especially true for DOPR schools, which serve Ohio's most vulnerable students. Often students enrolled in DOPR schools are older and face underlying health challenges or unique responsibilities such as family and work requirements. Providing the services and flexibility our students have required during the pandemic has been a challenge, but one that the schools in the Coalition have met.

SB 358 extends much of the protections and flexibility that was first offered to schools by HB 197. Specifically, the GRADS Coalition supports the following provisions:

- 1) Waiving the requirement to administer state achievement assessments for the 2020-2021 school year.
- 2) Enabling students to use their final grade in a class in lieu of an end-of-course exam to satisfy conditions for a high school diploma.
- 3) Extending the prohibition for an e-school from withdrawing students who were unable to complete assignments.
- 4) Extending the permission for schools to issue diplomas to a student on track to graduate for the 2020-2021 school year.
- 5) Expanding protections against sanctions resulting from report card data.

In addition to these provisions, we would ask that the committee consider language that would address the following:

- 1) Waive the participation thresholds tied to the NWEA MAP assessments for the 2020-2021 school year. DOPR schools are required to administer the NWEA MAP assessment and have 75% participation in the test. Unfortunately, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has yet to renew the NWEA contract, nor have they procured a replacement for the test, leaving schools unable to administer the test this fall. In other words, DOPR schools are being asked to administer a test that has not been provided by ODE. Furthermore, requiring students to take an in-person exam is impractical during the pandemic and will lead to nearly every DOPR school failing to meet the 75% participation threshold. Resolving this issue may not require a change in statute as the 75% participation requirement is a policy made within ODE and is not mandated in either the ORC or OAC.

- 2) Extend the ability granted in HB 197 that enabled public bodies to hold and attend meetings virtually. This flexibility has allowed meetings to occur safely and efficiently. Unfortunately, it set to expire on December 1, 2020

Thank you for considering these comments. Once again, we support the flexibility provided in SB 358 and urge the committee to consider additional changes to help DOPR schools during this unprecedented time.

GRADS Coalition

Buckeye Community School Coshocton Opportunity School Fairborn Digital Academy

Findlay Digital Academy Foxfire High School GOAL Digital Academy

Greater Ohio Virtual School Quaker Digital Academy

Townsend Community School TRECA Digital Academy