

Ohio Online Learning Coalition

December 1, 2020

S.B. 292 (Blessing) Proponent Testimony

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Committee in support of S.B. 292.

My name is Colleen Grady, and I serve as the executive director of the Ohio Online Learning Coalition. The Ohio Online Learning Coalition represents Ohio's online community schools, focusing on best practices, identifying ways to enrich students' experience with online education, and sharing information about technology-based instruction's advantages.

With the introduction of H.B. 2 nearly six years ago, the community school sector became the focus of increased scrutiny and policy changes. H.B. 2's emphasis on accountability and transparency drove substantial changes in the sector as a whole and for online community schools in particular. S.B. 292 builds on the foundation provided by H.B. 2 and takes the next step to provide additional tools to improve student participation and achievement.

Online community schools are an important option for students that need a more flexible, personalized educational setting. Technology-based instruction, in both blended and virtual environments, continues to grow in importance. Technology offers the ability to customize instruction based on students' needs, making adjustments in the depth, breadth, and pace of instruction and offer access to content not available in all traditional settings. Using technology is a skill valued by the workforce, updating skills and earning credentials often takes place online.

Enrollment in an online community school is somewhat more complicated than enrollment in a district school or brick and mortar community school. Most online schools require that students and parents participate in an orientation before beginning their studies. Additionally, online students are not officially reported as enrolled until they receive their computer and log on to the school's system for the first time. Once the initial log-on takes place and students begin their studies, schools must document all online and offline learning activities.

Online community schools work with students and families to explain expectations for participation before enrolling, but sometimes additional intervention by the school is necessary.

Current law requires all community schools to withdraw students from the school once they reach 72 hours of consecutive unexcused absences. Once that standard is met, students are withdrawn, although they can request to be re-enrolled, and the 72-hour clock begins again. Online community schools must re-enroll these students, even if students have previously met the 72-hour standard and cannot withdraw

students who routinely come close to the 72-hour mark before re-engaging with school work. Students under the age of 18 are referred for truancy, but nothing makes up for students' lost time and opportunity to move forward.

S.B. 292 provides additional tools to online community schools to intervene earlier to address lack of engagement and, in some cases, withdraw students before they reach the 72-hour level. This legislation also limits students' ability to continually re-enroll without consistent participation. S.B. 292 does not eliminate the standard to withdraw students that meet the 72-hour; it allows schools to accelerate the withdrawal process when appropriate.

In addition to providing new tools to online community schools, S.B. 292 increases accountability for both schools and individual students. Customized intervention plans assist schools in serving students and empower students to take more responsibility for their education.

H.B. 409, a companion bill to S.B. 292, recently received unanimous approval by the Ohio House. H.B. 409 includes several amendments that we feel strengthen the legislation and add clarity to key definitions. We support Senate consideration and approval of H.B. 409.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 292.