

Senate Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Testimony of Meka Pace – Superintendent and Executive Director of Metro
Schools
Tuesday, May 14, 2019

Good Afternoon,

Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. My name is Meka Pace and I am the Superintendent and Executive Director of Metro Schools.

Metro was the first STEM school in the state of Ohio. Our school started over ten years ago and was conceived through a partnership between the Ohio State University and Battelle Memorial Institute. The goal of the public-private partnership was to develop a school that emphasized the STEM disciplines to ensure that “all kids” would be college and career ready and able to participate in the 21st Century economy. We opened our doors with 96 students and now service over 900 students in grades 6-12. We are an early- college high school specializing in STEM programming. Students at Metro complete their core high school requirements during their 9th and 10th grade years, then enroll in work-based learning pathways in the fields of engineering, sustainability, or health science. Each year, Metro juniors and seniors participate in capstone research opportunities with scientists in the field and complete about 2,000 college credits all before their high school graduation. In short, the Metro Model works. Today, Metro’s framework has been replicated in over sixty schools that have received official STEM designation within the state of Ohio. Students enrolled in these schools have earned over 15,000 college credits, engaged in over 71,000 internship hours, have higher graduation rates and ACT scores than the average Ohio schools while serving more ethnically diverse and disadvantaged students.

Currently under Ohio Revised Code 3326, STEM schools may operate on multiple campuses but can be governed by one board. We are asking for an amendment to HB 166 that will allow for the following:

1. STEM schools to be given a district internal retrieval numbers (IRN) along with building IRN’s.
2. That funding be directly distributed under one foundation payment to the District IRN similar to what is done in K-12 districts
3. That State Report Cards be issued by building IRN within the district

These three provisions will allow us to continue to efficiently grow as a district, without having to create separate books and audits for each of our school buildings or spending unnecessary time disaggregating data instead of analyzing the data.

Under the current practices, when a STEM school decides to open up a new school, that school will be organized under its own IRN, essentially its own district. This means that each of the two schools cannot share equipment, materials or people without charging the other school for use of time or equipment. This model is ineffective, simply because small schools share, space, people and resources and dictating a paper trail for each of those appropriations is time intensive. This also means that each school must complete all of the reporting mandates separate of one another.

This current “every STEM school is a district and school” model creates real problems. I know because I’ve experienced them. In 2014, Metro opened a second high school campus, the Metro Institute of Technology. Then, my team and I believed a new IRN for the school was the right step, both to satisfy the terms of the external funder who helped kickstart the school and to provide extra visibility for the new school. In just the first year, here are a few of the problems we encountered:

- 1) Metro’s governing board had to be reformed as a second school board each month to provide oversight for the school, at the time, representing around 60 students out of an enrollment of 600.
- 2) The new school’s financial books, increasing its vital five-year financial forecast, could only be built using the school’s own revenue. It could not be considered as a “branch” of Metro schools.
- 3) Most significantly, these schools could not share staff in a flexible manner. If we needed a teacher to cover a gap or lend their time to either the new campus or Metro’s existing two buildings, they could not do so. If a counselor was needed, that counselor could only be hired specifically for one school. It even appeared that I could not serve as superintendent of both schools. Because the current law does not imagine a STEM school could ever have a leader managing multiple buildings.

Ohio’s STEM schools have continued to grow. But this change frustrates the staff and the leadership of every other building I’ve talked to. Today, I’m representing those schools and asking you to consider this change.

Last week, Lt. Governor Jon Husted visited one of the Ohio STEM Learning Network schools, the Tri-State STEMM School in Southpoint Ohio and he said - We want to see STEM schools succeed - The three big components to education are life skills, academic skills and career skills. We need specialization. Employers need to be clear about what they need" from schools, and educators need to be able to respond. Schools like Metro and Tri-State are listening and responding to this economic need – we are developing the next generation of Scientists, Technologists, Engineers and Mathematicians that Ohio needs to ensure our states future economic needs are met.

Allowing STEM schools to form districts and campuses under IRNs requires little to no extra investment from the state. Nor does this change in any way decrease our accountability for providing a quality education. In fact, this move will increase transparency to parents about our

scores as schools and districts. We are simply asking to be treated under the same rules as public schools and public-school districts.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.