



STEM Entrepreneurship & Innovation Program for Students to Help Develop Ohio's Future Workforce

Popularly Known as the “*Believe in Ohio Student STEM Innovation & Scholarship Program*”

Mr. Chairman, Madame Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. I am here today to provide testimony in support of Amendment HC0880X1 to House Bill 110, which continues funding of the Believe in Ohio Student STEM Innovation and Scholarship program.

Hello. My name is Andrea Harpen. I am a teacher at Blanchester High School, a rural Title I school in Southwest Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the Believe in Ohio program.

I have been a science teacher for 17 years. I spent 9 years in industry, working for Proctor & Gamble before raising my children and returning to the workforce as an educator. I teach advanced Chemistry, Physics and Calculus.

I am here to testify to the exceptional effectiveness of the Believe in Ohio program. It challenges students to apply what they have learned in their science classes and to compete with other students. In my classes, students are introduced to the program at the beginning of the school year. They are asked to think about problems in their life that might be addressed by a new use of technology. As the year progresses, students deliver on mileposts for accomplishing the project. They go from thinking about an idea, to sharing it with their class, to proving the science that underlies their idea, to presenting their ideas to a team of scientists who judge their work against their peers.

When they are successful, they see themselves in a whole new way. What makes this work is that they are competing with their peers for real cash awards before a team of engineers. In a rural, Title 1 school, that is a big deal! My students frequently comment that they have never worked so hard on a project, and never thought they could present to a team of engineers. Often this is the first time they can picture themselves working in STEM careers. Some judges also help student finalists for their regional and state competitions. Not only is this great for my students, but it also offers me with an opportunity to ask the community for mentoring help, which they have willingly given. This provides a connection directly between education and industry to build the workforce.

In my years of teaching, the Believe in Ohio entrepreneurial program is the best program I've seen come out of education. It challenges students to compete in a STEM competition on a level playing field of ideas. It offers meaningful incentives for success. It builds a bridge between education and industry to help build the STEM workforce. Every year, I see more students choosing STEM careers. Long term, this will dramatically change the landscape of our small town. I urge you to support this Amendment to House Bill 110 which I've found beneficial to the development of STEM careers in Title 1 schools. Thank you.