



Chairwoman Manning, Vice-Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Primary and Secondary Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in favor of House Bill 316, also known as the 2020-2021 High School Education Recovery Act.

My name is Tony Gatto and I am the Executive Director of the Arts & College Preparatory Academy (or ACPA), an independent charter school on the east side of Columbus. ACPA educates approximately 500 students in grades 7 through 12, from over 25 different districts in central Ohio – which amounts to a tremendous amount of diversity that can be seen in race, culture, religion, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, socio-economics, and neurodiversity.

Many students choose to attend ACPA because they experience marginalization because of these differences in their home districts, and in response, ACPA strives to create a school environment that focuses on inclusion, recognizes student voice, and addresses the unique needs of our student population. We achieve this through the arts and a standards aligned curriculum that extends content choice and autonomy to teachers so that they can create culturally responsive and engaging lessons that are inclusive of the students enrolled in their classes. This approach has seen consistent success on state report cards and other comparative measures.

ACPA started the 2020-2021 school year in a full virtual model. Teachers had little time to adapt their curriculum to virtual instruction. New schedules that included asynchronous work periods in the school day allowed teachers the necessary time to plan, create, deliver and grade an entirely new curriculum, and left students on their own to manage their time. Though frequent check-ins and time management skills were built into this new instructional delivery method, many students now had extra household responsibilities to attend to, and the new life stressors of isolation and lack of social engagement in an already complex phase of development. Cameras were often off and engagement was low.

As 2021 started with a vaccine on the horizon, ACPA made plans to implement a hybrid model, shifting the focus now to planning the return of students to the building and the safety protocols necessary to do so safely. Students who chose to stay home during this shift had increased asynchronous time, and as students settled in and hit a stride with this new schedule, it was time for state tests - meaning more schedule disruptions and reduced instructional time.

The number of high school students who did not earn credits and who did not earn multiple credits has increased this year – roughly 5% of our high school population. ACPA has already planned a summer program, using ESSER funds to ensure that students have economic barriers removed to completing graduation credits. Other plans made possible with ESSER funds for next year include hiring a number of instructional aides to help increase

the teacher:student ratio in the classroom and who will work directly with students who have experienced learning loss due to the pandemic. Flexible time incorporated into ACPA's main schedule will provide opportunities for further instructional individualization, including room for workshops and mini-classes that will supplement material from 2020-2021 courses that may not have received the proper amount of time, or allowance for repeating courses if necessary.

We have yet to see the full effects the pandemic will have on students as they progress through their education as the world returns to some semblance of normalcy, so it seems logical to put in place mechanisms that will support students' rights to a full and equitable education. House Bill 316 seems to support these practices, and gives students ownership over their own education. As we've found in 20 years at ACPA, students benefit when they are given agency over their education.

Thank you for the giving me the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.