

HB 110
Senate Finance Committee
May 17, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for considering this testimony on behalf of the members of the Greater Recovery And Dropout-Prevention Schools (GRADS) Coalition, which consists of ten Dropout Prevention and Recovery (DOPR) schools operating throughout the state. DOPR schools educate some of Ohio's most vulnerable students who have fallen behind in the traditional school environment. These schools provide unique learning environments and services to help students get back on track, and most importantly earn a diploma.

The GRADS Coalition supports language added by the House that would extend a pilot program for DOPR E-schools. You may recall this pilot program was originally created by the Ohio Senate last session in HB 123. Like other online schools, DOPR E-schools are funded based on student participation, which requires extensive and burdensome tracking of student engagement. Basing funding on student participation or "seat time" poses a specific challenge for DOPR E-schools, which serve a population of predominately at-risk students. Despite a school's best efforts, it can often take time for a vulnerable student to actively engage in learning opportunities. Unfortunately, under Ohio's current funding model, those efforts and services go unfunded, simply because the student did not participate. DOPR schools often enroll students with long histories of truancy issues and challenges that made them fall behind in a traditional environment. Unless a student has 100% attendance immediately upon enrolment, an E-school will not receive full funding. In other words, funding DOPR E-schools based on seat-time unfairly punishes DOPR schools for enrolling the very the students they are designed to help and try so desperately to get back on track.

The challenges DOPR E-schools encounter was apparent in an E-school funding report issued by ODE. That report (Table 3) compares the headcount of students at each E-school and the FTE that each E-school generated during the course of the year. You will see that general education E-schools were funded at 66.7% of total student headcount. DOPR E-schools on the other hand received funding at 49.7% of total student headcount.¹

Unfortunately, multiple high-performing DOPR E-schools were facing closure over funding constraints, which is what led to the creation of the pilot program in HB 123. This pilot program allocates \$2.5 million to implement a three-tiered funding system that would: 1) provide schools with the financial support necessary to ensure students receive the initial resources needed to succeed, 2) continue to fund DOPR E-schools based on participation, and 3) reward student achievement. It is important to note, that funding would be capped at the current formula amount or (currently \$6,020 per student). In other words, the pilot program is not designed to increase funding per student, but instead aimed at allowing schools more ways to receive full funding for each student they educate.

¹ <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/School-Payment-Reports/State-Funding-For-Schools/Community-School-Funding/Community-School-Funding-Information/Study-of-Internet-or-Computer-Based-Community-School-Funding-Models-1-1.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

The pilot program is only for the current school year and ODE must issue a report by December 31st. Even if ODE would recommend permanently implementing this new funding model, it would not be implemented in time to take effect for the 2021-2022 school year, forcing the DOPR E-schools to fall back into the dire financial situation they faced prior to the creation of the pilot program. We are asking the pilot to be extended for an additional two years, which will allow ODE additional time to compile data and issue recommendations on a long-term funding solution. This will also allow ODE to receive data during more traditional school years that are not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The GRADS Coalition also appreciates the intent behind the language added by the House requiring review by the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) on any proposed changes to the Education Management Information System (EMIS) as well as any changes to policy by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) that would impact community schools. JCARR review of these policy changes would ensure that community schools are able to comply with the proposals. Often, community schools are faced with changes in policy with little notice and limited time to comply with the new requirements. We hope requiring JCARR review of these policy changes will result in more robust discussions between ODE and community schools as changes in policy are being considered.

Thank you for considering this testimony on behalf of the GRADS Coalition in support of the House-passed version of HB 110.

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