



*Education Division*

**Sub. H.B. 110 Proponent Written Testimony  
Senate Finance Committee**

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Jennifer Schorr and I am the Associate Director of the Education Division of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this written testimony today on behalf of my organization. Buckeye Community Hope Foundation is a statewide sponsor of 45 community schools serving nearly 14,000 students across 11 cities in Ohio. We are rated Exemplary by the Ohio Department of Education.

My written testimony is submitted today to express support for sub. H.B. 110. Our organization appreciates the focus the bill places on moving towards properly resourcing public community schools while protecting schools from unnecessary and burdensome regulation that often put barriers in the way of our students reaching their full potential. Our focus at Buckeye is always on sponsoring high quality public community schools that provide options for students and families who need or want public school choice.

While Buckeye Community Hope Foundation supports the provisions in sub. H.B. 110, I wanted to take the opportunity to address a few areas that we feel may need additional clarity in this bill and additional provisions needed in current education policy.

**School Funding**

Direct Funding

The direct funding model for community schools is a step forward in helping to alleviate the divide between Districts and Community Schools over payments for students and families who have exercised their right to choose the school that best fits their needs. We encourage the Ohio Senate to protect this direct funding model for choice options even further with language that would prevent a line-item veto. We cannot leave our future funding to chance and the lives of students who need their community school to grow and thrive so they can grow and thrive.

Economically Disadvantaged Funding

The increase in funding for economically disadvantaged enrollments is also a strong component of the school funding bill. In order for schools to meet the needs to these students, funding

must be targeted to provide resources and support to increase achievement. However, this funding increase cannot be at the expense of the health and well-being of these same students, especially in regard to mental health services as we emerge from the pandemic. We hope the Ohio Senate keeps this much needed increase but can find a way to maintain the existing Student Wellness and Success Fund at its current funding level and not have it depleted by this increase.

### Quality School Support Fund

One area that still needs work is the quality charter schools program funding. High-performing community schools need these critical resources to serve more students that are seeking another option for their K-12 education. We hope the Ohio Senate will reverse the proposed cuts made to this funding and restore it to the level of \$54 million originally established by our governor.

As you continue to work on the state's budget and school funding, we urge you to consider additional K-12 education legislative and policy concerns and recommendations needed to continue community schools in Ohio.

### **Education Policy**

#### Automatic Closure of Community Schools

Brick and mortar community schools are out-performing urban district schools at rates higher than ever in Ohio. For seven years, the automatic closure law currently in R.C. 3314.35 has not been needed or executed. Why? Because both sponsors and governing authorities monitor the academic, fiscal, and compliance performance of each school; and close schools who do not meet the performance expectations outlined in their contracts and in Ohio law.

Against the backdrop of increased sponsor accountability and school performance, a rigorous fully implemented state report card, new Every Student Succeeds Act requirement, and an end to "safe harbor"; we respectfully request that the General Assembly remove this provision in law as it has not impacted the performance of community schools in Ohio for seven years – that work has been done by the dedicated and skilled educators, school leaders, and board members with the support and guidance of their sponsor.

#### Drop Out Recovery Prevention & Recovery Test Participation

Under current law, a performance indicator for the rating and report card system includes growth in student achievement in reading or mathematics as measured by separate assessments that have developed appropriate standards for students enrolled in dropout prevention and recovery programs. In the 2015-2016 school year, the State Board set a minimum threshold for testing at least 50% of the students enrolled during the fall test window and at least 50% of students enrolled during the spring window. This threshold was then increased to a test participation rate of 75% for each test window.

This participation rate does not account for any of the following points:

- The students taking the test in the fall window may not be the same students taking the test in spring; therefore, it does not show a growth measure per student but rather serves as an unconnected data point;
- There are students who need credits to graduate unrelated to Math or English yet are forced to take a test in subjects that do not have any bearing on their graduation status; and
- Not all dropout prevention and recovery schools are fully in-person during the pandemic.

We are requesting the General Assembly eliminate the test participation requirement.

### Automatic Withdrawal

Dropout prevention and recovery students have already experienced a significant event or several events that have disrupted their learning pathway. Students who live in poverty alone are six times more likely to drop out than their peers not experiencing poverty. These events do not stop just because they have enrolled in a dropout prevention and recovery school. It is a challenge every day for a student and staff to mitigate or remove these barriers to attendance and learning. It is not uncommon for a drop out student to miss several consecutive days and then re-emerge to attempt to graduate from high school, only to be forced to dis-engage again for a period of time because of their risk factors.

The requirement of a drop out recovery school to withdrawal a student who fails to participate in seventy-two consecutive hours of the learning opportunities offered to the student is just another and significant barrier to learning. When a student is withdrawn automatically and then attends immediately after, they must complete a new enrollment packet, take an assessment, and start over in the process. We have created another barrier to learning that does not align with the purpose of a drop out recovery and prevention program.

We recommend removing this barrier to graduation and return the threshold to the 105-hour rule.

### Blended Learning

Remote Learning Plans were implemented during the current pandemic as a mechanism for public schools to meet the educational needs of their students while also protecting health and safety.

Schools have been able to effectively pivot from in-person to hybrid to remote learning when extenuating circumstances were out of their control. Essentially, public schools have implemented “blended learning” at various times throughout the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. There is not a doubt that this type of flexibility has changed the way we view and implement public education in the future.

We request that a school’s ability to utilize a remote learning plan as their primary method of instruction become a permanent option in Ohio for all public schools to specifically address the unpredictable need for calamity days, recovery of lost days/hours for a student, pandemic outbreaks, and other instances where learning in-person is disrupted.

We request the definition of “blended learning” and its effect on attendance and funding be removed from law and rule as it would not be necessary to distinguish these methods as they would be an option for all public schools in Ohio.

### Sponsor Evaluation System

The Ohio Department of Education has collected comprehensive data from sponsors in compliance monitoring, quality authorizing practices, and academic performance for (5) full fiscal years beginning in 2014. In addition, ODE has continued to collect compliance and quality practice data for the most recent past and current school years.

Ohio currently has (20) active sponsors of community schools subject to the annual sponsor evaluation down from (69) sponsors in 2014. The FY19 evaluation results rated 80% of all active sponsors Effective or Exemplary overall. Over 95% of all students enrolled in a community school in Ohio has an overall Effective or Exemplary rated sponsor. With the absence of a complete Report Card for schools for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year due to the pandemic, sponsors subject to an annual evaluation are not receiving overall ratings, yet have continued to demonstrate high ratings in compliance monitoring and quality practices and their ability to effectively open, monitor and close schools.

The Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA) which I serve as President, has continued to meet with Department and recently provided six pages of written feedback with specific ways to improve the execution of the evaluation and improve the content of the tools themselves. Unfortunately, we have been unable to achieve substantive changes of improvement.

Keeping in mind the Department’s expressed desire of operating through the *lens of continuous improvement*, it is now more than ever important to get it right. Buckeye supports accountability for sponsors and the implementation of a credible, realistic, and best practice based approach to an evaluation system. It is important to note that most if not all Sponsors at the end of the current review cycle will not be subject to the evaluation until the 23-24SY. In order to have appropriate accountability for sponsors, we highly recommend the following:

- Suspend the current evaluation system;
- Close any current poor rated sponsors; and
- Establish a Sponsor Evaluation System Legislative Committee comprised of Senate and House Education committee members, representatives from the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers (OACSA), and representatives of the Ohio Department of Education to review and develop the next smart progression of the Sponsor Evaluation System to take effect in FY24.

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) who the current quality practices portion of the evaluation is based, is working across the country with other states to develop and implement authorizer evaluations. Ohio must take the time to engage in this work and improve our current system.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony today before the Senate Finance Committee. We truly appreciate your continued support in fair funding in public education and school choice in Ohio.