House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Senate Bill 1 Interested Party Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Ohio School Boards Association
Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators
February 23, 2021

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 1. My name is Barbara Shaner representing the Ohio Association of Secondary School Admiinstrators (OASSA). Joining me today to offer testimony and answer questions are Kevin Miller, the Director of Governmental Relations for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), Jennifer Hogue, Director of Legislative Services for the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), and Katie Johnson, Deputy Executive Director for the Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO). Our organizations represent public boards of education, school district superintendents, treasurers/CFOs, business managers and other school business officials, and high school principals from around the state.

We are grateful that the bill's sponsors have held several interested party meetings over the past few years seeking stakeholder input for the proposed legislation. We have appreciated the opportunity to participate in those sessions.

SB 1 would add a new semester-long financial literacy class as a graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2025. It would reduce the required number of elective units needed for graduation for these students from the current 5 to 4.5. The bill would also require districts to have faculty members with educator license validation in financial literacy instruction to provide the one-half unit of instruction in the study of financial literacy.

The content of the proposed course must satisfy the existing academic content standards for financial literacy adopted by the State Board of Education. In addition, the bill permits schools to use available public-private partnerships as well as resources and materials that exist in business and industry to develop their curriculum, therefore, meeting the unique needs of their students and community.

We support education in financial literacy for Ohio's students. It is important information for students to learn before confronting life's financial challenges. However, while we support the goals of SB 1, we would be remiss if we did not discuss what is already in law and identify some potential unintended consequences of the bill.

First, as currently written, the new semester requirement would be in addition to the study of economics and financial literacy that is already required to be integrated into the three social studies units required for graduation, or into the content of another class. This mandated duplication is unnecessary and leads us to have strong concerns that the provisions in SB 1 will crowd out other options for students.

The current requirement that districts include financial literacy education within another course offering has been successful. Our members have a hard time seeing the need for an additional mandate for financial literacy instruction. As we've mentioned, financial literacy standards have already been developed by the state board of education. The Ohio Department of Education also has model curriculum available for school districts to utilize. The current requirement provides a system of local control that allows each district to provide financial literacy instruction in a way that meets each student's needs.

Next, the additional semester requirement reduces the electives available to a student by half a credit. The result is that students pursuing a particular curriculum leading to a chosen career path might not be able to avail themselves of all of the course opportunities in exploring and preparing for that career. The implementation of a new requirement will likely have negative effects on programs in other areas, such as business, technology, STEM, and the arts.

We are thankful that SB 1 establishes the High School Financial Literacy Fund. That fund would reimburse the cost for meeting the additional requirements for the license validation that are incurred by a teacher or $500, whichever is less. Without knowing what the requirements for licensure validation will be, it is difficult to discern whether the reimbursement offered through the High School Financial Literacy Fund will be enough to cover district expenses.

We are also concerned that the addition of a financial literacy semester requirement could require school districts to hire additional staff if they do not currently have faculty members who meet the requirements for validation in financial literacy. Likewise, if currently eligible instructors already have full schedules, the only alternatives would be the hiring of additional teachers OR the reduction of already existing curricular offerings to make room for the financial literacy requirement.

We urge the committee to include an appropriation amount for school districts to cover the cost of additional staff where needed.

As we conclude our testimony, we want to emphasize again that financial literacy is important to the well-being of students. We believe most districts have taken great effort in implementing the current law and provide meaningful financial literacy instruction to their students. We stand ready to continue to work with the sponsors of SB 1 to discuss ways to strengthen financial literacy education while eliminating the possibility of the unintended consequences we’ve pointed out here.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer this testimony. We are happy to address questions at the pleasure of the chair.