

Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chair Santucci, Ranking Member Upchurch, and Members of the Economic and Workforce Development Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on Sub. Senate Bill 1.

I am currently serving in my eighteenth year as a superintendent, my twenty-fourth as an administrator, and my thirtieth as an educator in Ohio. I've had the honor to serve as superintendent in the East Knox Local Schools District (Knox County), the Loveland City School District (Hamilton County), the Hilliard City School District (Franklin County), and currently, the Dublin City School District. In each district, rural and suburban, I've been blessed to have opportunities to engage with state-wide leaders.

I am humbled and proud to have spent nearly two decades serving at the local level and participating in state-level policy development. Governor Taft appointed me to his Ohio Core Task Force as Ohio defined the core requirements for graduation from high school. Governor Kasich appointed me to serve on Ohio's Digital Learning Taskforce. This multi-year process worked to create the digital learning regulation and expectations for Ohio. Senate President Faber appointed me to the Testing Committee that reviewed the PARCC Tests and recommended changes in the state's assessment policies. And now, I serve on Governor DeWine's Executive Workforce Board alongside Senators Reineke and Kunze.

I've worked with Dr. Stephanie Siddens for over a decade; she is a talented, skilled educational leader who has earned the respect of district leaders across Ohio. Dr. Susan Zelman is a trusted colleague and nationally respected voice for public education. Dr. Deb Delisle is an advocate for all children and a professional friend; she has my unquestioned respect. Dr. Richard Ross is a mentor; I learned a great deal working with him on the Digital Learning Task Force. The Ohio Department of Education is staffed with dedicated, talented educators. Our current State Board of Education has many passionate, steadfast public officials serving in the current system. My support for a new path forward isn't because of the people in the current roles; it is because the existing structure needs alignment and vision. The bureaucracy, the rigidity that prohibits Ohio's schools from pivoting and adapting to the changing workforce needs, is putting our children and communities at a disadvantage.

Over the past two decades, I've observed significant changes in how education leadership operates in Ohio. While it may be easy to assign blame or complain about the current reality, what is required today is a new approach for Ohio's public schools. Education leadership needs to be improved; we need a clear vision and direction. Ohio needs a clarion voice setting a course for our public schools; we must align our schools to prepare students for the jobs of today and the skills to be ready for the jobs of tomorrow. We must move away from standardized assessments as the only measure of success in school. We've spent decades relying on tests as the singular benchmark with only slight systemic improvement. K-12 education is the primary driver for student preparedness and a pipeline to employment and higher education in Ohio. Primary Education builds the foundation for lifelong learning; Secondary Education opens pathways for future success. The time for action is now.

Democracy, in its purest form, lives within our local school boards of education. Our locally elected board members reflect our communities' needs, values, and expectations. The historical roots of local school boards in Ohio were to let local communities lead local school districts. The six-hundred-plus school districts in Ohio have widely divergent needs and strengths. In many places, the school district is the heart of the community. A strong, focused vision from the state provides a framework for local boards to lead at the district level. In contrast, conflicting messages at the state level, with unclear expectations, create confusion and inefficiency. We need a vision and direction for high-performing school districts, with local communities that hold us accountable through our boards of education.

Ohio already has two service levels to support the work of an aligned and focused state agency. Ohio's Educational Service Centers (ESC) and Regional State Support Teams (SST) have statutory authority and budget allocations to provide district support when needed. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach for Ohio, these service providers know the needs of local communities. In smaller districts, the educational service centers already coordinate services and increase capacity through collaborations. The State Support Teams are already in place for schools that need assistance to increase capacity and implement improvements when required. Ohio will increase efficiency and effectiveness by leveraging our ESC network to implement a state-wide vision.

The ESC network is also at the center of workforce development in Ohio. This legislation, and the associated changes, enhance the capacities of Ohio's ESC Network to serve K-12 students and our workforce needs. Most of the state's Business Advisory Councils (BAC) are led by the area's ESC. Even in districts like Dublin, with a robust, active BAC, partner with the ESC of Central Ohio to build capacity and relationships. Local and regional ESCs know the workforce needs at the local level. In a state as diverse as Ohio, the ESC network can leverage collaboration and partnerships to create effective pathways to in-demand jobs. Furthermore, community colleges and regional university partnerships are facilitated by our ESCs across Ohio. Ohio requires a multifaceted workforce development strategy; we can shift this work from a single department.

Our current system of educational governance needs to be fixed for Ohio's families or economy. Education is part of the body politic, and this isn't changing. We must embrace the current reality and chart a productive, more efficient path forward. Utilizing our ESCs and SSTs will bring support closer to each district. Empowering local school boards while holding districts accountable for academic performance embraces Ohio's commitment to local control. Ohio is, at its core, a local control state. A vision for the state, with standards for performance aligned with state-wide workforce needs, will redefine success. A state-wide framework provides a voice to school boards and parents for implementation at the community level.

Regionally elected Boards of Education govern our local ESCs. This approach places governance closer to the local constituents; it shifts accountability to those doing the work.

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted are leading unprecedented economic growth in Ohio. The Governor's leadership during a second term is critical to formalize changes in Ohio's education system. We must embrace this call to action, actively engage employers and higher education partners, and redefine success for Ohio's public school systems.

Aligning education policy leadership in the Governor's Office with a Cabinet department to support the vision will provide a singular focus. Deputy Directors with experience and training in Primary and Secondary Education Leadership and Career-Technical Education will create intentional synergy between the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) and local education agencies. Intentional partnerships with higher education and workforce development, marshaling Ohio's resources, will build synergy through a multi-agency approach.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Sub.Senate Bill 1.