

Testimony on H.B 312
Ohio House Finance Committee
May 8, 2024

Chair Edwards, Vice-Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on the proposed regional partnership legislation.

I am Tom Lasley, founder and former CEO of Learn to Earn Dayton and also former Dean and Professor Emeritus (though I still teach each term) at the University of Dayton. I have spent my professional career working at the systems level to address a wide variety of educational and social issues and continue to serve on a number of different community and national boards, including the National Council on Teacher Quality and the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

As the Theory of Change attached to my testimony shows, the regional partnership approach is grounded on a very significant IF-THEN relationship between critical structural inputs and strategic educational and economic outcomes: IF you have a shared vision and IF you have the right partners and IF you have a sustainable backbone organization and IF the partners work collaboratively THEN achievement gains can and will occur.

HB 312 is an opportunity to create across the state something that now occurs in only a small number of geographic areas. Regional partnerships and HB 312 offer an opportunity to scale state-wide an approach that has made a real difference in a small number of Ohio geographies.

As you all know, economic vitality is closely tied to educational attainment. A simple google search will reveal that as the intellectual capital of a county, state or country increases there is a direct impact on economic output. Indeed, economists such as Eric Hanushek (Stanford University) have clearly documented that educational attainment is a predictor of economic growth.

Ohio is now confronting some unprecedented workforce challenges and although we have many workforce programs in place, the projections for filling our current and next generation job needs are not promising.

Ohio has a proud tradition of local control and I have always been an advocate of local control on educational issues. Creating Ohio's workforce of the future will require that our localized efforts be complemented with a unified collective impact approach. Mark Kramer addressed this issue a decade ago when he wrote: "The heroic efforts of countless teachers, administrators, and nonprofits, together with billions of dollars in charitable contributions, may have led to important

improvements in individual schools and classrooms, yet system-wide [statewide] progress has been virtually unobtainable.”

Kramer’s research proposes what this legislation codifies: A broad collective impact approach to improve key educational attainment metrics around six critical performance milestones, which include kindergarten readiness, third grade reading, eighth grade math, high school graduation, college enrollment and college graduation.... all of which collectively influence employment readiness. The scope of these metrics requires that Ohio institutionalizes collective impact structures that can leverage the work of existing educational assets (e.g., early learning efforts, K-12 schools, higher education institutions and a wide variety of stakeholders).

In our area Learn to Earn Dayton, which is co-located with the Montgomery County Educational Service Center, is a non-profit that works across these sectors and with a diverse set of community partners in ways that other educational institutions simply could not do and do not have as established priorities. Some examples:

Example 1: All our high schools have counselors in Montgomery County who are working to help students complete FAFSAs, which as you know are critical to post-secondary enrollment mitigating student debt. Working with the Montgomery County Educational Service Center, Learn to Earn Dayton helped establish agreed upon completion goals, leveraged resources to incentivize FAFSA completion, secured professional development resources to better inform the assistance provided to students, and then tracked for all the schools, public and parochial, the FAFSA completion rates.

Example 2: Learn to Earn Dayton staff met with all the different educational leaders in the community at all levels (i.e., early learning through higher education) to publish an annual report that documents progress toward educational attainment at each of the established milestones for all of Montgomery County. This annual report is presented to the larger community the first Friday of March each year. We make a commitment, collectively with partners who serve each area of the education continuum, to ensure stable or positive progress annually on five of the six performance metrics.

Example 3: Learn to Earn Dayton works with all our educational and community partners to leverage funds that can be used to transform educational opportunities for students and families who are marginalized. As a result of that cross-sector focus, we had the foundation in place that catalyzed a successful Promise Neighborhood Award, with an investment of \$29,000,000 to transform the economic and educational outcomes for those living in one of the poorest areas of our community. That project would not have been possible through existing, disconnected educational assets. It required a collective impact infrastructure such as Learn to Earn Dayton!

These are but three examples...there are MANY more.

I shared earlier our Theory of Change, but accomplishing that can only occur if there is an aligned Theory of Action. Specifically: IF Ohio is going to secure the workforce it needs and foster the economic climate it wants THEN it needs to institutionalize (and scale) regional partnerships that can align with and leverage existing educational assets.

I applaud all the different efforts that are underway in the state to address our current and future workforce challenges. What is being proposed is a necessary and complementary approach that will enhance what exists and build out even more strategies so that ALL students in our state can achieve their personal and professional potential... and so that communities have access to the intellectual capital that they need and require for economic vitality.

You have all heard of the Mississippi miracle in reading, which occurred as a result of that state's adoption of the science of reading. Let's create a different kind of miracle in Ohio: A state where students not only know how to read but who are also live in communities that have program infrastructures that are aligned and leveraged to create the state's next generation workforce.

I offer my thanks to all of you for your thoughtful consideration of this proposed legislation. I'll be happy to address your questions.