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House Primary and Secondary Education Committee Testimony on House Bill 312

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Ohio Excels
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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, my name is Cassie Palsgrove, and I am the Director of K-12 Education Policy at Ohio Excels. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 312 (HB 312) today.

Ohio Excels is a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community to engage employers more consistently and deeply in efforts to help improve educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Ultimately, our goal is to make sure more students graduate ready for success and employers have the talent they need to keep Ohio growing.

Before my time with Ohio Excels, I served in a few roles at the now Department of Education and Workforce, one of which being the Director of the Office of Graduate Success where I served as the administrator over the first iteration of this Regional Education Partnership grant and network. I can personally speak to the benefit of the program laid out in this bill, including the establishment of the state network of Regional Education Partnerships, which I'll discuss later in my testimony.

The Importance of Regional Collaboration

The Regional Education Partnerships program uniquely recognizes the interconnectedness of the entire education and workforce continuum and can catalyze legislative efforts to invest in building the talent of tomorrow.

The program builds on the premise that success in one stage of a child's life is linked to their experiences in other stages. By fostering collaboration among partners along this continuum, Ohio can create a cohesive system that nurtures each child's growth and development.

Addressing Educational Attainment and Economic Mobility

The primary goal of this program and the partnerships is to increase educational attainment and economic mobility. This is achieved by aligning educational resources and community support with regional in-demand workforce skills and opportunities. This alignment can help equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the new economy, which can break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and create doors to more opportunities for all.

Distinguishing Regional Education Partnerships, Business Advisory Councils, and Industry Sector Partnerships

Before I go too far, I'd like to make sure that we are on the same page as it relates to the functions of these Regional Education Partnerships. They are not business advisory councils nor are they industry sector partnerships, both of which play crucial and complementary roles in our education ecosystem.

- **Regional Education Partnerships** bring together a diverse range of community stakeholders, not just employers, to collectively address the interconnected challenges and opportunities across the entire education and workforce continuum. Partners may include local hospitals, early education providers, non-profits that support students and families such as YMCA's, local primary and secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions.
- **Business advisory councils**, on the other hand, provide a platform for direct input from employers to schools to help shape K-12 education curriculum and training programs to ensure they align with in-demand skills in their local communities.
- **Industry sector partnerships** focus on a specific industry, most often manufacturing and healthcare industries, to identify and address the unique needs of their respective workforces and focus on higher education and some secondary education programming.

Examples of the Benefits of the Regional Education Partnership Program

The Regional Education Partnerships we are discussing today can rally communities to make the systemic and programmatic changes necessary to improve opportunities for our talent pipeline. In addition to the great testimony you'll hear from Learn to Earn Dayton, I'd like to highlight two additional successful partnerships (from the state Regional Education Partnership network summary report):

The Northwest Ohio Regional Education Partnership is in its second year piloting a pre-k program that is on track to double enrollment to serve 400 children next year. Also, the partnership was integral to more than 900 students participating in college campus tours and a 15% increase in enrollment to Bowling Green and the University of Toledo. The partnership also doubled the amount of scholarship applications helping students earn more than \$350,000 in scholarships.

The Galia-Jackson-Vinton-Meigs Regional Partnership recently hired career coaches to work with students in all seven partner schools, across three different counties, to implement career exploration classes, and to facilitate job shadowing, internships, and job opportunities for high school students.

Imagine the difference in a student's educational journey in any one of these areas of Ohio – they have the opportunity to move through truly connected systems, where their quality early learning prepares them for primary and secondary school and their secondary experience helps them explore their post-high school life in real time because of the multitude of community and education partners that are coordinating opportunities and supports along the way.

The Imperative for Codified Partnerships

Unfortunately, the reality is that most students in Ohio do not have access to such interconnected support systems. The education community has consistently expressed the need for more aligned community support and collaboration to meet the needs of the students they serve. This program provides a structured framework to address these needs. Take a look at the map below for existing partnerships funded through federal COVID dollars and the areas of the state they serve. We have a social and educational responsibility to address these disparities. Putting this program into permanent law and allocating state funding represents a concrete step towards this goal.

The bill also rightly positions the Department of Education and Workforce, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education, as the lead convener of the state network of Regional Education Partnerships. As mentioned before, as the former administrator over the first iteration of this grant and network, I can personally speak to the benefit of this state network and convening the leaders of the partnerships to share their learnings as they develop local goals and plans. From best practices on making data-driven decisions, to swapping ideas on the best way to

engage the community in local town hall conversations, the state network fosters collaboration and creativity and is an important element of this network.

Overall, Regional Education Partnerships have the potential to yield a multitude of benefits for our students and state, including **improved educational outcomes, increased economic mobility, and enhanced community collaboration**. Passing this bill signals the state’s commitment to this critical work and encourages the development of more of these networks across our state.

Conclusion

Please support this legislation by passing HB 312 and supporting community leaders in developing critical partnerships that will help better prepare our students for success. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

