

**Written Testimony on H.B 312**  
**Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**November 28, 2023**

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and distinguished members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to offer written testimony on the proposed regional educational partnership legislation.

My name is David James, and I currently serve as executive director of Summit Education Initiative (SEI). SEI is a pre-Kindergarten through 16 educational backbone organization concerned with educational attainment across all of Summit County. In addition, as the former superintendent of the Akron Public Schools, I am primarily concerned about how our collective efforts can ensure that our young people get exposed to career fields as part of their educational program, both in and out of school. Organizations like Summit Education Initiative can help spearhead these efforts through our ability to collect data from our local school districts to highlight successes and challenges related to educational attainment. I have seen firsthand how business engagement with students can open their eyes to potential career options. During my tenure in Akron, before retiring in June 2022, the District partnered with Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL) to implement the College and Career Academies of Akron.

Since 2018, the Akron graduation rates have risen from 79.8 percent to 86.1 percent in 2022. In addition, since 2018 there has been a 76.9 percent increase in students who have earned an industry credential and, in the 2023 graduating class, 1,287 students earned the Ohio Means Job Readiness Seal, representing 95.4 percent of the class. These types of outcomes are indicative of how school and industry partnerships can help students stay in school, promote access to career pipelines, and improve economic mobility among our youth. H.B. 312 brings together organizations like Summit Education Initiative and a variety of sister organizations, including the public schools and educational service center providers, to focus on our education and workforce needs from early learning through credential or degree acquisition.

I agree with my colleagues who understand how economic vitality is closely tied to educational attainment. My involvement with our local business advisory council informed my thinking on how our educational pipeline to career is critical to every community across the State of Ohio and with how regional partnerships, such as SEI, can be catalyst for this needed collective impact work. It is this reason why I am advocating for passage of H.B. 312 out of committee for full consideration by the Ohio House.

Sincerely,

*David W. James, Ed.D.*

David W. James, Ed.D., Executive Director  
Summit Education Initiative