Greater Ohio Virtual School

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Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
HB 33
Testimony
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Chairwoman Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am here today to advocate for the Dropout Prevention and Recovery e-school pilot program created in the state operating budget (HB 110). Governor Dewine's introduced version of the bill in HB 33 continues the pilot for an additional two years. The results of the pilot indicate clearly that Dropout Prevention and Recovery e-schools work and are a necessary part of the educational structure in Ohio. Because of the overwhelmingly positive results, we respectfully request that the two-year extension be amended to become permanent.

My name is Shawn E. Lenney, and I am the Executive Director of the Greater Ohio Virtual School (GOVS), a dropout prevention and recovery e-school serving over 700 students in grades 7-12 from 120 school districts statewide. We are located at the Warren County Educational Service Center in Lebanon, Ohio, and sponsored by St Aloysius Charter School Specialists. GOVS is served by a governing board consisting of five school administrators across five districts located in Southwestern Ohio. As an alternative option for students who are at-risk, GOVS provides a comprehensive education with the supports and services of a brick-and-mortar school and has done so since opening in 2002.

In December 2020, Governor DeWine signed HB 123 into law. Within that bill was an amendment to create a 1-year pilot program to help schools like the Greater Ohio Virtual School. The amendment contained a three-tiered funding system that provided solutions to funding issues created due to consideration of seat time only. Tier one, or base funding, filled the large funding void for resources necessary to onboard students who were truant from school and otherwise disengaged. Tier two continued the system of documenting seat time to track and monitor how students engage at our schools. The third and final tier offered funding for achievement or the completion of credits. The funding pilot was then extended for an additional two years through the approval of HB 110. Without this pilot program, the Greater Ohio Virtual School would have closed during the pandemic, forcing hundreds of students to attend schools that may not have been the best fit for academic and social-emotional growth.

The additional funds from the pilot allowed GOVS to implement a plan to increase student engagement and target student wellness, two areas of identified need for the population we serve. The additional funds created by the pilot program allowed for the inclusion of student wellness positions that were previously unobtainable due to funding constraints. A full-time resource coordinator, mental health therapist, and additional guidance counselor were all added to the GOVS staff. We changed our supplemental mentoring program to a full-time Academic Coach model allowing for more time to monitor lesson completion, track engagement, and provide guidance and support to students more frequently. We opened a permanent drop-in facility that provides students with a location to obtain resources and services throughout the day. The GOVS

Student Center has allowed us to increase our family and student engagement events and enable students to socialize and make new friends. During this time, we have graduated over three hundred students, kept over ninety educators employed and served over two thousand students. None of this would be a reality without the pilot program because the Greater Ohio Virtual School would have closed in the summer of 2020

The pilot program required the Ohio Department of Education to issue a report by December 2021. The **Funding Pilot Program For Online Dropout Prevention and Recovery Schools -Report to Legislature** was released on Friday, December 30th, 2022. This report is a critical piece of validation for the funding pilot. The hope was that the report would be positive and end with a recommendation or statement of support. It was indeed positive, as the Ohio Department of Education stated in the conclusion of their report, **"For many students enrolled in these e-schools, a dropout prevention and recovery program is one of the last opportunities to engage in learning and earn a high school diploma. This program provides an opportunity for these e-schools to maximize funding through a combination of enrollment, engagement, and achievement, and acknowledges the additional supports schools provide to students not captured and funded based only on documented learning opportunities.".** Aaron Rausch and his budget and finance team did a fantastic job representing our needs and how the pilot has addressed those needs. They have been incredibly transparent throughout the process and have consistently worked with the participating schools to ensure that the pilot addressed the very needs for which it was created.

I must emphasize emphatically that we are **not** asking for and **have never** asked for additional funding above and beyond what other schools receive or what we would otherwise be eligible to receive. We are simply asking for the ability to continue to earn full funding through multiple pathways. We are already receiving a non-traditional report card for working with non-traditional students. Aligning a non-traditional report card and funding system for working with non-traditional students is the next, logical step. This is my 26th year in education. The last few years have been incredibly fun and rewarding because we are finally offering the resources and programs that our at-risk students need and deserve.

Finally, I want to clarify a common misconception about online schools. It is imperative that lawmakers understand the difference between "remote learning" and "online learning." Remote learning is what brick-and-mortar schools were forced to engage in during the pandemic. It primarily consisted of synchronous learning involving teachers hosting Zoom calls with their students. While Zoom calls and synchronous learning are certainly part of what e-schools do, true online learning is much more comprehensive and effective. That is why studies have shown that students at online schools were the only group that showed educational gains during the pandemic. Ohio's online schools have been educating our children through this modality for over twenty years and are proud to serve students who, for various reasons, have made their way through our virtual doors.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be happy to take any questions.