



From: Michael Linton

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RE: Sponsor Testimony for SB 1

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 1. This bill appears to improve potential outcomes for K-12 students in the state. I expect one of the benefits to be not only a higher percentage of students that graduate but also will be better prepared for all aspects of life (including work). I expect the bill will also improve academic achievement due to enhanced engagement based on curriculum directed to individual student interests. I don't expect anyone would disagree with the statement that we as the public school system in Ohio can do better at preparing our students for the workforce – either directly from high school or all the way through post graduate work. I would suggest that our definition of success – at the individual student level and the school district level – is flawed. No one is surprised to hear that schools teach to the tests. I am a firm believer in standards and my experience is that very few objectives succeed without accountability. My question continues to be – what are the correct measurements of student and district success?

If I may – a quick personal background to maybe help you understand my perspective:

I am a lifelong Ohio resident, other than a couple of short apartment stays in San Francisco and Zurich for work.

I grew up in Circleville. Graduated from Capital University with degrees in Accounting and Economics.

My relevant interest and experience on this topic includes:

- Member of the Governor's Executive Workforce Policy Board
- Chair of Area 20/21 Workforce Policy Board – Ross, Pike, Hocking, Fairfield, Pickaway counties
- Retired CEO of Adecco North America
- Owner of multiple small businesses over the years in a wide range of industries
- Advisory board member for multiple Career and Technology Centers
- Member of Logan Elm Local School board for more than 14 years
- State and local board for Jobs for America's Graduates
- Numerous economic and workforce development boards including Ohio Southeast Economic Development

As a result of my time with Adecco, I have been engaged in workforce development issues since the early 1990's. My testimony today is not limited to the trades, but I hope to speak on behalf of all employers.

My goal in sharing these experiences is to suggest that I am engaged in workforce issues at the local, state and national levels. I spend most of my time working with individuals and organizations who, like me, want to improve employment opportunities for every individual in the state.

My view on the workforce today is that is the single greatest limitation to economic growth. I don't expect any long-term improvement due to current demographics and the lack of preparedness/preparation of students graduating from our current educational system. For the first time in our country's history, we have more people retiring from than entering the workforce. Students generally are less prepared for life. I understand that there are a plethora of factors that contribute to the continuing decline in student preparedness and many of those are and should be outside the responsibility of the school systems, but the education system in Ohio is the only solution we have to abate the tidal wave.

The primary contributors to the challenging workforce environment are:

- The lack of preparation for students graduating from or leaving the K-12 system
- The 40% of Ohioans ages 18-65 who aren't working today for whatever reason

We are here to focus on the first issue.

In my opinion, based on years of working on this issue, including hundreds of interviews with students, the primary issue we face in Ohio is lack of student engagement in education. If the education system could provide more inviting options directed toward the student's interests, we can overcome some of the disengagement of students. It is an opportunity for the employers of the state working closely with local schools to improve student engagement. Business Advisory Councils seemed to be a step in the right direction, but lack of a common goals, lack of defined BAC expected outcomes and participation from the employers and/or the school districts has rendered most BAC's virtually ineffective. I have visited many BAC meetings over the past several years. The reality is most districts (or even worse – many ESC's acting on behalf of local districts) treat the BAC as another box to check. Employers have little, if any, voice in curriculum or exposure to administration, faculty or students. And those were the objectives of the program.

Students are told beginning very early in their educational experience and continue to hear throughout their K-12 education, that college is THE BEST (and maybe only) PATH to personal success. And why wouldn't they? A very large percentage of teachers in the classroom have gone straight from their own K-12 experience to an undergrad degree then back to the classroom to teach. That is only path they know. Most teachers, and administrators, have limited exposure to local businesses to understand what jobs exist in their county, let alone what a job description or compensation package might look like.

A major limiting factor to K-12 education in Ohio is mass standardization. We teach to the middle so we can pass standardized tests. And we measure success on how well those students perform on those tests. I personally believe that limits the top students and the underperformers. The reality is kids are not standardized and many have different life goals other than attending college. Without exposure to and options to pursue alternative pathways, many students become disenfranchised. Some "check out" as early as middle school.

K-12 teachers are compensated based on how many years they have taught and how many post graduate degrees they can attain. I know I live, and have always lived, in the private sector, but where is the focus on student success as a tool to determine teacher compensation? Why is there no incentive for teachers to improve their “game”, including:

- Pour more of themselves into preparation and delivery of content
- To consider creative ways to address the changing demographics in the classroom
- Engage students who have “checked out”
- Learn more about career options for students in their communities (Greenfield story)

The unions represent the teachers, but who represents the students?

I certainly am not criticizing preparing students for college, but to somehow promote that path as preferred over other options is not in the best interest of the general student population or our economy. The statistics are staggering of the number of students who attend college for one to four semesters and leave college with nothing to show for it except:

- A pile of student debt
- Opportunity cost of missed income from career-based employment
- Unfilled positions with local employers

The point here is that career-based education should share equal footing, promotion and respect with those students who are college qualified and college ready. Career based education still carries the stigma of a program for academic underachievers. Undergrad degree attainment remains in the low 20% of the overall Ohio population. Without debating whether that number is high enough – does it make sense that more than 60% of Ohio high school graduates head off to college within 18 months of graduation?

Both Germany and Japan have built education models that help students evaluate their career interests and skills much earlier than school in the US. With the availability of technology driven curriculum, I do not understand why we can't create more customized education paths for students. Unfortunately, for the students who choose to pursue career-based education, many are turned away by CTC's due to program capacity issues from:

- Building/lab space
- Lack of qualified instructors

I support building an educational model where students interested in career-based education have the opportunity to learn of careers in their communities and can remain at their home schools for all or part of the day. This also may resolve some of the funding issues inherent between home school districts and CTC's. To summarize this point, we need more career based educational options available to students at an earlier age. Students who select these options should be celebrated to the same degree as those headed to college. Students who are kinesthetic learners and find their passion in middle school have a much better chance of completing a high school degree. There is not a one size fits all solution – each school district and each community is unique, but access to career based education is critical.

I believe the intention of the testing at the high school level is misguided. The ability of school to teach to the tests and students to prepare for the tests is not a statistically valid indicator of a student's potential success in life. And isn't that what we should care about? I know this data is sometimes difficult to obtain, but isn't the evaluation of student standing one, three and five years post-graduation a much more important measure of school performance? At a minimum, assessments should be developed that measure something besides the student's mastery of Algebra or Spanish.

A key tenant of this bill is the expectation that the head of K-12 education in Ohio is tasked to consider the workforce needs of the state, rather than simply being a feeder system for higher education. At the same time the leader of public instruction in Ohio must be aware of their responsibility to prepare ALL students for a path that will lead each student to a chance at personal success. And for most students, career-based employment is part of that story. Changes to the K-12 system happen very slowly and are driven by people who only know the world of education. I must say from my experience on a public-school board and communication from ODE and OSBA, there is a bit of mis-guided confidence (arrogance) around the education model. Some districts, administrators and teachers see the need to change, but ODE holds the cards and status quo seems to prevail. Any past and potential future change take too long to come to fruition. And there is NO ACCOUNTABILITY for results.

I believe our Lieutenant Governor and the Office of Workforce Transformation are working with employers to create some innovative programs, but these programs, including 16-17 year old internships, pre-apprentice programs, exposure to local career opportunities need more support from education. This can only be accomplished through a strategic overhaul of our current K-12 model. I have said for the past several years that I am excited for the economic development wins in our great state. I attribute these to the good work of Jobs Ohio, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the legislature and local economic development teams. But as I ask often to all who will listen...."Who is waking up thinking about workforce development everyday and all day in our state?" I can assure you that is not the State Board of Education or the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. This bill creates an infrastructure to address this question. If we don't enhance or workforce development pipeline thought improved K-12 education, the Intels and Hondas and Fords simply rob Peter to pay Paul. The result is potentially net zero economic growth and a growing number of underemployed individuals who will unnecessarily continue to be a drain on the public support system.

Thank you for the opportunity to share and I will answer any questions you may have.

