



Greater Ohio Virtual School

1879 Deerfield Road, Lebanon, OH 45036

Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 33

Testimony

May 4th, 2023

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingraham, and members of the Senate Education Committee thank you for allowing me to testify today. 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 statewide in grades 7-12. I am here today to advocate for the Dropout Prevention and Recovery e-school pilot program first created in the state operating budget (HB 110). I want to start by personally thanking Chairman Brenner for supporting this program in previous budgets. It is fair to say that without his support, I would not be here testifying, nor would our school be in existence. I will share with you later in my testimony the impact this program has had on our school and community, but I would be remiss if I did not begin by expressing my gratitude to the Chair.

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.



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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. 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.

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