

Thank you, Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking member Ingram and distinguished members of the Senate Education committee, for taking the time to review vital education issues facing our communities. I am Greg Harp, Chief Development Officer of Graduation Alliance. Graduation Alliance has worked with disengaged and chronically absent youth and adults since 2007. I am here to discuss two programs, the attendance recovery program called Engage Ohio, and an extension of Ohio 22 plus to students 18 – 22. We are asking for a renewal of Engage at \$7million, and the creation of a pilot program form \$2million for the 22 plus extension.

The legislature along with ODE and the governor have implemented a variety of programs focused on learning loss in subjects like reading and math that will make a difference, assuming students show up for those programs. Chronic absenteeism, however, will be a major obstacle to the effectiveness of these programs.

So let me address ENGAGE, the program designed to counter chronic absenteeism. Last biennium, it was funded at \$7 million with the purpose of locating completely disengaged students and increasing the attendance of chronically absent students through outreach and proactive coaching. We are requesting that this funding be extended. While much progress was made, as I will outline later in my testimony, chronic absenteeism has continued to be a major problem in Ohio, with the latest report indicating that 30% of Ohio students are still chronically absent this year. While we all hoped this issue would be temporary, the problem is persistent and will continue to need the focus and resources of the state in the coming years.

The ENGAGE program was utilized completely last biennium with:

- 67,000 referrals from districts,
- 850,000 outreach attempts to those referrals,
- 16,000 families served through coaching,
- and 1,000 missing students located.

A recent data review of the ENGAGE program found that in comparison to their control group:

- Chronic Absenteeism dropped 13.9% across all groups.
- 60.7% of all students improved attendance.
- K-5 students increased attendance by 11.3 days.
- Hispanic and Latino students increased by 6.7 days.
- The overall impact was increased attendance of 4.5 days for boys and 4.1 days for girls.
- In particular, the findings showed that K-8 student attendance benefited from coaching in comparison to the control groups.
- It is also noteworthy that our minority populations benefited most from coaching in terms of improved attendance.

Establishing good habits in our K-8 students is a key element to reducing chronic absenteeism in the coming years. Extending funding for the next biennium will be an excellent start.

As I mentioned, Graduation Alliance works with both chronically absent and completely disengaged students. Data from across the nation indicates chronic absenteeism is a key indicator of future disengagement and contributes to the dropout population. Ohio has for 8 years led the nation in establishing a dropout recovery program for adults over the age of 22. The 8 providers represented by Graduation Alliance have graduated 3,000 former dropouts alone and have a current graduation rate of 67%. Accounting for all the costs across the providers, the cost per graduate is only \$5,361, far below any comparable programs. Just six months after graduation:

- 64% of students reported they had been promoted in their current job or found a better job after graduation.
- Access to health insurance increased from 33% to 42%.
- 53% reported working in a high-demand job.
- 30% went on to higher education.

Arguably, Ohio has been *the* example of an economic model with national security importance with the Intel agreement. The aforementioned chronic absenteeism and disruptions in school over the past three years have created a wave of dropouts in Ohio and across the nation. While the data on the extent of the problem is still not entirely clear, the early indicators, like chronic absenteeism, and the barrier data we have collected through the ENGAGE program, show the wave is already here.

The success of the 22-plus program points to a remedy for this wave of dropouts. By extending the program to cover dropouts ages 18 and above, the state will catch students earlier, gain skilled workers faster, and utilize a proven, effective, and efficient program. The extension of the 22-plus program is critical to add more hands to those addressing the dropout population in Ohio, address gaps in service in rural areas and other “choice deserts,” and build capacity to meet the education and workforce needs that are vital to making Ohio into an even stronger economic model for our nation. It is our ask that this committee funds \$2 million each year in addition to the current 22-plus line item in the next biennium.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to take questions.