



**Written Testimony to Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 295- Interested Party
December 10, 2024
Dr. Romulus Durant, Superintendent, Toledo Public Schools &
Co-Chair, The Ohio 8 Coalition**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, My name is Dr. Romulus Durant. I am the Superintendent of Toledo Public Schools and Co-Chair of The Ohio 8 Coalition. I appreciate the chance to submit written testimony regarding SB 295 on behalf of our Coalition.

The Ohio 8 is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from nine urban school districts in Ohio – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lorain, Toledo and Youngstown. As a Coalition, we have testified many times over the years regarding school closure policy. In some instances, such policy has focused on academic performance; perceived under enrollment challenges; and implementation of various school improvement strategies. In nearly each of these scenarios (i.e.: Academic Distress Commissions; The Parent Trigger) the originating legislation was developed without the participation of the school districts; labor leaders and communities that are most impacted. Additionally, much of what has been developed in the past has rarely focused on proactive partnerships or evidence-based strategies that seek to prevent and mitigate challenges across various student groups and the communities in which they live. As a result, most legislation tends to be punitive instead of attempting to resolve problems before they become systemic issues.

The hope of the Ohio 8 Coalition is that the evolution of Senate Bill 295 does not follow this same pattern.

Presently, The Ohio 8 Coalition is gathering data on the impact of SB 295 on each of our members school districts. In the interim, what we can share with this Committee lessons learned from similar conversations in the past. Specifically, that if Ohio wants to improve performance or a learning setting at a particular school building, then such policies to address those issues should be developed in partnership with us and must start with the following evidenced based strategies:

- Proactive resources from the State of Ohio, such as state technical assistance, should be made available through partnerships with the school if such support aligns with and is helpful within their established plan or mitigation strategy.
- Any technical assistance offered must be delivered by expert educators and administrators that have a proven track record of turning around lower performing schools.
- Establish state driven standards specifically for school improvement experts (other states do this already). These educators must have at least ten years of successful experience in education and at least 5 of those years must be working directly with low performing student groups that experienced improved and sustained improvement.
- Established and ongoing partnerships between school district administration and labor leadership that partner in improvement strategies.
- Clear pathways to show improvement that are evidenced based and provide the opportunity to be released or no longer labeled as “poor performing”.

Again, we offer these suggestions as a starting place as the conversation around SB 295 continues. We will also continue outreach to each of you on this Committee to ensure the final policy focuses on proactive, preventative, and evidence-based practices that partner with the schools to achieve success.

Chairman Brenner and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to share with you today. Please feel free to reach out if you have any further questions. I can be reached at rdurant@tps.org or you should not hesitate to also connect with our lobbyist Scarlett Boudier at 614-266-0102. Thank you.