



House Children and Human Services Committee
House Bill 96
Dorothy Moulthrop, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer
Mike Von Gunten, Superintendent of Firelands Local Schools
Ms. Ruby Lyde, Grandparent of ODA Scholar
Open Doors Academy
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Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Dorothy Moulthrop, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Open Doors Academy (ODA). ODA is an educational nonprofit that provides high quality afterschool programs, summer camps, and year-round family engagement programming to children and young adults across Northeast and Northwest Ohio. We will serve more than 1,850 youth and their families this school year.

ODA is a workforce solution for many families that cannot otherwise afford childcare before and after school or during the summer. What sets ODA apart from other out-of-school time providers is our understanding that youth are best positioned to learn when their basic needs are met, and they are interested in the instructional content. We partner with local food banks to ensure that children receive snacks, meals and, in some cases, a bag of groceries to take home. In addition to working with math and reading tutors, we collaborate with our local partners to find instructors and courses that are educational and fun, like our culinary programs in Sandusky and Mansfield.

A recent analysis of the impact of our program on scholars' grades at our programs in Mansfield, Lima, and Sandusky, and in Lorain County further demonstrates the success of this model. On average, 66% of our scholars improved their grades in English/Language and 64% of scholars improved their grades in Math from the first to third quarter of the 2022-2023 school year.

Our studies have also proven the effectiveness of ODA's programming model in fighting chronic absenteeism. During the 2023-24 school year, our scholars showed an improved school day attendance rate of up to 66%, and on average spend 10 days more in school than their peers.

While our name may suggest otherwise, ODA is not a school, and we do not receive per pupil funding. We have been fortunate to receive TANF earmarks in prior budgets, which has allowed us to expand from 14 sites in the 2019-2020 school year to 28 sites in eight school districts today.

I would like to thank Representative Deeter for her support of a budget amendment to direct \$3 million in TANF funds each fiscal year to ODA. I ask that the committee favorably consider this request. There is significant interest and demand for our programs across the state,

and TANF support is vital for our ability to continue to meet this need. I'd like to introduce Mike Von Gunten to share his perspective on ODA programs.

Chair White, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Mike Von Gunten, and I am the Superintendent of Firelands Local Schools. We partnered with ODA to start an after school program at our middle school during the 2022-2023 school year. We were thrilled with the programs and very positive feedback from our student's families, and added both before and after school programs at our elementary school the following school year. These programs provide more than just supervision—they are lifelines for working families and safe havens for children.

I want to recognize Cara Hutchinson, the dedicated principal of Firelands Middle School, and Michelle Radanovich, middle school math teacher and the ODA program coordinator, for their tireless efforts in making this program a success. Their work ensures that our students have a place where they feel a sense of belonging. Every day, a core group of 25 to 30 sixth- through eighth-graders—diverse in their backgrounds, interests, and academic needs—come together. They start with scheduled homework time and math and reading tutoring, then transition to activities like crafts, gym time, and outdoor play.

This program is particularly critical at Firelands Local Schools, a mostly rural district spanning over 90 square miles. Families here have no other after-school care options, making programs like this not just beneficial but essential. For parents, knowing their children are in a safe, structured environment after school provides peace of mind and allows them to keep and maintain their employment.

Without programs like this, many students would go home to an empty house, struggle with their schoolwork, or miss out on the social interactions that are crucial to their development. We know that students who participate in after-school programs show improved academic performance, better behavior, and stronger interpersonal skills. Investing in these programs isn't just the right thing to do—it's a smart investment in Ohio's future. Now I'd like to introduce Ruby Lyde, who will share how these programs have impacted her family.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about what Open Doors Academy has meant to my life. A friend's mother had a difficult life. I met the mother and I simply told her, if you ever need someone I will be there for you. 16 years ago, the mother remembered what I said. I was babysitting for these two girls and I never heard from her. She was gone and she didn't come back. I knew what I had to do. I became the guardian. In the beginning I could manage, but as they got older, I needed help. A lot of help. When those girls came into the world, I was asked to take care of them, and God had my back with Open Doors Academy.

My granddaughter, Amira, is now 18 years old and a senior at Cleveland Heights High School. She started Open Doors Academy when she was in 9th grade. The doors opened for her and for me, and they never shut.

ODA taught her basic things that she hadn't learned in school. She learned about other countries and their traditions and the food. When she didn't know how to do a resume, they helped her. They taught her how to interview and how to get a job. In the pandemic, she lost her way, she was afraid, and she barely spoke. ODA helped her find herself again and get her voice back.

ODA built Amira's character and how she presents herself to the world. This is what we want for all young people. We want to send them out into the world, and we want to send them out as the best person they can be.

The program helped Amira to be stronger. She came out of her cocoon and now she is soaring like a butterfly. It helped her to be a leader, and it helped her to show she could develop her own business and be an entrepreneur herself. She made bracelets and ODA gave her the opportunity to go and sell them. Whenever you have to sell something, you have to use your voice, make eye contact, and communicate.

This program opened doors to opportunities that she did not think she had. She did not think she could be a student at a college, but she wants to visit colleges with ODA, and she now sees herself as someone who could go to college. It opened a door to service. She helped in the community, and she found doing so brought her more love than she could ever imagine.

These are opportunities that I could not give her. I could not afford any of this. She is excited. She feels loved in ODA. These are things I just couldn't provide for her. So many people need this program because raising young people is difficult. I always felt alone, but I knew I could call on ODA to step in and be my voice if it was needed.

Thank you for supporting this program and for your time listening to how it impacted my life. I urge you to continue and expand funding for before- and after-school programs. Our students deserve safe spaces to learn, grow, and thrive, and we have the power to make that happen.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children.