



HB 96 Proponent Testimony

David Taylor, Superintendent of the Dayton Early College Academy

House Education Committee

Chair Sarah Fowler Arthur

March 3, 2025

Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Education Committee, I am honored to be before you today as a proponent of HB 96. My name is Dave Taylor, and I am the Superintendent of the Dayton Early College Academy (commonly known as DECA), a network of high-performing community schools in the city of Dayton. Our three schools serve approximately 1,300 students in grades K-12, or about 7% of our city's children, with a singular focus of helping each of them gain the skills they need to go to and graduate from college. Our schools overwhelmingly serve children who are underrepresented in higher education: three-quarters of our students are considered economically disadvantaged, 98% are children of color, and the vast majority will be in their family's first generation to graduate from college.

Despite countless reforms over many decades, children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to reach the American Dream of financial independence and career and social stability. This is especially true in the city of Dayton where the majority of children live in poverty. I am now in the middle of my 21st year at DECA. I began as a classroom teacher—still the best job I've ever had—and quickly fell in love with the city of Dayton, the young scholars I serve, the people I work with, and the school that took a chance on me. Since DECA's inception as a Dayton Public school in 2003 and through our conversion to become a community school in 2007, we have served as a choice for families in Dayton who are searching for an option that will challenge their children academically and provide them with the structure and support they need to find success. Our schools provide hope—an accessible, tuition-free option—for families bold enough to dream about the futures their children deserve. And it works: DECA has consistently produced the highest scores in the city of Dayton on the Ohio State Tests, and 90% of our graduates go on to enroll in college. What's more, we boast a college graduation rate of more than 53%—that is five times the national average for students of similar demographics and very comparable to many of the suburban districts in the Dayton area. Since we opened our doors in 2003, over 75% of DECA graduates have either graduated from college or are still enrolled.

Since our conversion to a community school in 2007, our schools have made due with significantly less funding than other schools serving similar students. We haven't always been able to afford the best technology, to pay our staff competitively, or to provide the best facilities. We have spent countless hours soliciting support from our friends in the community to keep the lights on and sustain our work. While we strive to ensure our students never feel like they have less than others, it has become increasingly difficult to keep up with the rising costs of running a public school. For years we watched our traditional public school counterparts raise their salaries and poach our best, most talented

teachers. Too many times, we had teachers tell us that they will have to leave because the next district is offering \$5,000, \$10,000 or even upwards of \$15,000 more than we can offer them.

We have known for some time that poverty and student achievement are negatively correlated and while community schools receive some additional funding to support our efforts, we know that without this provision our funding levels are alarmingly insufficient to meet our children's needs. Simply put, the work to mitigate generational poverty costs more. Inside our school walls, we act as surrogate parents to our students. We constantly run activities before school, after school, on weekends, over breaks, and during the summer to help students make up ground academically. We work diligently to ensure that we are equipping our students with the skills they need to interact socially and professionally. We ensure that every student completes college courses while they are in high school. We continue to invest deeply in alumni relationships after graduation and provide support as they move to and through college. We constantly work to improve our ability to understand our students' cultures, experiences, and values to ensure they are reflected in our curriculum and instructional practices. I welcome any of you to visit our schools—you will see firsthand that there are no shortcuts to serving our students well. We do all of these things and so much more because our scholars—in fact every child—deserves to go to a school that believes in them and is worthy of them. This is why I come before you today with three (3) requests:

1. Support the Governor's proposed increase in facilities funding from \$1,000 per pupil to \$1,500;
2. Support the Governor's proposal to move the Quality Community School Support Fund, the Equity Supplement, and Facilities Aid from a budget line item to statute. The vast majority of our expenses are personnel-related—education is, after all, a people-driven field—and we are constantly uncertain whether our funding will be cut in the next budget cycle. This makes planning for salary increases and committing to grow our schools extremely difficult. Simply put, we need to know that we can count on being funded if we continue to perform above expectations and expand to serve more students down the line;
3. Consider increasing the Equity Supplement from \$625 per student to \$1,000 to reduce the funding gap between traditional schools and charters.

As I conclude, I would like to note that we have worked diligently to be good stewards of the state's funding. Over the years we have used our increased funding to drastically increase teacher salaries, add needed academic and behavior interventions and supports, adopt high quality instructional materials, and more. Because of your support for schools like mine, we have retained more top teachers, maintained our standing as academic leaders in our community, and begun actively exploring ways to expand our impact in the Dayton area. Thank you for your support and belief in the scholars and families I serve. Don't stop now—please help us continue fulfilling our mission and changing students' lives for the better.

I am grateful that you are approaching this endeavor with clear eyes and that you have afforded me an opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I stand ready to help you in any way and would welcome any questions you may have for me.