



**Proponent Testimony House Bill 96  
Senate Education Committee  
March 4, 2025**

Chairwoman Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 96. My name is Josh Jennings, I am the Founding Director and Superintendent of Global Impact STEM Academy, an independent STEM school in Springfield, and the current President of the Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools (OAISS).

OAISS represents Ohio's network of public independent STEM schools in order to promote their growth and sustainability to meet the state's workforce demands. As background, the creation of public independent STEM schools was authorized by members of the 127<sup>th</sup> General Assembly via provision of the biennium budget; intentionally creating a new classification of schools- neither traditional public or charter schools- to focus and support the economic development of the state with an emphasis on project-based learning steeped in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Our schools were created, in part, to be research and development labs for education in Ohio, and to be incubators of STEM talent across the state to meet Ohio's evolving workforce demand. We have embraced this challenge, and are Ohio's pre-eminent STEM trailblazers. We set the bar for STEM education in the state, and serve as the STEM talent pipeline.

As the state prioritizes workforce readiness, it is important to note that our schools work closely with businesses and institutes of higher education to ensure we are preparing students for success in the future and are addressing the regional workforce needs. In fact, across our network of eight schools, we have more than 750 community, business and higher education partners. At our schools, students are exposed to career opportunities early and often, and regularly engage with partners to explore workforce opportunities in the region.

As our name implies, independent STEM schools are not tied to a district, allowing us to accept any Ohio student, and be more flexible. But, as independent STEM schools, we educate our students exclusively with state and federal dollars that follow the student and are unable to levy taxes. The Quality Community School and Independent STEM School Support program has been crucial for our schools to be able to continue to fulfill our unique mission of providing personalized project-based learning and robust career exploratory programs, and meet the demands of the state and the communities we serve.

As mentioned above, our schools collaborate with local businesses, governments and academic institutes to ensure our curriculum is meeting the needs of today's workforce. Focusing on skill-mastery and problem-based learning, we prepare students for the industries of the future. Our successes are evident by our nearly 100 percent graduation rate, the high rate of students that pursue STEM post-graduation- between 60-70 percent. Our schools' value to the state is further demonstrated by the fact that our demand far exceeds our capacity, the number of educators, businesses and elected officials across Ohio and the country that are interested in learning how to replicate our programs, and the testimonies of students, parents and alumni of our schools. We take an innovative approach to education and are happy to share best practices and training to educators across the state and nation. We want to see all students succeed, and our impact reaches far beyond the students enrolled in our schools.

Independent STEM schools, by designation, emphasize personalized learning, real-life experiences and exposure to the workforce and emerging careers. Schools provide pathways in a variety of innovative fields, for example engineering, health, agriculture and more. Each classroom is essentially a lab, and our teachers have deep knowledge and experience in these areas. To ensure our teachers are qualified and we remain innovative, our staff is required to participate in extensive professional development. Our robust career exploratory programs also require us to provide students with equipment and technology that will prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. The fundamental requirements independent STEM schools must meet to achieve designation/redesignation are high and stand as proof that the students we are serving are receiving a high quality education.

Our schools want all Ohio children to succeed, and remain invested in sharing best practices. Investing in independent STEM schools is a sound investment for the state. Thank you for your time and consideration.