



Statement before the Ohio House Committee on Education
Testimony on S.B. No. 156

Advancing the American Dream by Teaching the Success Sequence

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To Chairwoman Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and the esteemed members of the House Education Committee, my name is Dr. Brad Wilcox.

I come to you as a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia and a fellow at the Institute for Family Studies (IFS) and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). My research focuses on marital quality, marital stability, and the impact of strong and stable marriages upon men, women, and children. My desire to give young adults in Ohio a shot at the American Dream is what brings me to you today, to testify in support of SB156.

This crucial bill, which would require Ohio public schools to teach the Success Sequence from grades six to twelve, would give hundreds of thousands of Ohio children the tools they need to steer clear of poverty, reach the middle class, and forge a strong and stable family life. The Success Sequence is a research-backed, three-step formula that has seen [97% of young adults](#) who followed the steps avoid poverty. The three steps are getting at least a high school degree, a full-time job in your twenties, and marrying before having any children. The vast majority of those who follow the Success Sequence also find themselves in the middle class or higher by the time they reach their thirties. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds also reap the benefits of the Success Sequence: 94% of young adults from lower-income families and 96% of young Hispanic and black adults who followed the Success Sequence are not poor by the time they reach their thirties. These statistics are based on my [analysis](#) with Dr. Wendy Wang of more than 7,000 young adults who were surveyed in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

Marriage also increases the odds that young adults build strong and stable families and realize what the Declaration of Independence called the “pursuit of Happiness.” The data [show](#) that millennials who marry before having children are far more likely to have stable marriages. By their mid-30s, 73% of those who married first remain in intact families—meaning they're married and have never divorced. In contrast, only 30% of those who had children before or outside of marriage are in intact families. The [research](#) also

indicates those who married before having children are the least emotionally distressed and happiest young men and women.

Closer to home, we see that 98% of Ohio thirtysomethings who have completed all three steps are not poor, compared to 82% of their peers who have not, according to the [American Community Survey](#) (5-year estimates, 2023). Likewise, 78% who have taken all three steps own a home in the Buckeye State, compared to 31% who have not, according to the [Current Population Survey](#) (2015-2025). These findings are consistent with the idea that the sequence offers a pathway towards the American Dream for young men and women across the state. Success Sequence education is a key way in which Ohio can encourage future generations to embrace the three pillars of the Dream: education, work, and marriage. For these reasons, I support SB156.