



A Voice for Ohio's DOPR Schools

**House Finance Committee
House Bill 96
Interested Party Testimony
March 11, 2025**

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96, the state operating budget. My name is Rosemary Rooker, and I am the superintendent of Findlay Digital Academy, but today I'm here to speak with you on behalf of the GRADS Coalition.

The GRADS Coalition consists of eight dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) community schools operating throughout the state, both online and brick-and-mortar. DOPR schools educate some of Ohio's most vulnerable students who have struggled in traditional school settings. Our member schools are free, public schools that provide unique learning environments and services to help our students get back on track, and most importantly, earn a high school diploma. We have proven track records which provide choice to Ohio families, nontraditional approaches to education, and our schools consistently earn ratings of Meets and Exceeds Standards on the Dropout Prevention School report card. Our communities recognize the value of our schools and are supportive in our mission.

Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) helps fund vital initiatives to support wraparound services for Ohio's students who face a number of challenges. The funds are intended to help students overcome obstacles and prepare for future success. All traditional and community brick-and-mortar schools are eligible to receive DPIA as this funding is based on a district's economically disadvantaged percentage. However, current law excludes DOPR e-schools from these funds and our students are deemed ineligible.

There is strong rationale for providing DPIA funds to DOPR e-schools. Our schools primarily serve "at-risk" students many of whom have experienced trauma in their lives and are dealing with numerous social and emotional issues. For many students, a DOPR school is their last opportunity for success. We surveyed our GRADS Coalition member schools, and 64.9% of our students are economically disadvantaged. Some of the most common barriers our students experience include:

- Parenthood
- Extreme poverty (200% of the federal poverty level)
- Homelessness
- Sexual and/or physical abuse
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Bullying
- Limited English proficiency
- High mobility and family disruptions
- Grade retention/age-for grade

- Being in the foster care system
- Loss of caregivers and parents
- Severe physical and/or mental health condition

These are the same barriers that exist in brick-and-mortar schools, however, funding is provided, while students in an e-school are deemed ineligible. Why?

Under current law, DPIA funds may be used for (among other things) dropout prevention, mental health services, physical health care services, family engagement and support services, services for homeless youth, mentoring programs, instructional technology, reading improvement and intervention, and academic interventions. DOPR e-schools earmark financial resources to many of the funding allowances listed above, but usually not at the level that is needed or we have to reallocate monies from other programs. Additionally, the increase in social and emotional needs of our students alone continues to impact the essential need for financial support.

Without the proper support for the alternatives our schools provide, many of these students would be high school dropouts living in our communities with the probability of community dependence for an indefinite amount of time.

My colleagues and I ask that HB 96 be amended to make dropout prevention and recovery e-schools eligible for DPIA funding. There are currently twelve DOPR e-schools in Ohio. This would not only ensure that DOPR e-schools are eligible just like traditional and community brick-and-mortar schools, but also so we have the proper resources to fulfill our statutory purpose – dropout prevention and recovery for our students.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter, and I would be happy to answer any questions.