

**Subject: Formal Testimony Before the Ohio House Finance Committee Regarding the Aerospace Program at Northwestern High School**

Honorable Chair and Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee,

I stand before you today to present testimony in fervent support of the Aerospace Program at Northwestern High School, and to elucidate the profound impact it has had on our students and the broader community.

This program has proven to be a transformative catalyst for our students, aligning seamlessly with the state's strategic objectives for college and career readiness. It transcends the mere study of aerospace, igniting a fervent interest in STEM fields and connecting our students to high-demand, high-wage careers within the state of Ohio. We have witnessed marked increases in student engagement and motivation, particularly among those previously disengaged in traditional academic settings.

Our initiative commenced in the 2021-2022 academic year with limited resources and a resolute vision. Ms. Whitney Walsh, Chair of the Mathematics Department, and I, Lahela Snyder, Curriculum Director, collaborated to develop a rigorous, hands-on, STEM-focused aerospace curriculum.

Early in the program's implementation, we forged strategic partnerships with community stakeholders, notably through the introduction of Drone Soccer. With critical funding from the State STEM enrichment program, we acquired essential equipment. This initiative, in turn, facilitated a pivotal connection with Ms. Lashonda Miller and the Braxton Miller Foundation, significantly expanding our program's scope and impact. Furthermore, Representative Willis, recognizing the program's potential, facilitated a connection regarding a grant opportunity to further bolster aerospace education for Ohio students.

This connection resulted in Northwestern High School being designated a partner school, enabling us to accelerate program development in alignment with the burgeoning aerospace infrastructure in Clark County, the home of Governor Mike DeWine.

Following the inaugural year, we partnered with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, leveraging a grant from the FAA. This collaboration allowed us to provide specialized training for Ms. Walsh, expanding our curriculum to include both manned and unmanned aviation pathways.

A recent field trip to Springfield-Beckley Airport exposed our students to a diverse array of aerospace careers, further fueling their enthusiasm and prompting increased enrollment in advanced aerospace courses.

Moreover, grant funding has enabled us to provide our secondary curriculum team and administration with professional development through coursework, networking, and attendance at leading industry conferences, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. Critically, the grant has facilitated the acquisition of advanced technological equipment, including a variety of drones, a sophisticated weather station, and flight simulators, significantly enhancing our instructional capacity.

This year, our third year of program implementation, has yielded tangible results. Three students experienced their inaugural flights at New Carlisle Airport, while others have articulated clear career aspirations in drone entrepreneurship and related fields. Several students are also pursuing military careers, leveraging their aerospace coursework to enhance their service.

It is noteworthy that even in the program's nascent stages, four members of last year's graduating class pursued aerospace-related college pathways, underscoring the program's immediate and enduring impact.

Northwestern High School is strategically located near key aerospace infrastructure, including the National Advanced Air Mobility Center, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, and other vital facilities, providing unparalleled experiential learning opportunities.

**I urge the Committee to consider the profound return on investment in our Ohio youth. This program provides our students with access to high-wage, high-demand careers within Clark County and beyond. Without this grant support, our small district, with limited resources, could not have achieved this level of program advancement.**

Here are several illustrative examples of the program's impact:

- Students who previously struggled in traditional STEM subjects have demonstrated exceptional aptitude in hands-on aerospace projects.
- Students have developed critical leadership and communication skills through collaborative projects and presentations.
- Students have overcome attendance challenges, demonstrating heightened engagement and academic achievement.
- Students are acquiring practical, real-world skills essential for careers in Ohio's burgeoning aerospace sector.
- The program has fostered a strong sense of community and collaboration, facilitating valuable industry connections.
- Students are inspired to pursue ambitious career goals, contributing to Ohio's future workforce.

The Aerospace Program at Northwestern High School represents a strategic investment in the future of our students and the economic vitality of Ohio. It equips our students with the skills, knowledge, and inspiration necessary to succeed in high-demand aerospace careers.

I respectfully request that the Ohio House Finance Committee recognize the substantial value of this program and ensure its continued funding.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Lahela Snyder,  
Curriculum Director Northwestern High School