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Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Hearing on House Bill 98 (Community Connectors)
Interested Party - Testimony of the Ohio Workforce Association

April 28, 2025

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony as an interested party on HB 98 - legislation that proposes the use of Community Connectors through the Educational Service Centers. We submit this interested party testimony on behalf of the Ohio Workforce Association (OWA) membership.

The OWA represents and offers supports to local Workforce Development Boards across Ohio. There are 245 local businesses represented across these Boards, as well as 28 Business Organizations and more than 40 labor representatives. The following are the largest business sectors that are represented on our Boards:

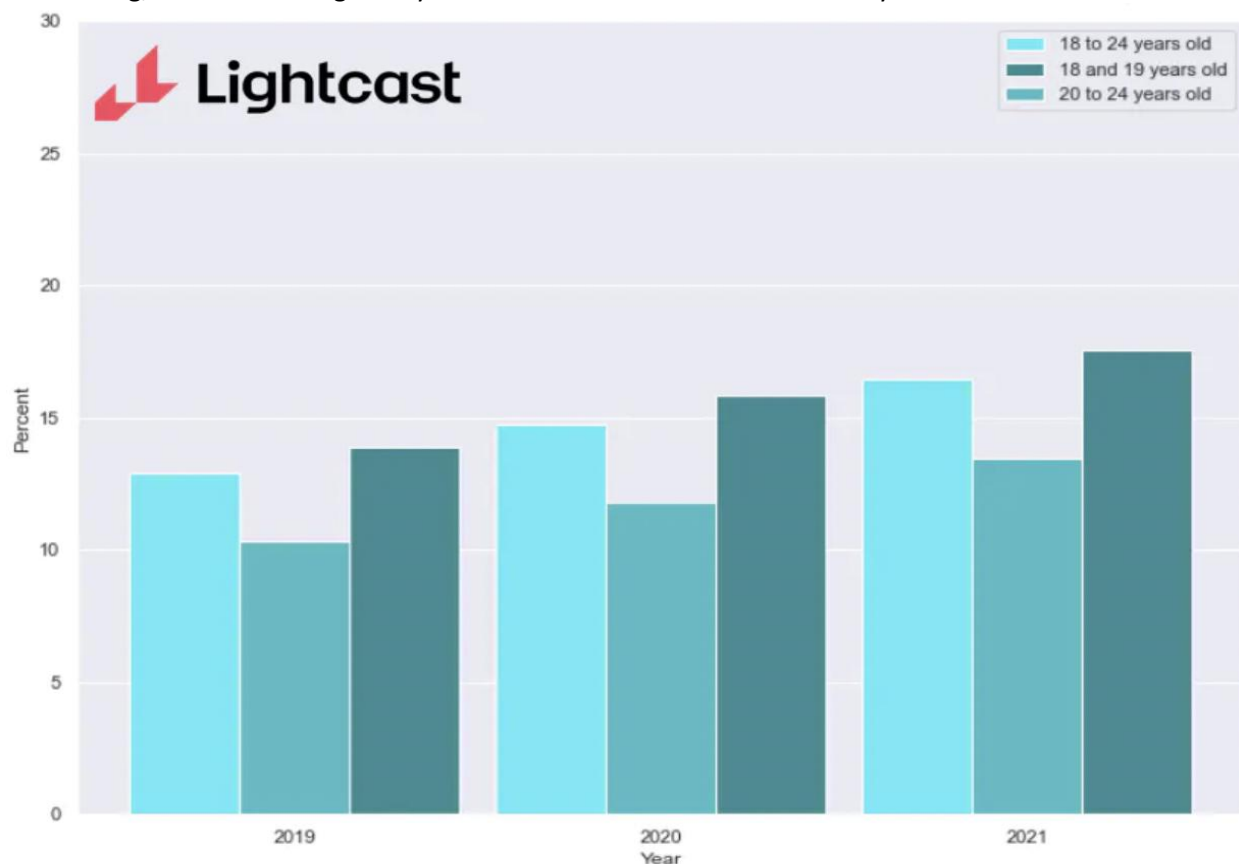
- 62 Manufacturing
- 31 Business Services
- 30 Financial Services
- 29 Healthcare
- 25 Construction and Skilled Trade Companies

We support a focus on career awareness and career exploration and we hope that through efforts like HB 98, strong connections are encouraged between the K-12 system and the local workforce development boards. The OWA recognizes the need for substantial interaction and coordination with high school students, especially with graduating seniors, to acquaint Ohio's young talent with the many opportunities available to them after graduation. Our workforce system utilizes OhioMeansJobs Centers in all 88 counties to assist both job-seekers and businesses. Through our Boards and these Centers, we are the state's "boots on the ground" in convening and connecting all things related to workforce development. This includes local workforce development board partnerships with K-12 and higher education. Workforce Boards are the expert source of labor market information on in demand occupations and growth industries for each of Ohio's economic regions. The boards' daily interaction with businesses sourcing talent informs a real time knowledge of career opportunities that should be shared with students.

Ohio's local workforce boards recognize the importance to capture and retain young talent and connect that talent with local businesses. The Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) is Ohio's innovative approach to expand and enhance services to youth and young adults aged 14 to 24 years old. CCMEP is funded through a braiding of state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth dollars. While CCMEP has touched an increased numbers of eligible young talent and provided an expanded offering of intensive case management and workforce development services, eligibility is limited to TANF and WIOA-eligible candidates. Ohio's businesses continue to experience a high demand for talent post-pandemic. The local workforce boards and their OhioMeansJobs Centers are in a unique position through already-established best practices and existing community/education partnerships to acquaint every graduating high school senior with workforce services available to them. This includes post-secondary education and short-term credential training, as well as work-based learning opportunities and assistance with direct job placement.

Recent research from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute reports that just shy of 50 percent of Ohio students enroll in two or four year colleges after high school. Enrollment is highest among students from suburban areas (69 percent) and lower in other regions. The Institute report also shared that only 8 percent of students earn twelve points in Ohio's industry credentialing system before graduating. Students from rural schools have the highest rates of credentials earned (13 percent), while those from suburban schools have the lowest (5 percent). Retrieved on March 12, 2023 from: [Ohio Education by the Numbers : 2023 Statistics, Charts, Tables & Maps : Thomas B. Fordham Institute Advancing Educational Excellence \(ohiobythenumbers.com\)](https://ohiobythenumbers.com)

According to data retrieved from Lightcast, as many as one in six young adults age 18 to 24 are neither in school nor working, a number that grew by 1 million from 2019 to 2021 nationally.



Many of the local workforce boards' innovations can be expanded and enhanced to better equip Ohio high school seniors with workforce options available to them upon graduation. For seniors who are not graduating from a high school career tech program or on a path for community college or university enrollment after high school, direct job placement along with exposure to shorter-term credentialing and work-based learning opportunities with follow-up assistance will be beneficial to lessening this national gap with 18-24 year olds not working. The following are a few examples of best practices and successful models that can provide a foundation for local workforce development board-led high school career navigator/community connector activities.

The Growing Rural Independence Together Through Jobs (GRIT) Project [Home - Grit Ohio](#) is a collaborative approach to build a high-demand workforce and stimulate economic growth. The coalition leverages local, state, and federal dollars by bringing organizations together such as OhioMeansJobs (OMJ), common pleas and drug courts, K-12 school systems, community colleges & universities, economic development agencies (JobsOhio/APEG), Ohio Department of Jobs & Family Services (ODJFS), drug treatment providers, businesses, and other not-for-profit agencies. With a focus on developing local solutions, we've proven that together, remarkable things happen.

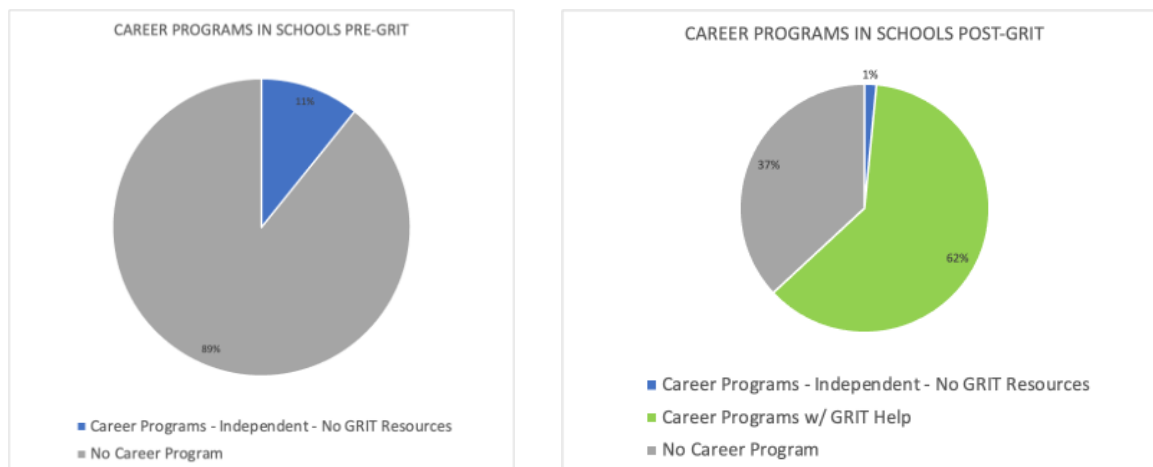
The initial GRIT effort focused on the 5 Ohio counties of Adams, Brown, Highland, Pike, and Scioto. The project has since been expanded to include Clermont, Lawrence, Gallia, Jackson, Ross, and Vinton. The GRIT Project includes students and adults on this journey to uncovering financial independence through jobs. Each participant begins with a career assessment and then a 1 on 1 coaching session with a career specialist. Through these conversations, a plan is developed to enroll in work skills training, if needed, and then to identify jobs, either in-person or work-from-home.

Through GRIT interventions and career counseling, students enrolling in career programs in school have increased significantly at 62%.

High School Career Programs— Pre and Post GRIT

Funding 1 and 2 combined

Counties: Adams, Brown, Clermont, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton



Local Area 16's (Belmont/Jefferson/Harrison/Carroll Counties) workforce development board and its CCMEP Lead Agencies offer a career navigator in similar fashion, outreaching and targeting only potential CCMEP-eligible students. The career navigator works out of the East Central Ohio educational service center and serves the local high schools in the Belmont County area.

Local Area 19's (Geauga/Ashtabula/Portage) workforce development board and its CCMEP Lead Agency/OhioMeansJobs Center Operator Portage County Job and Family Services offer an innovative array of services to students in grades 7 through 12 called OMJ W.O.R.K.S. (Workforce Opportunities and Readiness Knowledge for Students). The OhioMeansJobs centers co-host job fairs in each district with Portage Development Board. Job coaches are also placed in any district who would like "universal services" available to their students. Job Coaches go to the school district up to 4 hours each week to offer services to any student interested as a universal customer. The OhioMeansJobs counselors have partnered with Windham to offer STNA training to seniors who could use the certification to meet the graduation requirement and graduate. The counselors also assisted students who are in need of internships and connected them to employers who are willing to work with high school students.

The Area 20 Local Workforce Development Board (Fairfield/Pickaway/Ross/Hocking/Vinton Counties) and the OhioMeansJobs Center provides a career readiness program in all 8 school districts in Fairfield County. A Career Readiness Endorsement was created to identify work-ready students. There were 269 students last year that completed the endorsement. It includes the OMJ Seal as part of the program. There are 3 career navigators that work with 8 school districts, including one school with a beta test for younger students. One career navigator also works with pre-apprenticeship students at the Fairfield County Workforce Center. This includes supportive services such as driver's education and support to complete coursework to graduate. It also includes financial literacy, resume building, interview skills, and helping students apply for jobs. The workforce board participates in the Fairfield 33 Alliance (public private partnership), partners with school districts through an ODE grant and an Industry Sector Partnership grant. Last year resulted in 42 students receiving employment along with 40 pre-apprenticeship students receiving employment. This year there are 57 students in pre-apprenticeship and a phlebotomy program. The Area 14 Local Workforce Board (Athens/Meigs/Perry Counties) partnered with local schools through their apprenticeship HUB model and established a successful automotive pre-apprenticeship.

In conclusion, the OWA supports the end goal of HB98. We believe that the local workforce boards and their community and educational partnerships can provide a robust coordination of services to high school students through expansion of existing programs and approaches. OWA highly recommends that all Educational Service Centers offering Community Connector services be required to include their local workforce development board in all planning and coordination of workforce services directed to high school students. Ohio's public workforce system is already in schools providing assistance to youth who are eligible for workforce system funding. There are numerous partners working long side our boards and OhioMeansJobs Centers to make this happen – like the Chambers, local economic development, local business leadership, and education. Our local workforce boards have spent years building trust and productive relationships with the school districts to gain access to the emerging workforce. Boards are working with local businesses and Chambers to be able to share the latest local opportunities for employment, education, enlistment, and entrepreneurship.

Local workforce boards want to make sure that the bill honors the current relationships that have been established and also take into account that our OhioMeansJob centers are already investing funds into this effort. Funds provided by the state outside of WIOA and TANF could fill the gap and expand opportunities for OhioMeansJobs centers' staff to provide guidance to students outside our eligibility. Any solution provided to better engage graduating seniors with workforce opportunities must have performance and accountability built into it. Our local public workforce systems report to business-led boards and must meet rigorous performance measures.

Thank you for considering this important legislation and recognizing the importance of the career development needs of Ohio's young talent. OWA would be happy to address any questions at the committee's convenience, and to serve as a resource for any considerations that are workforce-related in the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer M. Meek Eells". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Jennifer M. Meek Eells, Executive Director
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