

Ohio House Workforce & Higher Education Committee

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Proponent Testimony: House Bill 98

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Introduction

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today in support of House Bill (HB) 98 on behalf of the Ohio ESC Association and its membership.

Overview

Educational Service Centers (ESCs) are local political subdivisions and school districts under state law (R.C. 3311.05, 3311.055), and Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) under federal law (20 USCS §7801(17)).

Unlike traditional school districts, JVSDs, county boards of DD, and many other local political subdivisions, however, ESCs do not have local taxing authority.

ESCs are required by law to perform certain statutorily mandated functions or services which include:

- Appointing a Business Advisory Council;
- Coordination and approval of all Special Education Cooperative Agreements; and
- Implementation of State or Federally Funded Education Initiatives assigned to them by the Ohio General Assembly, Office of the Governor, or Ohio Department of Education.

ESCs are also the largest component of the state's Educational Regional Service System (ERSS), which has the statutory mandate to support state and regional education initiatives and efforts to improve school effectiveness and student achievement. ***One of the most significant roles of ESCs is that of convener, facilitator and broker of services; not only being a direct service provider but working with other organization, both public and private, to create opportunities and drive improvement for students and schools.***

Historically, the primary ESC service areas are centered around: 1) curriculum and instruction, 2) school improvement, 3) professional development, 4) special education and related services, 5) early childhood education, 6) implementation of statewide initiatives charged to the ESCs by the Ohio General Assembly or department of education, and 7) facilitation, coordination, and networking between and among school districts, community-based agencies, and other stakeholders including the business community.

House Bill 98

By establishing the Community Connectors Workforce Program and leveraging the existing ESC infrastructure, House Bill 98 builds off the ESC role of facilitation, coordination and networking and supports the statutory responsibility to appoint a Business Advisory Council (BAC) and to support districts in the operation of their BACs.

Under 3313.82 of the Ohio Revised Code, “...the board of education of each school district and the governing board of each educational service center shall appoint a business advisory council, except that a school district that has entered into an agreement under section [3313.843](#) or [3313.845](#) of the Revised Code to receive any services from an educational service center is not required to appoint a council if the school district and educational service center agree that the educational service center's council will represent the business of the district.”

Nearly 90% of districts in the state have opted to utilize the ESCs for the purpose of appointing and operating a BAC. These locally focused partnerships convene education and business leaders to engage in dialogue, build trust and identify strategies that transform the student learning experience. The on-going, intentional collaboration results in a more responsive education system based on regional economic drivers and needs.

In this role, ESCs play an important part working with schools and districts to connect students to jobs and internships in their communities. You will hear more about these specific programs in testimony from ESCs.

In the past few years, ESCs across also Ohio implemented a range of career readiness and workforce development initiatives using ARP ESSER funds, with 11 ESCs highlighting this area in their case studies that were part of the state evaluation of ESC work. Common strategies included building partnerships with local businesses, offering student internships, expanding access to industry-recognized credentials, and developing new courses or career exploration programs. Notable outcomes included substantial increases in the number of industry credentials earned by students (for example, ESC of Central Ohio saw an increase from 4,716 to 7,594 credentials in one year, and East Central Ohio ESC more than doubled credentials earned), the establishment of STEAM labs and career-focused camps, and improved student awareness of regional career opportunities. These efforts not only enhanced students’ practical skills and career exposure but also fostered stronger connections between schools, employers, and communities, helping to build sustainable pipelines for local workforce needs.

Each year, the state of Ohio awards *The Business-Education Leader Awards for Excellent Business Advisory Councils*, which recognizes two-, three- and four-star rated Business Advisory Councils throughout the State of Ohio for their exceptional work building strong partnerships to instill professional skills for future careers and coordinating experiences for students. Proudly, this year 24 of the 38 recognized programs were ESC-led BACs. And three ESCs were recognized with specific awards of Excellence (Montgomery, North Point, and ESC of Northeast Ohio).

Why is HB 98 an important step forward?

Every system is perfectly designed to produce the result that it gets. Competitive grants by nature create winners and losers and often lead to service gaps. Funding in the form of formula-based unrestricted aid does not always ensure that dollars go toward state-identified priorities. ***What gets prioritized, funded, and measured gets done.***

Providing policy direction and targeted funding ensures that someone, each day, in every ESC across Ohio is responsible for the work, is coordinating with local business and the state, and is reporting back progress against specific, measurable goals.

House bill 98 provides this direction and targeted support while also providing flexibility at the ESC and district and school levels to determine how to best implement the program given the specific needs of the local and regional communities.

We urge your support and passage of HB 98.

Thank you for your time and positive consideration and I would be happy to address any questions at this time.