Ohio Association of Community Colleges
Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on Ohio House Bill 644
March 24, 2026

Chairman Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Ohio House Bill 644.

I am Avi Zaffini, the President and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC). On behalf of Ohio's community colleges, we appreciate Rep. Gayle Manning for introducing this legislation and creating an opportunity to discuss the importance of investing in student success.

OACC proudly represents Ohio's 22 public community colleges, which collectively serve more than 250,000 students each year. In addition, our colleges support over 40,000 non-credit learners pursuing workforce training and industry credentials.

Community colleges play a unique role in Ohio's education and workforce systems. We are affordable, accessible, and closely aligned with employer needs. But what truly defines our institutions is a student-first focus.

Our colleges work every day to reduce barriers, expand opportunities, and help students complete their education and training.

And completion matters.

Whether someone is seeking their first job, working toward a better-paying career, or changing fields entirely, completing a credential or degree is often the key to long-term economic mobility.

But the reality is that many community college students are balancing significant responsibilities outside the classroom.

Among Ohio community college students:

- 1/3 are age 25 or older
- 37% are parents
- 75% juggle work and academics, with nearly half working 40 hours per week.
- More than 1/3 report using at least one form of public assistance within the previous year (food, healthcare, childcare, and more).
- Nearly 2/3 qualify for financial aid

For many of these students, competing demands of work, family, and finances can easily disrupt educational plans, delay progress, and hinder completion.

Recognizing the unique challenges their students face, Ohio's community colleges invest in building dedicated support systems that help students navigate every step of their educational journey, from enrollment through completion and into the workforce.

Our colleges provide a wide range of academic and personal supports, including advising, tutoring, childcare assistance, transportation support, and other wraparound services. However, the scale of these services is limited to available resources.

House Bill 644 would help address this challenge through targeted investments that support the development, piloting, scaling, and evaluation of evidence-based student success strategies across campuses.

Importantly, the bill also creates a mechanism for private partners to match or supplement the state's investment, allowing these programs to reach even more students.

Ohio community colleges already have a solid foundation for this work.

Recognizing the importance of student success initiatives in improving persistence and completion, OACC launched the Success Center for Ohio Community Colleges more than a decade ago. The goal was simple but ambitious: to bring community colleges together to reduce barriers for students and implement strategies that help more students complete their programs.

Through this Success Center, our community colleges work collaboratively to:

- Implement evidence-based practices;
- Make data-informed decisions;
- Align national initiatives with local strategies; and
- Scale institution-wide reforms that improve student success

The Success Center has been supported by generous national partners and funders.

At the time it was launched, Ohio's Success Center was a first-in-the-nation innovation. Today, several other states—including Texas and Florida—have replicated the model, recognizing its impact and effectiveness.

And the results in Ohio are significant.

Over the past decade, the efforts of the Success Center, paired with the implementation of Ohio's performance-based funding model, have improved completion rates. For our public community colleges, the gap versus national completion rates dropped from 8.9% in 2010 to 1.3% in 2019.

This progress demonstrates what is possible when community colleges have the resources and support needed to implement research-backed strategies that help students stay on track and complete their education.

We also know that specific student success models work.

For example, three Ohio community colleges previously participated in a demonstration project of the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP, developed by the City University of New York. The model combines full-time enrollment with intensive academic, financial, and personal supports.

Cincinnati State, Cuyahoga Community College, and Lorain County Community College implemented this ASAP model to better support low-income students.

The results were impressive.

The Ohio demonstration increased graduation rates by nearly 50 percent and improved earnings outcomes for participants.

At Lorain County Community College, this initiative operates as the Students Accelerating in Learning, or SAIL, program.

SAIL provides structured academic pathways, one-on-one advising, scholarships, transportation support, and regular academic check-ins.

And the data show it is significantly improving completion rates.

We are fortunate to have leadership from Lorain County Community College here today to share more about the impact this program is having on their students.

From the perspective of Ohio's community colleges, we know which strategies work. What we need are the resources to start these initiatives and the capacity to scale them.

House Bill 644 would help make that possible. And the return on investment is clear.

Every student success story strengthens Ohio's workforce, our economy, and our communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.