



## **Interested Party Testimony on Senate Bill 127**

### **Ohio Senate Education Committee**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today on Senate Bill 127. My name is Chad Aldis, and I appreciate the committee's continued focus on strengthening Ohio's education system. I am here today as an interested party, but I want to be clear: with a few targeted changes, I could enthusiastically support this bill as a proponent.

As Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education-focused nonprofit with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C., I'm committed to policies that drive academic improvement while holding all public schools—district and charter alike—accountable for results.

Senate Bill 127 addresses a critical issue that has challenged Ohio for years—how we identify and intervene in persistently low-performing schools. I commend Chair Brenner for proposing a framework that brings consistency and clarity to this process. For too long, the state has maintained separate closure and intervention paths for traditional district schools and public charter schools, creating confusion and allowing persistently underperforming schools to struggle year after year after year. By applying a uniform standard to all 3,000+ public school buildings, Senate Bill 127 takes a significant step forward in advancing fairness, transparency, and a stronger focus on student outcomes.

The bill wisely incorporates both achievement and growth by using Performance Index (PI) and value-added (growth) data. This dual focus recognizes that when a school demonstrates both low academic achievement and a lack of student progress, it must be addressed. SB 127 does just that by requiring persistent low performers to close or adopt one of a range of structured interventions designed to improve academic outcomes. These elements reflect thoughtful policymaking.

However, I believe SB 127 can be further strengthened in three key ways:

#### **1. Revise the Growth Measure to Use a One-Star Rating Instead of Ranking by Percentile**

Under the bill as introduced, to be identified for closure or intervention, schools must rank in the bottom 5 percent statewide on performance index and in the bottom 10 percent on value-added. While the measures are the correct ones, the coefficient for value-added doesn't really lend itself to a ranking. I think it would lead to inconsistent identification and would create more uncertainty than is necessary.

A better approach would align with Ohio's existing report card system: use a one-star rating on value-added instead. This is a clearer and more stable indicator of inadequate growth, and it better reflects the state's own definition of "low performance." Combining this with a bottom 5 percent PI score would ensure that only schools with sustained low achievement and weak student progress are flagged—exactly as intended.

## **2. Apply the Same Identification Criteria to Both Sectors—but Limit Intervention/Restructuring to District Schools**

SB 127 rightly proposes uniform criteria for identifying underperforming schools across all sectors. Accountability only works when it's fair and consistent. That said, the interventions available should reflect the fundamental differences between district and charter schools.

Public charter schools were created to be autonomous and accountable—to innovate and excel, but with the understanding that chronic failure would result in closure. They are schools of choice, not assignment. Unlike a district school, closing a charter doesn't infringe upon the state's constitutional obligation to provide a public education to every student in Ohio. It simply removes a poor option.

For that reason, while district schools may require flexible interventions like restructuring, charter schools should not be offered that same option. SB 127 should preserve automatic closure for chronically low-performing charters and not allow restructuring as an alternative. This keeps faith with the original charter school compact: autonomy in exchange for accountability.

## **3. Preserve Existing Years of Low Performance in the Transition**

Finally, SB 127 would reset the accountability clock by excluding report cards prior to 2024–25. This provision would essentially wipe clean one or two years of poor performance for charter schools that were already on the path to closure.

It's vital that we maintain continuity in accountability. For existing charter schools that have already accumulated years of low performance under current law, those years should carry over into the new framework. Restarting the clock would not only reward poor performance—it would signal a step back from the high expectations Ohio has rightly established. We cannot afford to create the perception that the state is retreating from accountability and the tremendous progress that the charter school sector has made since the days of HB 2 a decade ago.

In closing, Senate Bill 127 is a commendable effort to unify and strengthen Ohio's approach to persistently low-performing schools. With the adjustments I've outlined, it can ensure fairness across sectors while upholding high standards for all public schools. Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue, and I welcome any questions you may have.