



# OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

*A Network of Center for Christian Virtue*

HB96 Interested Party Testimony

Senate Education Committee

Troy McIntosh, Executive Director

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Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network representing over 200 Evangelical and Catholic schools across the state.

You have begun the difficult process of weighing the best method for allocating the substantial resources within the state's budget to most effectively serve the individual and collective needs of Ohio's students. While we believe the current budget bill has done a very good job of doing this, there are a number of items that we encourage the Senate either to keep or to make minor, but important, revisions.

1. We strongly recommend that the Senate keep the House provision establishing a Educational Savings Account for students attending non-chartered schools. I have testified multiple times before this committee on the benefit to students of school choice programs that allow for the widest possible set of schooling options for Ohio students. There are currently about 50 non-chartered schools that students could use their ESA funds to attend, several of which you will hear from today. These are excellent high-quality schools that Ohio has an interest in providing as an option to its students. We recommend you retain this provision.
2. The requirement that schools adopt a policy prohibiting student use of cell phones during the school day is one of the best policies the state could take up. The devastating effects of cell phone use on student academic performance, mental health, and social interactions is well documented in research such as Dr. Jonathan Haidt's, [The Anxious Generation](#). And while the current version of this provision is a good first step, there are a few small changes the Senate could make in a single amendment that would make the policy far more effective.
  - a. Expand the prohibition to any personal device that has internet capability, such as a smart watch. A student without a phone but with a device such as a smart watch will be just as distractible as with a phone.
  - b. Clarify that the prohibition is to encompass the entire school day and not just during the "instructional" day, which could be interpreted as just during class periods. To gain the full benefit of the bill, the prohibition must include passing periods, lunch periods, and study halls.
  - c. Require that the phone be kept during the school day in a space inaccessible to students. Allowing them to be kept in book bags or even pockets will not remove the mental distraction and will not reap the benefits the policy would otherwise provide.



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These changes have been endorsed by Dr. Haidt and the governor's office has indicated that they are acceptable to them. An amendment making these changes has been drafted.

3. We endorse the provisions related to the sale of unused school facilities. However, the requirement that if a non-public school ever sells a building purchased under this provision reimburse the public district for the difference between the purchase price and the sale price presents significant problems that I don't believe were intended.
  - a. If a nonpublic school purchases a facility for \$1 million and puts \$3M toward improvements and sells the building 5 years later for \$4 million, should the nonpublic school really be required to give back to the public district \$3 million?
  - b. If a non-public school purchases a building for \$1 million next year, but then sells the building 25 years later for \$5 million, should they really be required to pay back the \$4 million that accrued just in appreciation?

We recommend this unnecessary provision be eliminated. But in the very least, we ask for a sunset provision after 2-3 years or an indexing of the sale price to prevent paying back only inflationary increases in the purchase price.

4. The current regulations for chartering new non-public schools were written prior to EdChoice and present unnecessary barriers to opening new schools by restricting students' eligibility for an EdChoice Scholarship until several months into the school year. Two minor changes to law by the Senate could fix this.
  - a. If a school has submitted their plan of compliance by June 125, require DEW to conduct inspections of the facility prior to the start of the school year rather than forcing them to wait until the school year has begun.
  - b. Make EdChoice eligibility retroactive to the first day of school for schools have submitted a plan of compliance by June 15 but that receive their charter after the year has begun. That way, students receive the full value of their scholarships.
5. We request the Senate increase the base amount as well as the category amount of the Jon Peterson Scholarships. This would bring them to a similar level as a student would receive at a public school. Also, we strongly recommend amending the prohibition on students using a Peterson Category 1 scholarship on tuition. These students are not eligible for an EdChoice scholarship and it is inequitable to not allow them to use any portion of the Peterson scholarship for tuition. Category 1 is the only category of the six currently prohibited from doing so.

Thank you for your work on the biennial budget and your consideration of the small but significant proposals. I am available for any questions.