

It is my pleasure to testify on behalf of this bill. For the past 18 years, I have had the opportunity to open my classroom doors to young people in Marion County. I currently teach at Elgin Local School District in Western Marion County. I have chosen to stay in the classroom for 18 years because of the opportunities provided to young people on an individual basis through agricultural education. I have been fortunate to teach hundreds of students and prepare them for life outside of high school. The preparation of young people for ever-changing and evolving career fields is challenging and emotionally exhausting. Every student walks through my classroom door with an individual story and is seeking assistance to help them find the first steps to a productive future after high school.

As educators, we are continually trying to create authentic experiences and lessons to help young people grow into responsible adults. The reality is that the agricultural industry is innovating at a rapid pace and we must evolve the way we view teaching this generation. In agricultural education, a solid foundation for innovative teaching and learning is achieved through Work-Based Learning with Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. Supervised Agricultural Experience programs or SAEs provide diverse experiences with a solid foundation for career exploration through skill-building opportunities that develop transferable skills.

The additional legislation enacted requires Career Technical Education students to complete Work Based Learning hours. Over my 18 years, I have advocated for young learners to interact with industry experts and businesses in Ohio. Students have had the opportunity to find their career paths by expanding their mentorship networks with connections through agricultural education. I am a firm believer that SAEs take students learning beyond the classroom walls and are valid strategies to redesign traditional views of education tied to seat time. Each of these examples provides a solid foundation that has developed each student and provided educational experiences that I desire to provide in my classroom but offer individual engagement that goes far beyond classroom walls.

Career technical education and agricultural education are the foundation of providing future leaders that will advocate for agriculture, feed our growing population, and provide the energy needed to fulfill the growing resources our world needs. The challenge that I have directly faced is that local school districts are unable to fund the extended programming necessary to support the Agricultural Education program. Supervised Agricultural Experience programs directly link to Work Based Learning and afford students mentors to partner with educators to increase career opportunities and awareness for our students. Every student deserves the opportunity to identify their individual growth goals and seek opportunities to experience far more than individuals inside school walls can provide by themselves. The stories I have shared today are not unique to my school and program. It is critical that we advocate for this bill. We must look at every one of our students and provide them with additional opportunities beyond the school walls.