



Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 96.

My name is Evan Eagleson, and I am the Legislative Director for the Great Lakes Region with [ExcelinEd in Action](http://www.ExcelinEdinAction.org), a national non-profit organization focused on student-centered policies that improve outcomes in the states.

I would like to begin by commending Gov. DeWine and the Ohio House of Representatives for their budget proposals. Both proposals demonstrate that ensuring students are set up for educational excellence and real-world success continues to be a priority for lawmakers.

Ohio has made many meaningful investments in our children's education – transitioning to the science of reading, investing in choice and creating more career-connected learning opportunities. However, these steps in the right direction must be maintained, and the state must keep building on the foundations already in place.

Accordingly, Ohio needs to double down on its commitment to improving literacy. Reading is the gateway to learning, and if our children cannot read, their chance for a successful future is limited. As we know, implementation matters, and students will only benefit from our investments if teachers have access to quality materials, proven training and sustained support from literacy coaches. Thus, we sincerely appreciate both the Governor's and the House's inclusion of \$12 million each fiscal year for literacy coaches.

The Ohio Senate can strengthen this current budget proposal's literacy supports by including the provisions in Chairman Brenner's Senate Bill 19 requiring evidence-based academic intervention services to students who demonstrate a limited level of skill in state assessments in English language arts or math.

Success in mathematics is just as important as reading, giving students increased prospects for future income and outcomes later in life. We would like to recommend returning language from the Governor's budget proposal that requires districts to report math core curriculum and instructional materials to the Department of Education and Workforce.

ExcelinEd in Action also thanks the Governor and legislature for maintaining their monumental commitment to educational choice. Every child deserves access to a quality education that provides the knowledge, skills and learning environment necessary to prepare them for a career and fulfilling life. Educational choice allows families to choose the best fit for their children to receive a quality education, and these choices include public, private and non-traditional schooling options such as community/charter schools.



Community schools receive nearly [30% less per pupil](#) funding nationally in comparison to traditional public schools. Yet, these schools are held to the same state academic and financial standards as their traditional public counterparts. Right now, one of the most pressing issues facing community schools is the lack of access to affordable facilities. So, it is crucial that the Senate keep the increase in per-pupil funding from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for community school facilities and the Governor's much-needed improvements to the unused school facilities law.

It is also critically important that the Senate restore the Governor's proposed funding investments and policies for career-connected learning. With [record job creation and economic expansion](#) in Ohio, we must be focused on preparing students for the demands of tomorrow's workforce. ExcelinEd in Action recommends reinstating the Career Awareness and Exploration funds as well as the provision requiring schools to integrate career planning into graduation requirements. These changes will help students explore careers, earn industry credentials and get real-world experience through internships and apprenticeships.

Lastly, we have all learned the negative effect distractions can have in the classroom. [Research](#) continues to show that excess screen time and constant phone access during the school day are eroding attention spans and reducing engagement. HB 96 and Senator Timken's Senate Bill 158 do the right thing. Both bills would solidify Ohio as a national leader in this space by formalizing a statewide phone-free classroom policy that puts focus and learning first without putting more pressure on teachers to manage device use alone. Schools implementing these policies have seen fewer distractions, increased student engagement, better teacher morale and reduced cyberbullying.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony. We are firm believers that every student can succeed if given the proper tools and I look forward to working with you all to ensure the future remains bright for Ohio's students.

Respectfully,

Evan Eagleson
Legislative Director, Great Lakes Region
ExcelinEd in Action