

May 6, 2025

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for HB96. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of restoring the Executive Budget's proposed funding and policy for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development. As an educator who gets the opportunity to focus on career exploration, I am deeply aware that educational progress is built over time, and sustained investment is essential to maintaining momentum.

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding has allowed schools across Ohio to create new opportunities for students to explore careers, engage with industry partners, and make informed decisions about their futures. These initiatives take time to build. They require careful planning, staff development, and community partnerships.

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding has been essential in advancing LinkedUp Connect—a regional platform that connects students and educators with career exploration experiences and over 140 business and community partners. Through the Workforce Innovation Network, we serve 30 school districts across Hamilton and Clermont counties, reaching up to 18,000 students and 4,500 educators. LinkedUp Connect is a key initiative of the Greater Cincinnati Business Advisory Council (GCBAC), a partnership of 30 districts and more than 100 businesses.

These funds also support GCBAC efforts by providing stipends to teacher-leaders who promote career exploration in their schools. These educators receive training to guide students, champion LinkedUp Connect, and help colleagues connect with business partners for meaningful classroom and professional development opportunities. This work continues to expand, giving students earlier and stronger links to future careers.

If funding is reduced or eliminated, the programs that are just beginning to show results will be disrupted. Staff positions could be eliminated, community partnerships could weaken, and the hard-won progress made toward preparing students for high-demand careers could stall.

Research clearly shows that early and consistent career engagement improves student outcomes and helps meet workforce needs.<sup>1</sup> We must not lose ground now. Restoring the Executive Budget's proposed funding for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development is crucial to maintaining momentum and fulfilling Ohio's vision for a prepared, #NEXTready workforce.

I would welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as you continue to consider this important investment. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Excels, *Reality Check: The State of Education in Ohio*, 2024.