

Testimony on the Impact of Career Awareness and Exploration Funding in the Four Cities Compact

Ohio Senate Education Committee HB96 – Biennial Budget

Chairpersons and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am here to share the transformative impact of Career Awareness and Exploration Funding within the Four Cities Educational Compact—comprising Barberton, Copley, Norton, and Wadsworth school districts. This initiative has significantly advanced early career development education, aligning with Ohio's Career Connections Framework to foster career awareness from the earliest grades .

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding plays a critical role in helping students discover purpose, identify potential pathways, and stay engaged in their education. The ability to explore careers in a structured, supported way helps students make informed decisions about their coursework, high school programming, and postsecondary plans. These opportunities often begin with simple but powerful moments: visiting a job site, engaging in a hands-on project, interacting with an employer, or participating in a classroom activity linked to a real-world career. With this funding, those moments are accessible to more students, more often.

Empowering Second Graders Through Career Exploration

Leveraging state funding, the Compact has implemented a pioneering program targeting second-grade students across all four districts. This program delivers structured career development lessons facilitated by high school students enrolled in the Compact's Teacher Academy. These aspiring educators conduct interactive sessions that introduce young learners to various professions, nurturing curiosity and broadening their understanding of potential career paths.

Each lesson is centered around a carefully selected book, which students receive to take home, reinforcing the connection between classroom learning and personal exploration. This approach not only enhances literacy but also encourages family engagement in career discussions.

Fostering Community Engagement and Professional Partnerships

The program's success has cultivated a meaningful partnership with Dr. Kevin J. Fleming, a nationally recognized advocate for career and technical education. Dr. Fleming's support has been instrumental in enriching the program's content and reach. His recognition of the Teacher Academy's efforts culminated in the establishment of a scholarship fund dedicated to supporting these students in their pursuit of careers in education.

Also, the program has strengthened our relationship with our elementary educators—modeling high quality career development lessons and opening up lines of communication for collaboration—truly connecting K thru 12 education.

Quantifiable Impact and Student Outcomes

Since its inception, the program has reached over 2,700 second-grade students, providing them with early exposure to career concepts and role models and books! The involvement of Teacher Academy students has not only benefited the younger learners but has also offered these high school students practical teaching experience, reinforcing their commitment to the education profession.

Feedback from participating schools indicates a noticeable increase in student engagement and enthusiasm for learning about different careers. Teachers have reported that students are more inquisitive about the subjects discussed and are expressing aspirations related to the careers introduced during the sessions.

The success of this initiative was shared statewide and has been implemented in other districts.

Conclusion

The Four Cities Compact's initiative exemplifies the effective use of Career Awareness and Exploration Funding to create a sustainable, impactful program that benefits both elementary and high school students. We see this funding as an investment in Ohio's future rather than a cost. By integrating career education into early learning and fostering partnerships with professionals like Dr. Fleming, the program sets a precedent for how strategic funding and community collaboration can prepare students for future success. Please help us continue to align K-12 education with the 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.

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Director

Four Cities Compact

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¹ Ohio Excels, *Reality Check: The State of Education in Ohio*, 2024.

