

**Ohio Senate
Education Committee
HB96 – Biennial Budget**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for HB96. We strongly support restoring the Executive Budget's proposed funding and policy for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development.

Since the late 1970s, we've worked in career development across Ohio, from our early years as teachers and school administrators to our current efforts through Partnerships for Authentic Learning and Leadership. Over these decades, we've witnessed how the success of such programs rises and falls with funding. When support lags, programs weaken. When funding is restored, innovation and engagement return.

Thanks to the recent investment in Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development Funds, school districts have launched inspiring new initiatives. We urge you to maintain this support so that students can continue receiving the expert guidance and real-world experiences they need to succeed.

Career awareness, exploration, and development have never been more important. The current landscape reveals alarming trends: diminishing student motivation, growing academic disengagement, and a workforce development pipeline struggling to prepare young people for complex, evolving career landscapes. We need to transform traditional educational models to inspire, connect, and truly prepare students for their futures.

Career development programs are vital in responding to these challenges. We have seen and partnered with school districts throughout Ohio using current state funding to provide motivating, age-appropriate experiences for K-12 students to discover who they are and where they might fit in future work settings. Removing this funding would be a huge setback for our state and its young people.

At its best, career development programming provides relevance and meaning through ongoing community-based experiences, engaging instructional materials, and teachers with a deep understanding of the career development process. Each of these assets has a cost, but the cost of *not* providing them would be much greater.

A recent issue of *Edutopia: The Research Is In* reminds us that "if academic work doesn't extend into the real world and connect to students' sense of purpose and identity, they'll tune out and find things that do." Career development programming can and must provide this connection.

Further affirmation is provided by the Association for Middle Level Education in *Preparing Young People for Their Futures*: "It's critically important that all our districts and schools are well positioned to guide young people through their career exploration process, enabling them to find joy at the intersection of what they're good at, what they love, what they'll be paid for, and what the world needs. In this way, kids will be equipped to make informed decisions about their education and career path, preparing them for their futures with fulfilling careers that meet their needs."

Over the past 50 years, research has steadily affirmed that authentic career development activities have many benefits:

- Enhanced academic achievement
- Deeper connection to purpose
- Deeper connection to community
- Improved mental health/wellness
- Increased civic engagement
- Improved career readiness
- Greater student empowerment

By prioritizing career development funding, you can continue to strengthen Ohio's efforts to:

- Create pathways for students to confidently address real-world challenges
- Foster innovative educational environments
- Develop a robust, adaptable workforce
- Help all students fulfill their potential, now and in the future

What we're describing here is a K-12 developmental process that can restore hope, purpose, and possibility to education. But it's a process that requires financial support to thrive and grow. We respectfully urge you to restore funding for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development. We would be honored to serve as a resource as you consider this critical investment.

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