



Jaime Miracle, Deputy Director
Senate Education Committee
Testimony in Opposition to SB 156
June 24, 2025

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for accepting my testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 156, a bill to require schools to use the Success Sequence curriculum. My name is Jaime Miracle, and I am the deputy director for *Abortion Forward*, formerly Pro-Choice Ohio. Before I begin, I want to thank my Policy Fellow Milena Wood for her assistance with drafting this testimony I'm presenting today.

Proponents of the Success Sequence curriculum often frame their agenda as providing students with an additional "choice" for how they can choose to navigate their lives, despite presenting no other "choices" as viable. Success Sequence life planning strategies have long been rejected by academic critics, "not because following it is a bad idea, but rather because it traces a path that people already likely to succeed usually walk, as opposed to describing a technique that will lift people over systemic hurdles they face in doing so. The Success Sequence, trustworthy as it may sound, conveniently frames structural inequalities as matters of individual choice."¹

But an even larger issue is the misuse and misinterpretation of data on poverty, employment, and marriage in an effort to legitimize the usefulness of pushing the Success Sequence. We can absolutely acknowledge the factual basis the success sequence is built upon. That is, completing education and getting full-time employment is, indeed, *correlated* with economic stability.² However, this framework, fully fails to account for the complex environmental and structural barriers that shape an individual's circumstances.³

When we cite figures demonstrating how marriage, employment, and education status are related to socioeconomic status, the full socioeconomic reality of Ohioans isn't captured. Full-time employment, demonstrated in the 2020 Ohio Poverty Report, may reduce poverty. But other factors like education access, childcare availability, transportation, poor health—especially in the form of disability or chronic illness—and discrimination significantly impact

¹ Alexander, Brian, "What is Success Sequence and Why Do So Many Conservatives Like It" *The Atlantic*, July 31, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/07/get-out-of-poverty-success-sequence/566414/>

² Reeves, Richard V., Rodrigue, Edward, and Gold, Alex, "Following the success sequence? Success is more likely if you're white." *The Brookings Institute*, August 6, 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/following-the-success-sequence-success-is-more-likely-if-youre-white/>

³ Tanner, Michael D. "The Success Sequence – and What it Leaves Out." May 9, 2018. https://www.cato-unbound.org/2018/05/09/michael-d-tanner/success-sequence-what-it-leaves-out/#_ftn1

both employment status and poverty.⁴ Overemphasizing the role of full-time employment in overcoming poverty does not capture *why* people do not work or work part-time positions.

The Success Sequence's oversimplification of such complex social phenomena produces a clear message: if the circumstances in your life do not allow for you to follow the sequence, it is *your fault* you live in poverty and not any fault of our failing social infrastructure. In other words, an idea like the Success Sequence "legitimizes inequality by attributing it to individual failure"⁵ because it "conveniently frames inequalities as matters of individual choice,"⁶ while ignoring the blame that should fall on inequitable systems.

Solutions to poverty must include tangible support from our governments, and we have an excellent example that happened just a few years ago to draw from. Spurred by the economic shock and food insecurity that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) became a necessary source of financial support for families across the nation:

"These advance payments, which provided an extra \$250-\$300 per month to the majority of American households with children from July 2021 to December 2021, reduced food insufficiency by 11 percent in families with children experiencing these economic shocks, compared to families who didn't experience the shocks and families without children, the new findings show. Low-income, Black, and Hispanic families reaped the greatest benefits, as these groups were most likely to miss work during the pandemic and least likely to earn paid sick leave.

In addition to the monthly cash benefits, the CTC expansion also broadened eligibility to households with low or no income and provided larger credits to families with younger children, under the American Rescue Plan that Congress passed in 2021."⁷

Before the tax credits were removed, "the expansion lifted nearly 3 million children out of poverty and reduced food insufficiency by 26 percent among all US households with children." For those living in job and food deserts, these credits became an essential lifeline. But following the rollback of the CTC expansion, the national child poverty rate more than doubled.⁸ For those who fear that providing families with a child tax credit would discourage employment, the opposite was true. Rather than discouraging work, the CTC worked as a supplement to already existing incomes to fill holes where people's income could not cover all expenses.

Pushing the Success Sequence is a fruitless endeavor if the individuals it's pushed onto don't have the opportunity to set them up for success in the first place. A shift in focus is necessary

⁴ Ohio Poverty Report, 2020. <https://development.ohio.gov/about-us/research/population/selected-population>

⁵ Mattei, U., & Haskell, J. D. (Eds.). (2015). *Research Handbook on Political Economy and Law*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved May 12, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781005354>

⁶ Alexander, Brian, "What is Success Sequence and Why Do So Many Conservatives Like It" The Atlantic, July 31, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/07/get-out-of-poverty-success-sequence/566414/>

⁷ Nicole C McCann, Lorraine T Dean, Allison Bovell-Ammon, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Tiffany Green, Paul R Shafer, Julia Raifman, Association between Child Tax Credit advance payments and food insufficiency in households experiencing economic shocks, *Health Affairs Scholar*, Volume 2, Issue 2, February 2024, qxae011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/haschl/qxae011>

⁸ Nawaz, Amna & Lane, Sam, "Families slip back into poverty after pandemic-era child tax credit expires." PBS News Hour, March 25. 2024. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/families-slip-back-into-poverty-after-pandemic-era-child-tax-credit-expires>

if the proponents of the success sequence really want to equip students with the resources they need to make good decisions, delay childbearing, and rise out of poverty. We need to also address the structural barriers to success for the next generation, not just give children the "inspiration" to succeed.

Material support is essential in overcoming structural barriers. Giving students the tools to make good use of that material support is equally important. This is a task that schools and institutions of education can be equipped to take on and is the stated purpose of this idea of the Success Sequence. Once again, we see this proposed curriculum fall far short of what students need. *Comprehensive* sex-education is often credited with teaching students the values and social intelligence many supporters of the Success Sequence hope to see instilled in the next generation. However, the Success Sequence programming embraces the failed policy of *abstinence-only* sex education, leaving students without the tools they need to follow the proscribed sequence.

The general public overwhelmingly supports comprehensive sex education in schools despite legislative efforts to politicize health education.⁹ "Research, public health experts, educators, and leading medical and professional organizations overwhelmingly denounce the abstinence-only approach."¹⁰ Decades of research has found that, "not only is this [abstinence-only] approach ineffective at achieving its stated goal of delaying sexual initiation and/or changing sexual risk behaviors, it's also harmful because these programs "feature misinformation based in fear, gender stereotypes, and shaming tactics that negatively impact students including: LGBTQ-identifying students, those who've already engaged in sexual activity, and students who've experienced sexual violence."¹¹

Comprehensive sex education is just one example of the type of positive, effective programming that can foster prosperity and prospective economic stability in Ohio's students. Education will continue to be a necessary force in producing adults who are more likely to succeed and be economically stable. But the Success Sequence curriculum is not the way to accomplish that goal.

We cannot simultaneously claim that we want the best for Ohio's youth and yet implement school curriculums that cannot provide positive outcomes. You must accept some responsibility and address structural barriers to success if this body truly wishes to reduce poverty in our most vulnerable communities. Couple that support with well-studied and effective educational programming to give students the tools to be successful.

We must not continue to create an environment in our schools where we leave students with *A Dream Deferred*, as described in Langston Hughes' famous poem. Do not let them "dry up like a raisin in the sun." We must create an environment where each and every one of them can achieve their dreams. Our students deserve so much better than S.B. 156.

⁹ Szucs LE, Harper CR, Andrzejewski J, Barrios LC, Robin L, Hunt P. Overwhelming Support for Sexual Health Education in U.S. Schools: A Meta-Analysis of 23 Surveys Conducted Between 2000 and 2016. *J Adolesc Health*. 2022 Apr;70(4):598-606. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10904928/>

¹⁰ <https://siecus.org/why-we-need-to-avoid-sexual-risk-avoidance/>

¹¹ Ibid