



Interested Party Testimony House Bill 96
Senate Finance Committee
May 27, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 96 on behalf of the Ohio Alliance of Independent STEM Schools (OAISS). OAISS represents Ohio's network of public independent STEM schools, promoting their growth and sustainability to meet the state's workforce demands.

The creation of independent STEM schools was authorized by members of the 127th General Assembly, establishing a new classification of schools- neither traditional public or charter schools- to focus and support the economic development of the state with an emphasis on project-based learning steeped in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Our schools were created, in part, to be research and development labs for education in Ohio and serve as incubators of STEM talent to meet Ohio's evolving workforce needs. We have embraced this mission, setting the bar for STEM education in the state, and serving as the STEM talent pipeline.

We appreciate Governor DeWine's support and commitment to quality public schools of choice in his executive proposal, and are grateful that the House maintained the proposed funding of the Quality Community School and Independent STEM School Support program, the Facilities Aid, and Equity Supplement. We respectfully request the Senate's support to maintain these crucial line items and proposed funding levels. We would, however, encourage the Senate to support the implementation of the Fair School Funding final phase-in from the Governor's proposal. As independent STEM schools, we rely solely on state and federal dollars that follow the student and are unable to levy taxes. As a result, our schools have categorically been the lowest funded public schools, and every dollar is important. The Quality Independent STEM School Support program, established last General Assembly, has been crucial in enabling our schools to continue to fulfill their mission of providing personalized, project-based learning, and robust career exploratory programs to prepare students for the workforce of the future. We are grateful that House Bill 96 continues this funding, provides an important increase in the facilities aid, and extends the equity supplement to include independent STEM schools.

As the state prioritizes workforce readiness, we remain committed to working closely with businesses and institutions of higher education to ensure we prepare students for future success and address the regional workforce needs. Across our network of eight schools, we engage with over 750 community, business and higher education partners, and continue to build new relationships. Students are regularly exposed to career opportunities, and engage with partners to explore workforce opportunities in the region.

Independent STEM schools are held to a high standard. Admission is non-selective and open to all students across the state. By designation, we are required to emphasize personalized learning, real-life experiences and exposure to the workforce and emerging careers. Schools provide pathways in a variety of innovative fields- for example engineering, health, agriculture and more. Our teachers have deep knowledge and experience in these areas and are committed to approaching education differently. To ensure innovation, our staff is required to participate in extensive professional development, and our robust career exploratory programs require access to advanced equipment and technology to prepare students for future jobs. The fundamental requirements independent STEM schools must meet to achieve designation/redesignation are rigorous and stand as proof that the students we are serving are receiving a high quality education.

Our success is evident by our nearly 100 percent graduation rate, and 60-70 percent of our graduates that pursue STEM post-graduation. Our schools' value to the state is further shown by a demand that far exceeds our capacity, interest from educators, businesses and elected officials across Ohio and the country seeking to replicate our programs, and the positive testimonies from students, parents and alumni. We take an innovative approach to education and are committed to sharing best practices and training with educators across the state and nation. Our impact reaches far beyond the students enrolled in our schools.

We want all Ohio children to succeed, and remain committed to setting the bar for STEM education. Investing in independent STEM schools is an investment in Ohio's future workforce. We ask that you maintain the funding as proposed by Governor DeWine and maintained by the House for the Quality Independent STEM Schools, Facilities Aid, and the Equity Supplement. This funding is essential to ensure we can continue to provide the innovative education that is responsive to the community and workforce demands of our regions and state. Thank you for your time and consideration.