

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony
HB 96 – FY26-27 State Operating Budget

Dr. Maria Boyarko, Principal, Whitehall Yearling High School

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Maria Boyarko, and I am the principal of Whitehall Yearling High School, a diverse Central Ohio school serving approximately 1,200 students in an urban community where 85% qualify for free or reduced lunch and more than 60% of our students identify as Black, Hispanic, or multiracial. Our school is located just south of John Glenn Columbus International Airport, in a vibrant suburban city that values innovation and opportunity for all its residents.

I am here to express my strong support for the STEM Educator Workforce Collaborative, which has been pivotal in advancing STEM opportunities for our students, particularly those from groups that have been historically underrepresented in STEM fields.

Fab Lab/Maker Space: Catalyzing Hands-On STEM Learning

In 2024, we opened our Fab Lab/Maker Space, a state-of-the-art facility equipped with 3D printers, CNC routers, robotics stations, and virtual reality tools. This space was made possible by a \$1.77 million Ohio CTE Equipment Grant and serves as a hub for hands-on, project-based learning.

Professional Growth and Impactful Teaching

The STEM Educator Workforce Collaborative has provided invaluable professional development for our staff. For example, Patrick Danko, our lead engineering teacher, participated in immersive training through the Collaborative, earning credentials such as the FAA Part 107 Drone Pilot license and Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and engaging in partnerships with business and industry. As a result, his teaching has shifted from traditional lectures to dynamic, hands-on projects that mirror real industry practices. Students in his classes now engage in activities like drone flight for surveying and mapping, robotics competitions, and collaborative engineering challenges, giving them a direct line of sight to careers in aviation, transportation, and advanced manufacturing.

Supporting Student Success in STEM Pathways

Participation in the Workforce Collaborative has led to a significant increase in the number of Whitehall Yearling students pursuing STEM pathways. Since joining the Collaborative:

- STEM course enrollment in Engineering among students increased by 34%, and there was a 22% rise in young women pursuing engineering pathways.
- 58% of Fab Lab participants from low-income households are now pursuing postsecondary STEM training, up from 21% in 2023.

Integration of Best Practices for Whitehall Yearling Teachers

Our work is guided by research-based strategies for helping marginalized students succeed in STEM and transition to the workforce. These include:

- Early exposure to workforce opportunities with PAST Foundation as “STEM Immersion” work-based learning at local labs and businesses.
- Dual-enrollment programs with local colleges, allowing students to earn college credits in fields like mechatronics while still in high school.
- Advisory boards for each pathway with local employers, including those in logistics and aviation, to ensure our curriculum aligns with workforce needs.

The STEM Educator Workforce Collaborative is not just a program- it is a catalyst for change in schools like ours. It provides the professional development, resources, and partnerships necessary to ensure every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to pursue a future in STEM.

I urge you to continue investing in this vital initiative for the benefit of our students, our community, and Ohio’s future workforce.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Boyarko

Principal, Whitehall Yearling High School

Whitehall City Schools