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Senate Finance Committee

Testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 96

Kevin Duff, Executive Vice President, Ohio Excels

June 5, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 96. My name is Kevin Duff, and I am the Executive Vice President of [Ohio Excels](https://ohioexcels.org).

I would like to thank the Senate for the positive changes found in the sub bill, which include:

- Restoring the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment
- Continuing the support for literacy coaches
- Focusing on improvements to math instruction and curriculum materials
- Collecting important data about the demand for educators
- Beginning the transition to direct certification for identifying low-income students for the purposes of Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid, or DPIA
- Holding high school graduation requirements constant
- Maintaining support for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant

Ohio Excels has a few other priorities we would like the Senate to consider for the omnibus amendment. You can find those later in my testimony. However, I'd like to focus on just one amendment today: the creation of the **Education & Workforce Data Insight Board (SC0531)**.

This budget is proposing to spend \$30B on K-12 education over the next two years. It will spend another \$6B on higher education. The state also spends billions more on early childhood and adult workforce programs. To be clear, we believe it is critically important to invest in these areas. But despite the tens of billions spent, the state still lacks the consistent ability to identify its long-term return on investment. We have so many unanswered questions:

- Which programs deliver the strongest returns and should be expanded to impact more students? Which programs need to wind down?
- How well is the pipeline of students aligned to the projected needs of Ohio's workforce, both currently and in the anticipated near term?
- Where are students struggling – and thriving – in the education and workforce system?
- What happens to students who graduate from high school but do not enroll in postsecondary training or education? What are their employment outcomes?

As Senators, you are faced with the challenge of determining where to direct funding. Imagine a budget cycle where you could have data on effectiveness available at your fingertips. You would be able to expand programs that work. You could create incentives for positive long-term outcomes, building on the K-12 formula's performance supplement introduced in the sub bill. You can create incentives for educational experiences and credentials that have strong results.

We believe that our amendment is the first step to making that a reality. It would establish the Education and Workforce Data Insight Board – a cross-agency leadership body that brings state agency directors and external stakeholders together to provide strategic direction for Ohio's data system. This board would help ensure our data efforts are coordinated, secure, accessible, transparent, and – above all – focused on impact.

This proposal is supported by a wide spectrum of education and business groups from around the state:

Business Group Support:

- Cincinnati Business Committee
- Columbus Partnership
- Greater Cleveland Partnership
- Ohio Business Roundtable
- Ohio Chamber of Commerce
- Ohio Council of Retail Merchants
- Ohio Farm Bureau
- Ohio Restaurant & Hospitality Alliance

Education Group Support:

- Alliance for High Quality Education
- ExcelinEd
- Greater Cleveland Career Consortium
- Learn to Earn Dayton
- Ohio Association of Career-Technical Educators
- Ohio Excels
- Ohio Federation of Teachers
- Thomas B. Fordham Institute

We can do so much more with the data we already collect. With the right leadership and privacy safeguards in place, we can finally unlock the full value of our data – making smarter decisions, measuring what matters, better serving Ohio's students and economy, and spending taxpayer dollars more effectively.

Beyond the board, we hope the Senate will also consider the following amendments for the omnibus:

- **Middle School Career Exploration & Planning – SC0530:** We believe every middle school student should have access to a structured career exploration course to help them understand potential career options, assess their interests, and start career planning early. Many schools already do this successfully, and we are asking the state to require this for every middle school, so all students have the same opportunity. Every student should have a single, comprehensive academic and career plan by the time they start high school.
- **Algebra I & Math Licensure Expectations – SC0543:** We applaud the state's efforts on literacy, but more needs to be done to improve math instruction. We ask you to support two changes. First, the state should require *new* K-8 teachers to demonstrate proficiency in math before leading math instruction in the classroom. Second, the state should require schools to enroll students who achieve a high score on their 7th grade state math test into Algebra I in 8th grade unless their parents choose to opt them out. Schools may still enroll additional students using local measures and teacher judgment.
- **Career Awareness & Exploration Funds – SC0534:** For the past few state budgets, Career Awareness and Exploration Funds have supported meaningful, locally-driven activities such as field trips, speaker series, career fairs, and career coaching – opportunities that help students make real-world connections between school and future careers. We encourage the Senate to fully restore this fund to its original \$16.325 million per year.
- **Statewide High School Internships – SC0532:** We propose creating a new High School Internship Program which would give students access to paid, hands-on work experiences in multiple industries. Based on the successful Ohio Tech Internship model, this program aims to expand opportunities and equip students with valuable skills and professional networks.

- **Computer Science Promise – SC0542:** Computer science is essential for success, and Ohio now guarantees access to courses for students in grades 7-12 with the CS Promise Program. To ensure more students take advantage of this opportunity, we urge you to require schools to proactively inform parents and students about these opportunities.

Thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.