Lorain County Community College

Tracy Green, Vice President, Strategic and Institutional Development
Lorain County Community College

Proponent Testimony – SB 345

Chair Timken, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 345.

At Lorain County Community College, we strongly support the intent of this legislation—to invest in evidence-based strategies that improve student success, strengthen workforce alignment, and expand economic opportunity for Ohioans.

One example of this in action is our SAIL program—an evidence-based student success model grounded in the nationally recognized ASAP approach.

The ASAP model—Accelerated Study in Associate Programs—was originally developed by the City University of New York (CUNY) to support and accelerate community college completion among low-income students. Through a combination of structured academic pathways, intensive advising, and targeted financial supports such as tuition assistance, textbooks, and transportation, ASAP was designed to remove the most common barriers to completion while keeping students on a clear, full-time path.

CUNY's results were transformational. Randomized controlled trials found that ASAP nearly doubled three-year graduation rates, making it one of the most rigorously validated and impactful student success models in the country.

Building on that success, Ohio partnered with MDRC, a national leading evaluator of educator and workforce programs, to replicate the model across three community colleges—including Lorain County Community College—beginning in 2017. This effort, often referred to as the Ohio ASAP Demonstration, was designed not only to test whether the model could be replicated outside of New York, but whether it could produce similar outcomes in a different policy and funding environment.

The findings confirmed that it could.

We made a deliberate decision not just to pilot the model—but to sustain it, refine it, and ultimately scale it into what is now our SAIL program.

What makes SAIL effective is a coordinated, student-centered approach designed to remove barriers and keep students on track. Students follow a structured pathway, participate in a learning community, and receive proactive, required career and academic advising with frequent touchpoints throughout the semester. The program also addresses real-life barriers by providing support for textbooks and materials, as well as modest assistance for transportation

and other basic needs. Together, these elements create a personalized support system that helps students persist through challenges and complete.

And those challenges are real.

One of our students, Isabel Torres, began her journey as what she describes as a "blank slate" – without a high school diploma, without identification, and without a bank account. After leaving school at 16 to help support her family, she returned through LCCC's GED program, studying between shifts at her family's restaurant.

Izzy Torres (right) and her SAIL advisor, Cynthia Arredondo

Scan to watch Video for more about Izzy's Story

After earning her GED, she transitioned to college courses at LCCC. She thrived in the coursework – going from struggling with elementary math at the start of her GED program to solving complex equations in her college algebra course in just two years. Yet, outside the classroom the obstacles continued. Housing instability, poverty, food insecurity, and the pressure of balancing work and school nearly forced her to stop out.

It was through SAIL that she found something different.

She was connected to an advisor who helped her navigate college, access tutoring, and stay on track academically. When basic needs became a barrier, supports like emergency aid and even small resources—like grocery and transportation assistance—helped her remain enrolled.

At one point, Isabel stepped away from college entirely. It was the relationships built through LCCC and the SAIL network that brought her back—reminding her that it was not too late to continue.

Today, she is back on track, working toward a career in nursing, and building a future that once felt out of reach.

Her story is no longer a blank slate. Isabel's experience brings to life what the data confirms: when students are provided with the right supports, they persist and succeed.

The results demonstrated such clear and measurable impact that we made the choice to expand the model—because when an approach works at this level, it should not remain limited in scope. The results at LCCC have been both significant and consistent.

Prior to SAIL, the three-year completion rate for LCCC Pell-eligible students was just 7.6 percent. Through SAIL—grounded in the ASAP model—we have achieved an average three-year completion rate of approximately 45 percent across ten completed cohorts, representing more than a five-fold increase and mirroring the transformative gains first demonstrated by CUNY's ASAP initiative.

These outcomes are especially meaningful when you consider the realities many of our students navigate. The vast majority of our low-income students are working—often full-time—many are supporting families, and a significant number are returning to college after previous starts and stops.

Students in the program are also more likely to reach key academic milestones—earning more credits, completing gateway English and math courses, and staying on track to completion.

And importantly, the impact extends beyond completion.

Longitudinal research from the Ohio demonstration shows that students who participate in programs like SAIL earn more than comparable students in the control group—over $2,000 more annually at six years and more than $3,000 more annually at eight years—demonstrating a clear connection between student success and economic mobility. This is exactly the type of outcome Senate Bill 345 is designed to support.

SAIL reflects a Tier 3 level of evidence—the highest level outlined in Senate Bill 345 — demonstrating strong, measurable, and sustained impacts on student outcomes, with the ability to be replicated and scaled across different settings. This aligns directly with the bill's emphasis on investing in programs that not only work, but can be expanded to benefit more students over time.

But just as important as the model itself is what we have learned about scaling and sustaining it.

For several years, capacity limitations meant we could only serve about 40 percent of eligible students—121 students out of approximately 285—leaving more than 160 low-income students each year without access to a model we knew was working. This simply wasn't acceptable. Beginning in Fall 2025, we made the decision to fully scale SAIL so that <u>all</u> first-time, full-time Pell-eligible students at LCCC can benefit from this model.

That decision was grounded in a simple principle: when you find something that works—and that meaningfully changes students' lives—you find a way to scale it. However, scaling is not automatic. It requires intentional investment, alignment of resources, and a long-term sustainability strategy.

We approach this through what we call our "Flywheel" model—aligning strategic investments for transformational impact that leads to operational excellence. As SAIL improves student retention, completion, and momentum, it also strengthens our performance under Ohio's

outcomes-based funding model. In turn, those increased resources are reinvested to sustain and expand the program.

This is the type of model that Senate Bill 345 makes possible at scale across Ohio.

By creating a competitive, evidence-based innovation fund, this legislation ensures that institutions are not simply funded for activity—but for outcomes. It prioritizes programs that demonstrate measurable impact, align with workforce needs, and include clear plans for scalability and long-term sustainability.

While colleges and universities are continuously working to improve student success, implementing evidence-based innovations at scale requires upfront investment. Programs like SAIL involve redesigning systems, building advising capacity, aligning financial supports, and investing in data and evaluation. Senate Bill 345 helps bridge that gap by providing the start-up resources and technical assistance needed to move from pilot to scale—and from short-term success to long-term sustainability.

We are proud to offer SAIL as one example of how this approach can work. We also recognize—and strongly support—that institutions across Ohio may bring forward additional innovative models that meet the intent of this legislation. This bill creates the framework to identify those models, invest in them, and scale them for the benefit of students and the state's economy.

While the data is important and helps quantify the impact, the real power of this work is reflected in the lives of the students who benefit directly from it, like Izzy as well as Shyla Bush and Jordan Sas who provided their stories in writing supporting Senate Bill 345.

Their experiences reflect what the data shows—when students are supported in intentional, evidence-based ways, they persist, they complete, and they move into careers that offer greater opportunity and stability.

In closing, Senate Bill 345 represents an important step forward for Ohio. It aligns investment with outcomes, supports innovation with accountability, and creates a pathway to scale what works.

At Lorain County Community College, we stand ready to continue sharing our data, our strategies, and our lessons learned—and to serve as a partner in building a broader learning community across the state focused on student success and workforce impact.

If Ohio is serious about strengthening its workforce and expanding economic mobility, we must invest in the strategies that we know deliver results—and Senate Bill 345 gives us the opportunity to do exactly that.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.