

Ohio House Finance Committee
Written testimony on the Straight A Fund Provisions of House Bill 64, the
FY16-17 Budget

Kristina Phillips-Schwartz, Director of Education Initiatives
Cincinnati Business Committee
March 26, 2015

Chair Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. As a Straight A Fund Governing Board Member, representative of the Cincinnati Business Committee, and mom of two children, I'd like to thank you for your commitment to education innovation and improvement on behalf of children in Ohio.

The world our children are growing up in is rapidly changing. From technological advances in how we communicate, to how we purchase products, to revolutionary medical advances and so much more. It is a time of excitement and promise.

As a state, we face the challenge of ensuring that all students have access to an education that will allow them to reach their full potential and allow them to succeed in this emerging economy. The stakes are high.

The Straight A Fund is critical in helping our education system achieve the same level of innovation as we see in other sectors. This unprecedented \$250 million fund is significant enough to really drive change at scale. It is also unique enough in its qualifications (requiring student achievement results along with spending reductions) that only the most creative and effective proposals are funded.

In my role with the business community, I spend a lot of time visiting schools and classrooms. Clearly, there are some exciting things happening in pockets of isolation throughout the state. Straight A Fund is helping identify, incentivize and scale those innovations to create a wave of change across the education system.

Innovative ideas are being tested and proven models are being scaled. I will share a few examples of this today.

- **Career pathways** are being created that meet current needs of industry. The Straight A Governing Board recently heard from the successful RAMTEC robotics engineering training program. They are partnering with major manufacturers to close skills gaps in Ohio. High school students graduate job-ready with credentials for positions in industry. As a result of Straight A, they are able to expand in from the rural Marion area to 8 additional sites (Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Cleveland, Akron, Shelby, Newark and Plain City.)
- Straight A is also making **college coursework/credit available** to students in Appalachian areas of the state. A collaborative of 27 Appalachian districts and Battelle for Kids have created distance learning labs and are allowing teachers in these districts to get credentials to teach college level courses in the high schools.

- **Efficiencies and shared services** in transportation are also underway as a result of Straight A. Twenty districts are installing GPS systems in their buses to see where they can merge routes and save costs. They plan to reduce the number of routes by 20 in the consortium and can then redirect that funding into the classroom.

All in all, more than \$300 million in projected spending reductions are expected from Straight A Fund schools, allowing more money to go to Ohio classrooms.

These innovations that have come from the front lines, are sustainable, will help drive academic achievement, create cost-savings, and increase resources available in classrooms. They are just a few of the many creative and impactful grants supported by the Straight A Fund. The impact of these grants will be evaluated with promises and realities of replication.

Thank you for your continued support of the Straight A Fund. It is driving a new way of thinking about innovation in our school system and dramatically increasing the number of students with access to a great education.