

**Ohio Senate Finance Committee**

**June 11, 2015**

**Interested Party Testimony Presented by:**

**Judy Hennessey, Superintendent, Dayton Early College Academy &  
DECA Prep**

**Sub. H.B. 64 as Pending in the Senate Finance Committee**

Supporting approval of the DECA Parental Engagement Pilot Project

Chairman Oelslager and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am the superintendent of the Dayton Early College Academy and its partner elementary, DECA PREP. I have come to ask you please, to reconsider the amendment proposed by Senators Beagle and Lehner for a Parental Engagement Pilot Project. We strongly believe this study would be ground-breaking for Ohio.

**Background:**

DECA PREP has demonstrated early promise for closing the achievement gap of urban students in Dayton. Intensive interventions have been implemented including extending the school week and year. However, a critical missing piece is the ability of the home to reinforce the foundational skills needed to become fluent readers and writers.

Parents are often poorly educated themselves and lack the know how to provide their children literacy-rich homes. Stark differences are documented in the homes of middle class children versus in the homes of poverty. The consequence is an inordinate amount of money and labor to “catch up” --- resulting in bright children coming to school unprepared to learn to read and, in subsequent years, schools facing the cumulative effect of low achievement across all content areas.

**Bold action is needed to develop a prototypic program to engage parents in the practice absolutely necessary for children to develop literacy.**

What is neither documented nor analyzed is the impact of parental engagement. Intuitively, we know students with engaged parents perform better academically at school, but interestingly there is no imperial data to support this claim. The omission of parents in urban, poor schools is well-documented in the reform literature. Equally absent is a program that teaches parents how to become teachers-in-the-home. The combination of low performance and ensuing low expectations of poor children cannot be addressed without a reexamination of both home and school intervention. The pilot provides funding (\$100,000 per year) for an independent study of the impact of parental engagement for students in grades 1-3. We anticipate enrolling approximately 75 -100 students in the pilot. The pilot would:

- Establish a five year study of a structured parental engagement program that can be replicated in other schools.
- Engage parents, with intention and accountability, in the education of their primary-aged children. The children in the pilot will have been identified as off-track to meet reading expectations by grade three. In other words, these children appear to be on track to fail.
- Establish a University of Cincinnati-designed study to provide credible data about the impact--academic and cost-effectiveness--of this intervention. These data can drive policy as Ohio continues to close the achievement gap for children of poverty, both rural and urban.
- Be the first in the nation to research this level of parental involvement in the education of children who, despite other labor-intensive and costly interventions, are not meeting basic reading and writing expectations. No other study could be found that supports and teaches parents to this level plus holds them accountable to work with their children consistently. Ohio could be the first to apply what common sense dictates: parents must be partners with their schools to get students where they need to be and being poor does not change that critical dynamic.

**Deliverables:**

1. A replicable, cost-effective prototype for closing the literacy achievement gap among low-achieving students in any Ohio school.
2. A study of national significance reporting the impact of the pilot on Ohio's neediest learners.
3. A roadmap for implementation, making this a viable program for other Ohio schools.

Thank you for reconsidering this amendment as you finalize the budget. Please note that the superintendent of the Dayton Public Schools has written a letter in support of the pilot. I will attempt to answer any questions you may have.