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SB 298 - OEA Proponent Testimony

Senate Finance Committee

May 3, 2016

Chair Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Becky Higgins. As a teacher and President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA), thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of our 122,000 members. The OEA supports SB 298, a bill that seeks to help students, parents and taxpayers by modernizing e-school accountability and transparency safeguards in a way that better reflects their unique education service-delivery model.

To begin, the OEA commends the Ohio Senate for its recent leadership in unanimously passing HB 2, legislation that updated many aspects of the accountability and transparency system for Ohio's charter school governance structure. By clarifying governance responsibilities and strengthening oversight expectations, HB 2 promises a significant benefit to Ohio's charter school students.

With a spirit and intent similar to HB 2, the proposals in SB 298 seek to update certain accountability and transparency mechanisms so they more closely align and support the distinct aspects of the e-school education model. It makes sense to customize some methods of data-collection, record-keeping and school oversight in a way that fairly reflects newer public education models that have significantly customized methods of delivering education services. Making appropriate adjustments to e-school oversight mechanisms that are in accord with the important distinctions in how public e-schools operate is critical to ensuring every e-school student receives the high-quality public education they and their parents have been promised.

SB 298 aims to establish a more effective system for ensuring that e-school students actually receive the high-quality education services their parents expect and that the student deserves. In so doing, SB 298 does not interfere with any parental choice regarding the delivery method of public education for their child. Rather, the bill seeks to support these parents by helping to make sure their child receives the benefit of the free public education services they have chosen and to which their child is entitled.

All in all, SB 298 reflects ongoing efforts to make sure all publicly funded education programs in Ohio have a fair, but rigorous, system of accountability and transparency that adequately protects students, parents and taxpayers. The provisions in the bill aim to advance a flexible, modern approach to accountability and transparency. It does this by proposing meaningful oversight



mechanisms that better acknowledge the unique characteristics of the e-school service delivery model. Notably, the bill seeks to avoid applying a one-size-fits-all accountability system to e-schools; the bill recognizes that these schools do not operate a traditional education model based on structured classroom attendance during pre-scheduled time-periods.

More specifically, SB 298 contains numerous proposals regarding e-school accountability and transparency that are important and timely. These proposals pertain to e-school student attendance (recording, calculating, and reporting), funding levels, school operations, parental engagement and good government provisions such as live-streaming of public meetings of e-school governing boards. Finally, a helpful provision in the bill that applies to all public schools, including brick-and-mortar charters and e-school charters, would *require* ODE to provide annually updated student mobility data on district and school-level state report cards.

In closing, the OEA's testimony today in support of SB 298 stems from a belief that the charter school concept, including e-schools, has a viable role in Ohio's system of public education. However, the viability of any publicly funded education program must be based on a system of delivering high-quality education services to students in a way that adequately protects students, parents and taxpayers.

Thank you for your time and consideration, as well as your ongoing support for a high-quality public education system for all of Ohio's students. I am available for any questions you have, along with Matt Dotson of OEA Government Relations, who have may assist in providing additional information if necessary.