

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Bill Mullane and I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 298, a bill that when enacted will add accountability measures to Ohio's online schools.

I am currently the president of the Board of Directors for Southside Academy, a charter school serving 150 K-8 students in Youngstown, Ohio, as well as a Supervisor of School Improvement for the Ashtabula County Educational Service Center. I am completing my thirty-eighth year as an educator. I spent twenty-eight years in the Warren City schools serving as an art teacher, teacher of at-risk youth within an Occupational Work Experience Program and founded Warren's Alternative School which was an alternative to expulsion for proven-risk students. I also served as principal of a seventh grade building, an eighth and ninth grade building and finally ten years as Warren's high school principal.

I recently served six years as a board member and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Eastern Gateway Community College. My tenure began when Jefferson Community College changed its name and expanded into Columbiana, Mahoning and Trumbull counties. During my tenure the college substantially expanded its online offerings and entered into a unique private/public partnership to develop campuses in Youngstown and Warren. I have taught education courses, a graduate humanities course in the American Studies department and supervised student teachers at Youngstown State University.

In these capacities I have had the opportunity to work with numerous students who have opted for online schooling. In fact I have a nephew who exercised this option for his junior and senior year of high school.

Online education has great potential. For students who wish to accelerate, take courses not available in their school or to catch-up to their peers when they fall behind, having access to reliable well managed online educational option is a solid alternative for them.

Placing content online and having access to well-developed, standards aligned resources, like those provided by INFOhio, allows teachers to explore new paradigms for instruction. By rethinking the way we use homework and having students familiarize themselves and front load content prior to class so that class time can be spent applying the knowledge and skills rather than introducing them, we have the potential to increase student responsibility for learning and increase the rigor and relevance of our content.

For students who have been successful in their traditional public schools, have a work ethic or home supervision and support, our e-schools offer a pathway to completing schooling on their own terms with success.

For those students who choose an e-school option in order to avoid the consequences of truancy, lack of school engagement or failing grades online schooling is often a pathway to failure and becoming further behind. When they return to our traditional public or charter school having spent a year or more gaining little or no credit or completing very little course work they are further at-risk for dropping out.

My nephew who chose to attend an e-school was well supervised at home by his mother. She believed that he was on-track for graduation until late spring of his senior year when it became apparent that he had been logging in to his account but not engaging with course work. He gamed the system by logging in which was counted as attendance but then doing no course work. In the end and with the supervision of his mother, he had to stay enrolled in his e-school for six months beyond his scheduled graduation date to actually complete his work and graduate.

Ensuring that the students who opt for an online education are actually logging on and accessing the content offered by E-Schools is critical. Assuring that students in the online environment experience the rigor of Ohio's academic content standards at least at the level that they would in their brick and mortar

traditional or charter public school is important both for the student and for the future of online education in Ohio.

We must seek ways in which online schools can engage students who are already at-risk when they enroll by providing needed academic and social/emotional counseling. Whether this is done by the school or in conjunction with the students' home school or a community based agency students and families cannot be left to fend for themselves.

Initially the promise of community and on-line schools was that they would serve as laboratories for the traditional public schools in which innovative and at times challenging practices would be deployed and measured in order to figure out how all schools could be improved. The standards against which all traditional and community schools are measured have to become clear, concise and easy to understand for both the internal audience of teachers, administrators, students and parents as well as external audiences of community members and business leaders.

For those of us who believe that students and parents are clients or consumers in the educational process and that the product of schools is the work they create for students to do and the methods by which they assess that work, it is critical that online schools have credibility.

The state needs to assume the role of a consumer protection agency ensuring that online schools are equipped to provide a quality education and have in place safe-guards to make sure that students and parents choosing an online educational option can make that choice knowing that the school can account for student attendance and progress. It is critical that the limited educational resources in Ohio for both traditional, community and online schools are focused on teaching and learning.

Senate Bill 298 has the potential to enhance the credibility of our online schools and after it is enacted to allow them to focus on finding ways to best serve our students and meet their educational needs. The following components of the bill provide a pathway to authentically engaging parents and students in the educational process:

- If a student fails to "log-in" for 10 consecutive days, the e-school must notify ODE, the student's parent/guardian, and the district of residence.

- Requires each e- school to keep an accurate record of and report the number of hours each individual student is actively participating in learning opportunities in each period of 24 consecutive hours. The report must be made to ODE, in the form and manner prescribed by ODE, on a monthly basis. ODE must make this report available on their website.

- Requires a student's parents/guardians, teachers, and the principal or lead teacher of an e-school to confer to evaluate the student's continued enrollment in the school in the event that the student's academic performance declines.

This bill is necessary to provide our constituents assurance that Ohio's e-schools are accountable to parents, students and taxpayers. Before e-schools can meet their true potential to explore new pathways for students to attain an excellent education they must be able to ensure that their students get the support and the education they deserve. It is critical for students and parents to know that when they choose an on-line educational option that there is accountability for student attendance and engagement with the curriculum.

Chairman Oelslager and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.