

Belpre City School District

2014 Rockland Avenue, Belpre, Ohio 45714

(740) 423-9511 ♦ FAX (740) 423-3050

Tony Dunn – Superintendent

Missy Griffith – Treasurer

May 2, 2016

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Tony Dunn. I currently serve as Superintendent of Belpre City Schools. I have a Bachelors degree in Elementary Education, a Masters degree in School Counseling, and have completed postgraduate work in Education Administration. I have dedicated my entire adult life to education. I started in 1987 as a teacher in Kenton County, Kentucky, then served as a school counselor in Madeira City Schools. After that, I was a school principal in Milford Exempted Village Schools, then superintendent of Georgetown Exempted Village Schools. I was recently honored to receive an award with two colleagues during Governor Kasich's State of the State address this year for our efforts to combat opioid addiction and overdoses.

I am here to urge your support for Senate Bill 298, which would bring basic accountability to Ohio's online schools and increase fiscal responsibility within the state.

As an education administrator and an Ohio taxpayer, I am very concerned about the tax dollars that are likely being wasted due to lack of accountability at Ohio's online schools. Those valuable tax dollars could be used to benefit the schools and students in my district. It is frustrating to learn that our money might not currently benefit any students at all.

Recent reporting has uncovered overpayments to two Ohio e-schools so far. Provost Academy – one of the state's smaller e-schools – was overpaid nearly \$800,000 last year. Lakewood Digital Academy in Hebron was overpaid \$150,000. I can only imagine the wasted funds that have gone undetected in previous years.

Ohio's public schools are struggling to make up for tax dollars lost to charter schools. My district, Belpre City Schools, recently billed the state for the local tax dollars lost since 2002 from students who left to attend charter schools. We estimated this loss at just over \$1 million.

To add insult to injury, it now appears the tax dollars taken from us have been going to charter schools that don't even track attendance, let alone make sure their students are receiving a quality education.

Ohio needs S.B. 298 to ensure our tax dollars are used to actually educate our students. This bill is a simple way to accomplish that goal. A simpler solution to the Charter School industry might just be to have the same procedures and transparency afforded other public schools in Ohio. S.B. 298 at least gets us on the right path to achieving that goal. I can only hope that sometime in the near future we will all enjoy the same accountability and transparency requirements which will let us all know how our tax dollars are being spent to educate our kids.

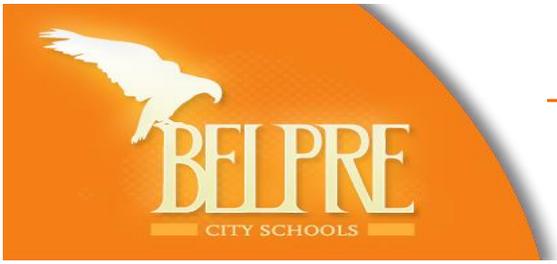
I also have personal experience managing students who return to public schools after attending e-schools. Just last month, I attended a meeting about a student returning to Belpre from TRECA Virtual Academy after just leaving Belpre High School in January of this year. We were also notified recently by two schools – Ohio

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Virtual Academy and ECOT – that they are filing truancy charges and withdrawing two Belpre students for non-attendance issues. All these students are now more behind their peers than when they left, and in the case of high school students, in danger of not completing courses they need for graduation. It is our obligation to educate these students. Many online schools are failing at their basic duties.

We need to address truancy issues in e-schools. That can only happen if we accurately track and report student attendance on a regular basis. Without the measures required by this bill, we cannot honestly say we are educating the almost 40,000 Ohio children who attend online schools. It is almost without exception that students enrolling in Belpre City Schools from e-schools have experienced attendance problems while enrolled in those e-schools.

Now that we are aware of the problem, continued failure to educate would mean shirking legislative responsibilities and abandoning tens of thousands of young Ohioans. There can be no more excuses. We must make these changes now and continue to work for equality in accountability and transparency.

I urge the Committee to at least vote in favor of Senate Bill 298 or make it all much simpler and increase the fiscal and attendance accountability to that of other public schools. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

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