

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN SB 298
TO
THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE OHIO SENATE

BY

TERRY GRODEN
VICE-PRESIDENT, NORTH OLMSTED CITY SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION
MAY 3, 2016

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, ranking member Skindell and members of the Finance Committee of the Ohio Senate, I am here today on behalf of the North Olmsted Board of Education to support Senate Bill 298, and to address specific provisions contained therein. These measures are vital to the academic and fiscal health of *our* school District. But we also believe they will provide important protections for school children and taxpayers throughout the State of Ohio.

The City of North Olmsted is a western suburb of Cuyahoga County. It is, and has been, a community dedicated to quality education. The district has been rated Excellent or Excellent with Distinction several times because parents, business and community leaders, and school staff have worked together to put programs in place that rival those found in any other district.

And there is a great sense of pride within the school system itself. We focus on core academic instruction, curriculum, professional development for high-yield instructional practices, and assessment, giving our students the best possible opportunities for success as an adult. More than \$7-

Million dollars in scholarships and grants were offered to North Olmsted graduates in 2015 alone.

North Olmsted is also a district that has never opposed choice. We believe every child deserves a quality education no matter where he or she finds it. However, we do oppose inadequate choices.

That brings us to the need for a bill such as SB 298. Many of Ohio's e-schools are, first and foremost, failing to properly educate the students they're supposed to be serving.

By now, everyone who is close to this issue is familiar with Stanford University's CREDO Report. According to that report, Ohio's online students are learning the equivalent of 79 fewer days in reading material, and 144 fewer days in math, in a single year than their traditional public school peers.

Additionally, a report released in 2015 by the Ohio Education Research Center found that, "test scores plummet the year a student transitions to an e-school." And, although students who remain in that e-school eventually may show gains in subsequent years, "their scores remain below the scores they received prior to entering an e-school."

In an article that appeared in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on November 30, 2015, Susan Patrick identified the problem. Ms. Patrick is the head of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. She said, "Authorizers are not demanding adequate transparency, evidence of quality work at a college-ready level, and are not shutting down or intervening

in poor performers.” Ms. Patrick added that it’s “up to the schools to do everything in their power to ensure students can succeed.”

The first step toward making sure those students succeed is to make sure they are participating. That is why we support measures in SB 298 that would: a) require an e-school to keep a record of the number of hours in which a student is actively participating in learning opportunities during a consecutive 24-hour period, and b) require an e-school to notify the Department of Education, parents, guardians, custodians and the student’s resident district of a student’s failure to participate in learning opportunities for 10 consecutive days.

Furthermore, we support the provision requiring a conference between the student’s teachers, parents and principal or lead teacher from the e-school, should that student’s academic performance continue to decline, for the purpose of evaluating the student’s ongoing enrollment at the school.

But among these and other provisions designed to enhance the student’s chances for success while attending an e-school, we also support measures in SB 298 that will protect the interests of students and tax payers from the home district.

This year, approximately 50 North Olmsted students chose to attend one of seven different online schools. None of these seven e-schools outperformed North Olmsted in any academic performance metric, yet more than 300-thousand

dollars (\$314,672 to be a little more exact) was transferred from the District to these schools.

When you consider that North Olmsted receives approximately \$1,642 per student in basic state aid, the net result of these transfers is a loss to the District of \$232,572 dollars.

Whether that much money is actually needed to operate the e-schools that receive it could be answered by the provision in SB 298 to create an E-School Funding Commission.

But what makes the loss of those funds so troubling, beyond the manner in which it compromises our ability to provide all the programs and services expected by the State of Ohio and the residents of North Olmsted, is evidence that at least some of these online schools received more money than deserved due to inflated enrollment counts. We support the enhanced oversight and transparency provisions included in SB 298 to help safeguard the interests of students in traditional public school districts from such practices.

The North Olmsted Board of Education also supports the provision requiring test scores of students who were enrolled in an e-school, but transferred to the student's resident school district, to be attributed to the e-school if that student was enrolled at the e-school for more than 90 days during the year of the transfer.

During the 2015-2016 school year, 41 students have transferred from an e-school to the North Olmsted

City Schools. Of those, 19 students were previously enrolled in our school district but made the decision to return. This situation places the burden on teachers and administrators from the public school district to make up for lost instruction, substantiated by the results cited earlier in the CREDO report, or suffer possible repercussions due to lower performance metric scores.

Lastly, North Olmsted strongly supports the provision in SB 298 related to advertising. We believe e-schools should be required to display some of their key academic grades from the most recent state report card on any advertising, recruiting and/or promotional materials. We believe this is imperative toward helping parents make an informed decision before choosing a school for their children to attend.

Clearly the North Olmsted City Schools are committed to helping all students learn at high levels so they can be successful in school and life. There is growing debate as to whether that can be accomplished through a 100-percent online environment.

Earlier this year, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology weighed in with a report entitled the Online Education Policy Initiative. According to the report, technology can play a supporting role in the education of an individual, but it cannot “replace the unique contributions teachers make to education through their perception, judgment, creativity, expertise, situational

awareness and personality.” The report further states that teachers are “essential and irreplaceable to education in ways that a computer program can never be.”

Even Nina Rees, from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, has become skeptical about the efficacy of online education in Ohio, referring to the CREDO Report as a “valid study.”

Although we can’t predict what online education will look like in the future, we can say from the evidence provided today, more transparency, accountability and oversight is needed in Ohio’s e-schools. We believe such reforms are critical to improving the future of *all* school children across the state and to protecting the interests of tax payers who ultimately fund public education.

Therefore, the Members of the North Olmsted Board of Education, along with the Superintendent of the District, urge the Senate Finance Committee to approve SB 298 as it is currently written.

Thank you for your time and consideration.