

FINDLAY DIGITAL ACADEMY

Where Learning Fits You™

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Senate Finance Committee SB 298 Opponent Testimony May 10, 2016

Chairman Oelslager,

I am Sandra White the superintendent of Findlay Digital Academy. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to SB 298.

Findlay Digital Academy is a district sponsored conversion charter school that serves 175 students in grades 9-12. We are an on-line dropout recovery school. In 2014, we were named a Charter School of the Year by the Ohio Alliance of Public Charter Schools. We continue to meet or exceed standards on our report card and had a 50.5 % 4-year graduation rate and a 72% 5-year graduation rate last year. We have been awarded grants from AT&T for the past three years and have received numerous awards from State Treasurer, David Yost, for our clean audits. We graduate more students than most of the traditional schools in our county.

The majority of our students have undergone some major trauma in their lives and have either already dropped out of school once or are at risk of dropping out of school. The research of Jensen, Gentry and others has clearly demonstrated that physical change does occur in the brains of students who experience trauma and stress. This makes learning difficult and sometimes impossible for them until measures are put in place to actually help these students regrow brain connections. Our students have had too many bumps in the road and just don't fit into the traditional mode of school in any sense. It often takes us much more time and effort to rebuild their brain cell connections, confidence and help them to achieve academically. Remember, our students are often parents, are working at jobs, are living in poverty, are behind in credits, and many times are struggling with

depression or health issues. We eventually help most of our students graduate and that is the standard by which dropout recovery schools should be judged.

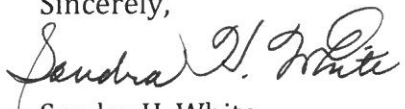
We may be an e-school, but we have a lab open 24 hours a week where students can come and receive one-on-one tutoring from our Instructional Coaches. Every student is contacted every week by one of the coaches to discuss academic progress and other issues. We send our Family and Student Engagement Coordinator to a student's home when we feel he/she is not making adequate academic progress. We give our students moral and academic support and a lot of 'tender love and care". We are constantly pressing them to do better. But with all that our students have going on in their lives, sitting in a seat for 30 hours a week just is not going to happen – at least not initially.

Our students don't learn at a traditional rate. They learn in spurts and it also occurs when that 'ah ha' moment happens. But often getting that 'ah ha' moment or motivation to kick in might take weeks, months and sometimes a year. But when we can finally get the student to that place, he/she will graduate. So it may take us five years and \$30,000 on a roller coaster learning path to help a student graduate. But look what is gained for a child. And, can a price tag really be put on the future of his/her quality of life? Research has shown that taxpayers average paying between \$750,000 and \$1,000,000 in social services for those who don't graduate from high school. So, I ask you, which is the better investment?

Charter schools were started to allow creativity and school choice. Recent legislation is moving toward pushing everyone into the traditional box. Since when can seat time be equated to learning? Also, how can a school make financial plans when funding will be determined by seat time, credits earned or other such moving targets? It simply can not be done.

Dropout recovery schools by the nature of our clientele are far different from traditional schools and most e-schools. Dropout recovery schools need to be looked at and handled differently. I urge you to do so and not include us in the proposed SB 298.

Sincerely,



Sandra H. White