



Thank you, Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and committee members for giving me the opportunity today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 409.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C. Our Dayton office is also an approved Ohio charter school sponsor.

As many of you know, Fordham has been a staunch supporter of school choice for decades. We believe that every family deserves the right to choose their child's school; however, we also believe that state and local leaders have a duty to ensure that these options are high-quality. Although the Ohio General Assembly has done a considerable amount of work in the last few years to improve charter school laws, the unique nature of online schools and the well-publicized closure of The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) has made any policy changes in the online space—even when warranted—difficult to enact as there's a concern that any changes could be perceived to weaken accountability.

With that context, it was good to see the introduction of HB 409. It provides a framework whereby an online charter school can disenroll a student for unexcused absences and for failure to participate in instructional activities. It's an idea—already being used in Indiana—that we have supported for a number of years.

The bill allows online charters to adopt a policy related to engagement in instructional activities and requires schools to provide notice to parents and make an attempt to improve student engagement before disenrolling a student. When a student is disenrolled, the legislation requires that parents be provided a list of educational options and notice be given to the local school district.

The proposal—somewhat unorthodox—is premised on the acknowledgement that in a traditional classroom, teachers are able to directly observe students and select instructional strategies that increase the likelihood of student engagement. Teachers in online schools, on the other hand, are far more limited in how they can interact with students. Under current law, online schools are only able to monitor and enforce a student's attendance; they have little power to hold students accountable for active participation. This means that hundreds or even thousands of online students could be cruising through school and not learning anything simply because they log in every day but don't complete any work. Even if the school knows there's a problem and the student isn't learning much or isn't engaged, its hands are largely tied. In such cases, students are being academically harmed and taxpayer dollars are being wasted.

This change would be a meaningful improvement in Ohio's law regulating online education. One thing of note that we think should be clarified involves existing law (3314.03(A)(6)(b) O.R.C.) and is known as the 72 hour rule. It provides that students missing 72 consecutive hours be automatically withdrawn from a school. HB 409 doesn't explicitly remove this provision, but it references the subsection in a manner that

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would make it prudent to modify the language to ensure that safeguard isn't accidentally rendered moot.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.