

# Ohio Online Learning Coalition

January 23, 2020

## **H.B. 409 (Koehler) Proponent Testimony**

Chairman Jones, Vice-Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee in support of H.B. 409.

My name is Colleen Grady and I serve as the executive director of a new organization, the Ohio Online Learning Coalition. The Ohio Online Learning Coalition represents Ohio's online community schools, focusing on best practices, identifying ways to enrich students' experience with online education, and sharing information about the advantages offered by technology-based instruction.

Beginning five years ago with the introduction of H.B. 2, the community school sector has been the focus of increased scrutiny and policy changes. With a focus on accountability and transparency, the legislative changes resulted in substantial changes in the sector as a whole and online community schools in particular. Building on other legislative changes, H.B. 409 takes the next step and provides online community schools additional tools to improve student participation and achievement.

Online community schools are an important option for students that need a more flexible, personalized educational setting. Technology-based instruction in general in both blended and virtual environments continues to grow in importance. Technology offers the ability to customize instruction based on students' needs, making adjustments in the depth, breadth, and pace of instruction as well as offering access to content not available in all traditional settings. Using technology is a skill valued by the workforce updating skills and earning credentials often takes place online.

Enrollment in an online community school is somewhat more complex than enrollment in a district or brick and mortar community schools. Most online schools require that students and parents participate in an orientation before beginning their studies. Additionally, online students are not officially reported as enrolled until the student receives their computer and logs on to the school's system for the first time. Once the initial log-on takes place and students begin their studies, schools must document all participation in learning activities both online and off.

Online community schools work with students and families to explain expectations for participation before they enroll, but sometimes additional intervention by the school is necessary.

Current law requires all community schools to withdraw a student from the school once they reach 72 hours of consecutive unexcused absences. Once that standard is met, students are withdrawn, although they can request to be re-enrolled and the 72-hour clock begins again. Online community schools must re-enroll these students, even if students have previously met the 72-hour standard and also cannot withdraw students that routinely come close to being withdrawn before re-engaging with school work. Students under the age of 18 are referred for truancy, but nothing makes up for students' lost time and opportunity to move forward.

H.B. 409 provides additional tools to online community schools to intervene earlier to address lack of engagement and in some cases withdraw students before they reach the 72-hour level. This legislation also limits students' ability to continually re-enroll without consistent participation. H.B. 409 does not eliminate the standard to withdraw students that meet the 72-hour, it allows schools to accelerate the withdrawal process when appropriate. We are working with Rep. Koehler on language that clarifies that the 72-hour provision remains in place.

In addition to providing new tools to online community schools, H.B. 409 increases accountability for both schools and individual students. Customized intervention plans assist schools in serving students and empower students to take more responsibility for their education.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 409. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.