

Testimony on Academic Distress Commissions

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Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony regarding the Academic Distress Commission proposals being considered for inclusion in Am. Sub. House Bill (HB) 166.

While my training and career have been in technology and manufacturing, I served on the Board of Trustees at both the Medical University of Ohio and the University of Toledo, I was the Interim Dean for the College of Education at The University of Toledo (UT) from 2009-2011 and I continue to serve on the Advisory Boards for UT's Colleges of Engineering, Education, and Arts and Letters. I also serve on the boards for Toledo School for the Arts, the Imagination Station Science Center, Toledo Public Schools Business Advisory Board, Toledo Early College High School, and Lourdes University in Sylvania OH.

I want to reinforce what Chris Varwig and Stephanie Eichenberg have previously said in testimony and I will not repeat the facts they have provided about TPS nor will I repeat the background they have provided in support of the language around Academic Distress Commissions contained in Am. Sub. HB 166. I also urge you to further collaborate with ODE, SAS and the State School Board to finally fix the grade card system in Ohio that is nothing more than a correlation with the school's zip code.

However, what I do wish to provide is additional information regarding the plight of all of Ohio's urban educational systems and to urge you to focus on solving the problems rather than on judging the relative success or failure of our urban systems, using obsolete and completely unhelpful criteria.

To begin the conversation, if we had to pick the one thing that would help solve all the economic development and social issues we face in Ohio and across this country, we would pick "education."

However, all the data shows that to increase the number of high school graduates, to increase the number of two and four-year college graduates, and to increase the chances for educational success, especially in our urban schools, we must make a commitment to “Universal Pre-K.”

As background, the City of Toledo’s future is threatened by a significant college degree attainment gap. By 2025, it is estimated that 65% of Ohio’s workforce will require some kind of postsecondary training to meet employer demands. Toledo’s current rate of college attainment is only 17.4%, compared to 26.1% for Ohio and 30.6% nationally. Local leaders understand that the solution to the college attainment problem cannot be found by simply expanding access to college. The root cause of this challenge must be addressed.

What is known, however, is that nearly 80% of kindergarteners arrive at Toledo Public Schools needing learning interventions and 60% require intensive interventions, as measured by the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. National data shows that urban kids who enter kindergarten unprepared have only a 1-in-2 chance of ever graduating from high school.

Therefore, if Toledo and our other Ohio urban cities are to remain viable and to offer an attractive quality of life for residents and if our cities are competitively produce, attract, and retain employers in the future, then Ohio must effectively address this educational issue.

We can’t change the socio-economic status of our urban families over-night but, we know that a child’s brain is 95% developed by age 5 and we also know that what we can do, almost over-night, is to give every urban child a chance to be in a nurturing and learning environment from age 3 to age 5, for at least a part of the day; that means offering (high quality) Universal Pre-K to every child, especially in our urban neighborhoods.

Further, even though research shows that there is a \$8.60 payback for every dollar we spend on PreK, the common response is that “we can’t afford it.” This is where I think we need a State Board of Education and a Legislature that are willing to “break the mold” and to help Ohio rethink the entire PreK-12 educational paradigm by admitting that perhaps the system that we created 100 years ago is not what we need today, especially if we want to increase quality, to educate more kids better at lower cost, and

to make more efficient use of the human and financial resources we already have committed to PreK-12 education.

To put the situation in perspective, for the Toledo area there are an estimated 14,000 Lucas County children (ages 0-5) living in poverty, and approximately 10,000 of those children reside within Toledo Public Schools district. There are, also 5,000 to 6,000 three-to-five year olds who would benefit from quality pre-K in Lucas County, but only 2,200 of those students attend a Head Start program, which leaves an acute need for 4,000 of Toledo's most impoverished children.

To put the Ohio K-12 situation in perspective, we have 610 school districts in Ohio, most of them small, which means that we also have 610 superintendents, 610 football stadiums, 610 yellow bus fleets, 610 purchasing operations, and on and on.

I heard the Youngtown Mayor estimate that if we did nothing but move to one superintendent per county, except for the large urban systems, we could save close to \$1.0B which would allow us to fund Universal PreK across the State and to send every kid to college free.

So, when we say we can't afford PreK, what we are really saying is that we are unwilling to rethink our educational system for the 21st century, and we are failing to implement the one program that could change the paradigm in Ohio's urban school systems, and could pay for itself 8x-over in increased future tax revenue, and reduced incarceration social welfare expenses.

In addition, educational research has demonstrated that competency-based education is the way to optimize the educational results for all students, which means that if Ohio took advantage of the fact that we have twelve 4-year public universities and twenty-two 2-year public community colleges in the state, we could implement early college for (pick a number) 25% of Ohio's high school students and we could use the savings to fund Universal PreK or to support our underfunded urban K-12 schools.

Instead, we slog along with a time and age-based educational system that is more expensive and less efficient than is possible in the new world of technology, communication, and collaboration.

In summary, I want to reinforce everything that Chris Varwig and Stephanie Eichenberg said regarding Academic Distress Commission proposals but, in addition, I want to urge the Ohio Legislature and the Ohio Department of Education to get serious about rethinking our PreK-College paradigm since in order to solve the failing urban school issue and to quit penalizing certain area codes where there is high poverty, we must get serious about implementing high quality Universal PreK, Statewide.

Think about it, have any of us ever made a personal investment with an 8,600% return?

Respectfully,

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