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Senate Education Committee House Bill 166 Testimony on Academic Distress Commissions Lisa Gray & Kevin Duff, Ohio Excels June 13, 2019

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166. My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. I am joined today by Kevin Duff who is Ohio Excels' Director of Policy and Research.

Ohio Excels is a new nonprofit created by a coalition of business leader to focus on helping to improve the educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Our focus on education includes early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education experiences. And, as part of that, we are committed to working with the broader business community, policymakers, educators and other community leaders to support our students, educators and schools.

Helping turnaround our lowest-performing schools and districts is one of the biggest challenges policymakers face in education. Ohio's model of Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs) has been around for many years, and it has not yielded the results policymakers and the public were hoping to achieve on behalf of our students.

While Ohio Excels does not have a specific proposal for ADC improvement, our board identified a set of design principles that any policy meant to address Academic Distress Commissions and low-performing school districts should follow. Overall the model proposed in this amendment to replace the structure created by HB 70 is a great step forward. Today, I would like to review these principles and highlight where the proposed amendment aligns with them.

Early Supports: The state should do more to **identify low-performing school districts that are trending downward** and provide additional supports and interventions before districts reach the lowest levels of performance. These supports should include an independent **review and outside turnaround partners**.

The amendment aligns well with this principle in several ways:

- The improvement process begins after the first overall F grade;

- The district receives a root cause review to identify the critical areas that need attention; and
- The state offers to cover the cost of approved improvement organizations which can support and add capacity to district staff.

Partner with the Community: Business, philanthropic and other community leaders need to be included as **key partners** in helping chronically low-performing school districts **develop and implement** improvement plans.

The amendment includes requirements to engage stakeholders in several ways. Districts have to engage a wide range of community stakeholders to help develop the district's improvement plan. The amendment requires individual schools that are required to create improvement plans to have community stakeholder input as well.

Mayoral Involvement: There should be **more mayoral involvement** in the leadership of districts identified as chronically low performing to help improve public accountability and better activate community engagement and support.

The amendment involves the mayor or highest-ranking executive officer through appointing authority, but it could include more involvement through the stakeholder engagement process.

Focus Resources: While the state and local community should support the district as a whole, the majority of the turnaround **efforts should focus on the lowest-performing schools** in the district.

The amendment wisely requires building-level improvement plans and stakeholder engagement to target attention and additional resources to the schools that need it the most.

Final Consequence: There should ultimately be a **final consequence** for chronically low-performing school districts that do not improve over time, such as state takeover. However, there should be additional options available for chronically low-performing school districts to forestall this consequence, such as partnering with third-party providers, adopting proven intervention strategies, collaborating with local, high-quality charter schools, and other turnaround strategies.

The amendment adheres to this principle. The proposed process gives school districts additional help and time to demonstrate they are on the right track compared to current law. However, it does maintain an improved version of the commission structure, now named school improvement commissions. The new school improvement commission includes more supports from the state, accountability for the district leader and provisions to ensure the commission members are from the local community.

It is important to balance the urgency of improving student outcomes while providing enough time for the improvement process to show results. The current amendment allows a district to receive six overall F grades before it receives a commission. That is almost half of a student's educational career. We would encourage the committee to consider shortening this timeframe.

We believe this amendment is an important addition to the state's budget. The House amended House Bill 154 into the budget bill. Ohio Excels opposes that amendment. The children in these schools deserve the best schools we can provide, and we are not confident this approach will improve student outcomes as well as this proposed amendment. House Bill 154 does not include additional supports for districts, address districtwide issues or include a final consequence for districts that do not improve over time.

This is challenging work. Ohio Excels is ready to work with committee members on further defining a comprehensive and long-term district improvement solution on behalf of Ohio's students and families. Thank you.