

HB 110 Interested Party Testimony
Jayla Butler, Senior attending the Dayton Early College Academy
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Chair Andrew Brenner
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My name is Jayla Butler. I am a senior at the Dayton Early College Academy and I will be attending Johns Hopkins University in the fall on a full tuition scholarship. I will be the first in my family to attend college, planning to study biology with the eventual goal of becoming a research scientist. When our administrators shared the ramifications of what you will recommend for funding of public charters like DECA, I asked permission to share with you how DECA has changed my life. It is an honor to be here today to speak before you about the incredible school I have been blessed to attend: the Dayton Early College Academy.

When I enrolled in DECA in the 6th grade, it quickly became apparent that my academic skills lagged behind what would be expected for entrance into college and to compete for the precious scholarship dollars I would need to get there. In my previous schools, the expectations for my classmates and me were low. Homework was largely busy work, assignments that required reading and writing outside of class were rare. The gap between what was being taught in wealthy communities and what I was learning just grew larger and larger each year.

But when I came to DECA, everything changed. DECA is the great equalizer. It is a place where learning is valued - it's an environment set up for students like me to succeed - to thrive, learn, and be encouraged to surpass my goals!

At DECA I have learned so much more than how to formulate a thesis, support it with ideas, and cite my sources in MLA format. I was also free to explore who I am, what I value, and where I want to go.

A DECA diploma really means something. We are required to complete many requirements beyond DECA classes----there have been college credits, over 100 hours of community service, job shadows, two non-paid internships, ACT prep classes, college visits, and so much more. I attribute these extra requirements, this rigor, to paving the way for me to go to Johns Hopkins.

If nothing else, what I want to communicate today is that DECA is one the very few options for kids in Dayton who want to be prepared for college. According to the Ohio Report Cards, DECA is the highest performing public school within the boundaries of the Dayton Public Schools. My family could not afford private school, nor was moving an option. Without DECA, I am convinced I would not have received the academic preparation necessary for college. Maybe more importantly, at DECA I received the personalized attention of my teachers who set the bar high and relentlessly supported me to reach those expectations.

My family was aware that not all public charter schools are providing a solid education. Just as teachers can evaluate the quality of their students' work, I believe legislators have the metrics to separate the strong charters from those that fail. Hundreds of capable students who live in Ohio's cities have a grim future because they are not being educated in a manner that sets them up for college or careers.

Schools like DECA have a different track record. I urge you to set the bar high for performance and support the schools that meet those expectations. Support the high-performing charters to enable them to stay open and grow.

I trust that as you debate this budget, you will remember me and other students like me. My school has been developed over the past seventeen years with one clear mission: to prepare kids like me from the city of Dayton to earn a college degree and become productive Ohio citizens. We track our graduates and I can tell you with confidence that DECA graduates are completing college at five times—five times--the national rate of 10% for students of similar demographics. Not bad for a school that is free to attend and enrolls students on a first-come, first-serve basis!

DECA has the metrics to ensure that the State's investment is a good one. Having a solid education is the only thing that stops the cycle of poverty where I live. I hope my story is compelling to you. It is the story of hundreds of other DECA grads like me.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.