

# Ohio Online Learning Coalition

Testimony Regarding H.B. 110  
May 6, 2021

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding H.B. 110.

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

## Community School Funding

We greatly appreciate the work done by the Ohio House to address major base costs inequities in the original funding proposal. The House-passed version of HB 110 uses 100% of base funding components for community schools. Unfortunately, there is still a difference between community schools and districts regarding the base cost calculation. **We would request that the base funding calculation for community schools utilize the same minimum staffing requirements applied to districts' base costs.** As pointed out during previous testimony before this committee, both districts and community schools have fixed costs such as treasurers, counselors, health services, etc.

The table below demonstrates the impact that minimum staffing has on the base cost calculation.

H.B.110 As Passed by the House

School/District	ADM	Proposed Base Cost
School X	405	\$7,131
District Y	423	\$9,658

Although not technically part of the formula, we are concerned with using multiple guarantees to increase district funding while community schools saw categorical funding cut that is not replaced. **We also respectfully request that funding eliminated from community school funding, targeted assistance, K3 literacy, and performance bonuses be reinstated.**

## Online Community School Funding

Equity continues to be a concern with regard to funding for online community schools. Under the current proposal, funding for online community schools increases less than brick-and-mortar community schools and significantly less than districts when fully phased in.

Unlike other community schools, online schools receive only base funding and special education and career-technical funding for eligible students. Although close to 60% of online community school students are identified as economically disadvantaged, no categorical funding is available to support those students. Health and Wellness funding, which averages more than \$250 per pupil statewide, on average amounts to less than \$17 per pupil for online students. **Students in online schools should have access to these necessary resources equal to those made available to online schools and programs operated by school districts. In particular, we recommend categorical funding for economically disadvantaged aid, early literacy, and English learners become part of the formula for online community schools.** As districts doubtless found over the past year, students' needs don't lessen or disappear when they receive instruction primarily online.

The chart below illustrates the significant funding gap between online community schools and online schools and programs in districts.

#### Online Community School v. Online District Expenditures

School Name	School Type	ADM	Grades Served	Total Expenditure Per Pupil*
Greater Ohio Virtual School	Online Community School	399	7-12	\$9,771
Virtual High School	Online District School (Cincinnati City SD)	589	9-12	\$14,692
Auglaize County Educational Academy	Online Community School	82	6-12	\$11,586
Canton Digital Academy	Online District School (Canton City SD)	67	10-12	\$15,680

\* Includes operating and nonoperating expenditures for the 2019-20 school year as reported by the Ohio Department of Education

In addition to districts' online schools and programs being funded at a much higher level than online community schools, online community schools are paid only for documented participation by students. Even when time missed is due to an excused absence such as illness, online community schools experience a reduction in funding of between \$40 and \$50 per pupil per day missed. District online students are fully

funded regardless of whether or not they log in or complete a single assignment. **The Coalition recommends equitable treatment with regard to documenting the participation of students in online schools and programs regardless of whether a community school or a district operates the programs.**

#### Dropout Recovery Community Schools

Several online community schools primarily serve at-risk students through dropout recovery programs. Dropout recovery community schools help students, many of whom previously dropped out of high school, return to school and earn a high school diploma. **We thank the House for adding this program to the budget and recommend that the Senate maintain the dropout recovery pilot.**

#### Direct Funding of Community Schools

The House funding plan eliminates the deduct mechanism for choice programs, including community schools. We appreciate the efforts by the House to address this issue, but we are concerned that the current version of H.B. 110 does not go far enough to protect these programs from a line-item veto. **We recommend additional work on this provision to ensure choice programs are protected from a line-item veto should the Senate decide to move to a direct funding mechanism.**

#### Automatic Closure of Community Schools

**The Ohio Online Learning Coalition supports the provision included in the House-passed version of H.B. 110 that would reset the timeline for the community school closure.** This committee has heard testimony recommending eliminating this provision; otherwise, no community schools would close for several years. The facts indicate that assertion is not supported. In fact, per the Department of Education website, no community school has been closed based on the automatic closure statute (ORC 3314.35) since fiscal year 2014. Even without the closure requirement, community school sponsors routinely reviewed contracts and monitored schools' academic and fiscal stability, closing those schools that fail to meet performance expectations. In fiscal years 2018, 2019, and 2020, a total 30 community schools merged or were closed based on sponsors' or governing authority action, not the automatic closure statute. There is no evidence that resetting the timeline would impact accountability.

#### JCARR Review of EMIS

I think it's fair to say that community schools are somewhat frustrated by what seems like a never-ending stream of new requirements with which they must comply, none of which are specified in law or administrative rule. Unlike the rule-making process that includes a comment period, CSI and JCARR review, and a public hearing, Department 'business rules' or 'technical documents' sometimes appear with warning or change even when there is no change in statute or rule. We would welcome a more collaborative working relationship with the Department of Education. Still, **we believe that maintaining the House provision requiring greater oversight of EMIS reporting requirements and JCARR review of requirements not specified in the Ohio Revised or Ohio Administrative Code would provide a framework in which**

**essential discussions can occur.** Having such guardrails would, in our view, provide greater certainty and further support the progress made in the community school sector.

**Finally, we recommend that the Senate increase the projected number of community school students.** The House-passed version of H.B. 110 projects enrollment of approximately 105,000 students for the next two years when current enrollment is around 118,000. In light of the interest in direct funding, it is critical that we not underestimate or underfund community schools and other choice programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding H.B. 110. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.