



**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Senate Bill 229 Written Testimony
Ohio School Boards Association
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators
Sept. 28, 2021**

Good afternoon, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill (SB) 229.

Our organizations represent public school district boards of education, superintendents, elementary and high school principals, treasurers/CFOs, business managers, and other school business officials from around the state. On behalf of our members, we support SB 229 and thank Sen. Blessing for sponsoring this much-needed legislation.

SB 229 would permit school districts and other entities to submit a declaration to operate a blended learning model by April 30, 2022, instead of the current July 1 deadline. Blended learning is defined as “the delivery of instruction in a combination of time primarily in a supervised physical location away from home and online delivery whereby the student has some element of control over time, place, path, or pace of learning.”

The bill also includes several pandemic-related measures that address the unique challenges and flexibility needs of the current school year, including authorizing individuals who hold state-issued licenses to provide services to students with special needs in their licensed areas by electronic or telehealth means, as well as a prohibition on the use of the chronic absenteeism measure on the state report card.

The bill’s deadline extension to April 30, 2022, is important and necessary for two reasons: First, last school year’s temporary remote learning flexibilities expired, which means districts that are experiencing significant cases of illness, quarantines, or staffing shortages need a legal alternative that will allow them to offer remote learning for a limited period of time. In response, they are relying on blended learning, extending the school day or school year, or using up to three days’ worth of calamity hours to address these temporary closures. Second, since most school districts did not file a declaration to operate a blended learning model by the current July 1 deadline, the remaining options provide schools with little to no means of providing uninterrupted education to students.

We do have concerns with one provision of the bill pertaining to access to digital learning tools. Under current law, districts operating under a blended learning model must have a policy that includes the method by which the district will ensure students have the digital tools necessary to participate when learning remotely. Under SB 229, however, districts would be *required* to provide internet access and devices necessary to access online content to *each* student participating in blended learning. It is not unreasonable for districts to ensure all students have access to the internet and to devices so they can fully participate in remote learning, but it may not be necessary for schools to provide these tools to all students, especially those who already have internet capabilities and access to electronic device and when the remote learning experience is meant to be utilized only for a limited amount of time. We propose clarifying that the district is responsible for assisting students who need internet access or digital learning tools.

Fueled by the Delta variant, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge students and school leaders, and these challenges demonstrate the need for flexible policies for school leaders and students, including temporarily shifting to remote learning via the blended learning model. Schools need all the tools available to them to continue meeting the needs of their students. For these reasons, we urge your support and swift passage of SB 229.

Chair Brenner and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for your time and attention. Please contact us if you have any questions.