



SB 240 Proponent Testimony
Tyler Thornton, Chief Operating Officer of Breakthrough Public Schools
Senate Committee on Primary and Secondary Education
Chair Andrew Brenner
December 14, 2021

Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today as a proponent on SB 240, sponsored by Senator Bob Peterson.

My name is Tyler Thornton, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Breakthrough Public Schools. Breakthrough Public Schools is a network of 12 nonprofit, high performing community schools in Cleveland, most of which are sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Our student population is 99% minority and 70% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Breakthrough Public Schools continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio, consistently outperforming our urban counterparts as well as many suburban school districts.

I have been working in education for over 15 years in a variety of strategic and operational roles at some of the highest performing charter networks in the country, including serving on the strategy team at the KIPP Foundation and as the founding operational leader for Rocketship Public School's first school in Milwaukee. The Chief Operating Officer role at Breakthrough is what brought me back home to Northeast Ohio five and half years ago, and I am so proud to be part of an organization that has accomplished so much for the children of Cleveland. In our first decade of operation we've grown from serving 800 students per year to serving 3,500 students per year. We've intentionally sought locations in the highest need communities in Cleveland- the city with the highest childhood poverty rate in Ohio and the nation- to ensure that *all* students in the city have access to a path changing education. A core tenet of our academic belief system is that *everyone learns, everyone grows- together*. I see evidence of this every day. I am so inspired by our talented team of leaders, teachers, and staff who work tirelessly to provide rigorous and culturally affirming experiences for our students. And I am grateful to be a member of a leadership team that understands the critical importance of embracing excellence in all aspects of schooling.

It is time for community schools to take the next step towards accountability, efficiency and excellence. SB 240 will enable Community School Networks to operate as a single organization with a single board of directors, and will provide multiple efficiencies and operating advantages. Current law requires separate boards for each school and charter management organizations, which creates parochial interests and inherent conflict. A single board of directors will align all

of the adults, board, and staff to create a common focus on what is best for **all** of the students and **all** of the schools.

Simply reducing multiple boards to one eliminates redundant board meetings, saves a tremendous amount of time, and encourages consensus decision-making. The ability to have a single set of board and staff leaders oversee multiple schools simplifies operations, creates efficient common practices with corresponding cost savings, and enables innovations and best practices from any of the schools to be quickly disseminated across all schools. Professional development for both principals and teachers also becomes more efficient and impactful.

The Community School Network creates important flexibility to direct resources where they are most needed. For example, the ability to move key staff members to the schools that need them most enables the Community School Network to address academic or operating challenges as they arise. Similarly, the flexibility to reallocate funds enables the Community School Network to support any school with extra academic resources when needed, address unexpected maintenance, or repair issues that arise.

A further advantage of the Community School Network is that it actually provides more accountability and transparency. Under the proposed construct, the network will receive an overall report card and each school within the network will also receive a report card on its academic performance. Moreover, as a public, non-profit entity, the Community School Network's finances will be fully open and transparent.

In summary, the Community School Network will provide operating efficiencies and savings, enhanced accountability and transparency, and most importantly, a more aligned approach to academic programming, staffing, and professional training that will enhance the education for students. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.