



From: Michael Linton

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RE: Sponsor Testimony for SB 178

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 178. The purpose of this bill appears to improve potential outcomes for K-12 students in the state. I expect one of the benefits to be a higher percentage of graduates who not only will be better prepared for all aspects of life (including work), but who also achieve higher academic achievement as a result of enhanced engagement toward curriculum directed to individual interests. I don't expect anyone would disagree with the statement that we as the public school system in Ohio can do better at preparing our students for the workforce – either directly from high school and all the way through post graduate work. I would suggest that our definition of success – at the individual student level and the school district level – is flawed. No one is surprised to hear that schools teach to the tests. Having said that, may I add that I am a firm believer in standards and my experience is that very few objectives succeed without accountability. My question continues to be – what are the correct measurements of student and district success?

If I may – a quick personal background to maybe help you understand my perspective:

I grew up in Circleville. A lifelong resident of the state, except for a couple of stints living part time in apartments in New York, San Francisco and Zurich.

Graduated from Capital University with majors in accounting and economics. Obtained my CPA license while working with Arthur Andersen (now Accenture).

After AA&Co, joined a franchise of Adia Staffing (now Adecco). When we sold our Central Ohio franchise to corporate, I joined Adecco US. I later retired as CEO of Adecco North America – to include Canada, Mexico and US operations. Adecco is the largest staffing company in the world and in the US and the largest employer in the US.

I joined Accurate Heating, Cooling and Plumbing (DBA Accurate Mechanical, Inc) after I retired so I could have access to high-speed internet, which wasn't accessible where we live in the Hocking Hills.

As a result of my time with Adecco, I have been engaged in workforce development issues since the early 1990's. My testimony today is not limited to the trades, but I hope to speak on behalf of all employers.

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My current workforce service includes:

- Governor's Workforce Policy Board (was also involved during the Taft administration)
- I serve as chair of the Area 20 WIOA board – Ross, Pickaway, Fairfield, Hocking, Vinton (previously served as chair of Area 1 (Franklin) when WIA was initially created)
- Serve on Logan Elm Local school board (for 14 years)
- Serve on advisory boards for numerous CTC programs – trade specific and overall school
- Serve as treasurer of Ohio Southeast Economic Development board
- Serve various local economic development/workforce programs
- Served on the state and national boards of Jobs for America's Graduates

My goal in sharing these experiences is to suggest that I am engaged in workforce issues at the local, state and national levels. I spend less than 50% of my time running our business, because I spend much more than half of my week working with individuals and organizations who, like me, want to improve employment opportunities for every individual in the state.

In the late 1990's/early 2000's, Adecco had over 2 million employees working at our customer sites. The economy was strong. I remember conducting an interview on "Squawk Box" on the floor of the NYSE. My comments seemed realistic at the time when stating the employment market has never been this tight and don't expect it will EVER be this tight again. I guess that is why no one ever paid me to speak as a futurist!

My view on the workforce today is that is the single greatest limitation to economic growth. I don't expect any long term improvement due to current demographics and the lack of preparedness/preparation of students graduating from our current educational system. For the first time in our country's history, we have more people retiring from than entering the workforce. Students generally are less prepared for life, let alone the growing underperformance in the critical areas of reading and math. From my perspective as a taxpayer, this is totally unacceptable. I understand that there is a plethora of factors that contribute to the continuing decline in student preparedness and many of those are and should be outside the responsibility of the school systems, but the education system in Ohio is the only solution we have to abate the tidal wave.

In my opinion, based on years of working on this issue, including hundreds of interviews and round tables with students, the primary issue we face in Ohio is lack of student engagement in education. Some may say that is the result of the lack of parental support. If the education system could provide more inviting options directed toward the student's interests, we can overcome some the hurdles established at home. It is an opportunity for the employers of the state working closely with local educational institutions to stem the tide of a cultural decline in work ethic and generational poverty. Business Advisory Councils seemed to be a step in the right direction, but lack of a common vision and participation from the employer and/or the school districts has rendered most BAC's virtually ineffective. I am not speaking the party line with that assessment. I have visited many BAC meetings over the past several years. The reality is most districts (or even worse – many ESC's acting on behalf of local districts) treat the BAC as another box to check. Employers have little, if any, voice in curriculum or exposure to administration, faculty or students.

Students are told beginning very early in their educational experience and continue to hear throughout their K-12 education, that college is THE BEST PATH to personal success. And why wouldn't they? A very large

percentage of teachers in the classroom have gone straight from their own K-12 experience to an undergrad degree then back to the classroom to teach. That is only path they know. Most teachers, and administrators, have limited exposure to local businesses to understand what jobs exist in their county, let alone what a job description may be or what a compensation package might look like.

Speaking of teachers....teachers are compensated based on how many years they have taught and how many post graduate degrees they can attain. Period! I know I live, and have always lived, in the private sector, but where is the focus on student success as a tool to determine teacher compensation? Why is there no incentive for teacher's to improve their "game", including:

- Pour more of themselves into preparation and delivery of content
- To consider creative ways to address the changing demographics in the classroom
- Engage students who have "checked out"

The unions represent the teachers, but who represents the students?

I certainly am not criticizing preparing students for college, but to somehow promote that path as preferred over other options is not in the best interest of the general student population or our economy. The statistics are staggering of the number of students who attend college for one to four semesters and leave college with nothing to show for it except:

- A pile of student debt
- Opportunity cost of missed income from career-based employment
- Damage to resume due to:
  - Incomplete college experience
  - Gap in education/employment
- Unfilled positions with local employers

The point here is that career-based education should share equal footing, promotion and respect with those students who are college qualified and college ready. Career based education still carries the stigma of a program for academic underachievers. Undergrad degree attainment remains in the low 20% of the overall Ohio population. Without debating whether that number is high enough – everyone has an opinion here – does it make sense that more than 60% of Ohio high school graduates head off to college within 18 months of graduation? It does make sense from the students' perspective as that remains the primary guidance they have received throughout their school experience.

Both Germany and Japan have built education models that help students evaluate their career interests and skills much earlier than school in the US. In the sixth grade, German students know with near certainty whether they are bound for a university or some other education/career option. In Japan, that decision comes after fifth grade. With the availability of technology driven curriculum, I do not understand why we can't create more customized education paths for students. Unfortunately, for the students who choose to pursue career-based education, many are turned away by CTC's due to program capacity issues from:

- Building/lab space
- Lack of qualified instructors

I support building an educational model where students interested in career-based education can remain at their home schools for all or part of the day. This also may resolve some of the funding issues inherent between home school districts and CTC's. To summarize this point, we need more career based educational options available to students at an earlier age. Students who select these options should be celebrated to the same degree as those headed to college. Students who are kinesthetic learners and find their passion in middle school have a much better chance of completing a high school degree than if they are expected to complete 4 years of math, 4 years of English.....There is not a one size fits all solution – each school district and each community is unique, but access to career based education is critical – especially for districts where a large percentage of students do not attend college.

My greatest concern and I believe the greatest potential benefit of this bill is for the “tweeners”. The group of students – 20%-80” of a school population who don't have any plans at the start of their senior year. They aren't going to college, they don't know what career options exist in their region and even if they were aware of options, they are not prepared to capture those career opportunities. Our K-12 system needs to identify those students long before their senior year and help them create a path to success.

I might be accused of blasphemy for the next statement, but I believe the intention of the testing at the high school level is misguided. The ability of school to teach to the tests and students to prepare for the tests is not a statistically valid indicator of a student's potential success in life. And isn't that what we should care about? I know this data is sometimes difficult to obtain, but isn't the evaluation of student standing one, three and five year's post-graduation a much more important measure of school performance? At a minimum, assessments should be developed that measure something besides the student's mastery of algebra or biology.

A key tenant of this bill is the expectation that the head of K-12 education in Ohio is tasked to consider the workforce needs of the state, rather than simply being a feeder system for higher education. Again, I understand the importance of a quality college prep curriculum at the K-12 level – I believe I have benefitted from this model. At the same time the leader of public instruction in Ohio must be aware of their responsibility to prepare ALL students for a path that will lead each student to a chance at personal success. And for most students, career-based employment is part of that story. Community and connected learning should be part of the solution as demonstrated by organizations like BB2C in Washington County and beyond.

We sometimes joke in our company that the current education model keeps those of us in the trades solvent. Many of our customers have no clue how to perform very simple household repairs. And this knowledge gap is not limited to one demographic. When I was in junior high school, we learned basic electricity, metal work, woodworking, plumbing and carpentry. At Accurate we sometimes feel guilty for charging a service diagnostic fee for flipping a circuit breaker or showing a customer how to close the water entry valve.

I believe our Lieutenant Governor and the Office of Workforce Transformation are working with employers to create some innovative programs, but these programs, including 16-17 year old internships, pre-apprentice programs, need more support from education. This can only be accomplished only through a strategic overhaul of our current K-12 model. I have said for the past several years that I am excited for the economic development wins in our great state. I attribute these to the good work of Jobs Ohio, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the legislature and local economic development teams. But as I ask often to all who will listen.....”Who is waking

up thinking about workforce development everyday and all day in our state?" This bill creates an infrastructure to address this question. If we don't enhance or workforce development pipeline, the Intels and Hondas and Fords simply rob Peter to pay Paul. The result is potentially net zero economic growth.

Thank you for the opportunity to share and I will answer any questions you may have.