

Ohio House of Representatives
Ways and Means Committee
HB 124
March 28, 2017

Testimony by Mary Beth Freeman, Superintendent, Delaware Area Career Center

Chairman Schaffer, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee. I am Mary Beth Freeman, Superintendent of the Delaware Area Career Center (DACC), a joint vocational school district located in Delaware County. We serve the four Delaware County school districts, Big Walnut, Buckeye Valley, Delaware City and Olentangy, which are taxing districts within our Career-Technical Planning District (CTPD). In addition, Worthington City Schools is a contract district within our CTPD, and we serve, through open enrollment, numerous students from Westerville, the Ohio School for the Deaf, and several other districts. I am currently in my ninth (9th) year as Superintendent at DACC. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of HB 124.

I would like to begin by sharing with you just a few accomplishments of our students. Over the past nine years we have demonstrated increase success for our students. Annually, we are sending more students (double digits) to national competition in Skills USA, Business Professionals of America, FFA, and HOSA. Before 2012, it was on an occasional basis that a student earned the opportunity to compete at nationals. Recently, one of our FFA teams was invited to compete internationally. Our Digital Design team won a student Emmy award through the Ohio Valley Chapter of the National Academy of Television and Sciences, for a promotional video they did for Del-Co Water. Students experiment with the latest technology, such as Google Glass, drone technology and virtual technology, to replicate how it is currently being used in different career fields. During the 2015-16 school year, students participated in work based learning experiences and earned over \$62,000 collectively. Of the programs where industry certifications are available, 75% of our students have earned the respective industry credential. We have seen a significant increase in students who are eligible and inducted into the National Technical Honor Society. Our students learn the value of giving back through community service events such as conducting food drives for People In Need (PIN), blood drives and supporting the Delaware County Humane Society, to name just a few.

Our staff members are dedicated to the success of our students, doing whatever it takes to help them. Almost 40 teachers have completed Google Apps training for the purpose of integrating technology into their curriculum. Several instructors have received local *Teaching in Excellence* awards and our welding instructor was awarded the national Skills USA Outstanding Career and Technical Educator Award in 2016.

We have many partnerships which expand student opportunities. A partnership with Maryhaven began as a means to offer an alternative option to suspension/expulsions. We now have two mental health

professionals on campus full-time and the program has evolved to include a proactive means of support for students. Our Law Academy has partnered with the Delaware County Sheriff's office to provide training to those preparing to become law enforcement officers and to provide countywide training to current law enforcement. As part of our program for students with disabilities, we have partnered with Bob Evan's, Goodwill Industries, and Ohio Wesleyan University to provide job sites and job training experiences.

I share these comments to help you understand that we are preparing young people and adults with the necessary skills to be successful at work and in their community. We believe it is important to provide education for success in all aspects of life.

DACC has strategically made decisions to be in the position to provide the aforementioned opportunities. It is important to understand the background and how we arrived to the current situation.

In 2008-2009, my first year at DACC, we began a yearlong strategic planning process. One of the value statements is "We value our ability to be good stewards of taxpayer's money." From this, DACC voluntarily requested the State Auditor complete a performance audit. DACC was the first career center in the state of Ohio to go through this process. The final report was complete in January, 2010. Over the next several years, we followed suggestions, including the completion of a facilities assessment.

DACC had (and still has) two small campuses, seven (7) miles apart. Following the completion of a facilities assessment, a community focus group convened on several occasions to review the outcomes of the assessment. Their role was not to make a recommendation to the Board of Education, but rather, they were tasked with identifying options, along with the pros and cons of each option. The facility options included the following:

1. Remain as two campuses.
2. Purchase land, build a new school and sell the both campuses.
3. Move everything to the north location.
4. Move everything to the south location.

Based upon the information provided to the Board of Education from the community focus group, the Board of Education made the decision to consolidate the two campuses, and more specifically, move our entire operations to the site of the current south location on Rt 23, just south of Delaware, where all programs would be more centrally located to the students we serve. This option would provide ongoing operational savings to both DACC and to our associate districts. For example, when I asked our home districts how much they would save in busing costs by going to one site versus two, I was amazed at the amount. Of those who responded, it ranged from \$47K-\$56K per year, per district. That calculates to approximately \$300,000 of taxpayer dollars per year that would be saved and can be used back at our home districts.

Making many of the recommended changes from the performance audit allowed us to position ourselves not to have to ask voters for any new money for the building project. With the cuts we made and with the permanent improvement portion of the levy in question, we could consolidate our campuses, provide daily services to all students, save in travel and operational costs attributed to two

campuses, and save money for our associate districts. I tell you, that as a superintendent, and speaking on behalf of our Board of Education, we are proud of our strategic approach to remaining fiscally prudent and providing an excellent educational experience for our students.

In 2001, our voters approved a five (5) year levy for 1.7 mills of which 1.3 mills are for operating expenses and 0.4 mills are for permanent improvement. In addition, we have a 1.5 continuing levy for operational expenses. In 2005, the voters renewed the 1.7 mills for 10 years. DACC promised not to come back to voters for 10 years and we kept our promise. In 2015, we asked the voters to approve the renewal levy. Again, we promised not to come back for 10 more years. The voters overwhelmingly approved our levy by over 10,600 votes or 61%. At the end of November 2015, we received the notification that our levy passed and was certified.

Following our success at the polls, we proceeded with the consolidation of our two campuses. The current south campus would become home to all DACC operations. We hired an architect and a construction manager at risk. September 28, 2016, was an exciting day for DACC as we broke ground for our \$45M expansion and renovation project. The project was moving forward as planned with a "move-in" date of August 2018.

In mid- December **2016**, I received a phone call stating that because of a human error at the Delaware County Board of Elections, the State Tax Commissioner had not calculated our taxes as approved by the voters. Our tax paying district stretches into an additional four (4) counties, Franklin, Marion, Morrow and Union. The DACC tax levy was not placed on the ballot for 1026 voters. Even if all voters had voted against the levy, we would have won by over 9500 votes, a significant margin. To date, we have not collected any money from the levy that was overwhelmingly approved.

In January 2017, the DACC Board of Education filed a Writ of Mandamus with the Supreme Court. On March 8, we received word that we lost 4-3. DACC Board of Education filed a Motion to Reconsider on March 20. To date, we do not have a response.

Prior to January, both levies were collecting approximately 1 mill which put us just over the 2 mill floor for JVSD's. I would also like to note that JVSDs are not entitled to any inside millage. The levy would have generated \$7.1M annually. Because the remaining 1.5 continuing mill is under the 2 mill floor, it is currently being collected at its full amount, not the reduced amount mentioned above. This has created a net loss of about \$4.4M. With an approximate annual budget of \$13M, this is approximately 1/3 of our operating budget.

The support of HB 124 and the approval of this levy is important for several reasons. First, and most importantly, we will be unable to complete our construction project. Second, we cannot sustain all the support systems for students as I shared in the beginning of my statement. Third, we listened to our community through planning efforts, focus groups and partnerships. We sought guidance through means such as the volunteered Performance Audit, and we followed recommendations as prescribed. We have remained fiscally prudent and we have made strategic decisions to deliver a strong education while remaining cognizant of our fiscal position. Fourth, because this was a renewal levy, homeowner's

had the benefit of the 12.5% homestead exemption and if we have to go back for a new levy, our taxpayers will lose this benefit. Fifth, there is also a benefit when we are only going to the voters once every 10 years. It keeps us off the ballot when our associate schools are on the ballot. The last thing we want to do is compete for any votes at the polls. Additionally, we have a much larger geographical territory and the cost to run a campaign is higher, and running a campaign more often means we are going to community members and businesses, with our hand out asking to donate to the levy fund, on a more frequent basis, the same community that is asked to support their local district campaigns. DACC has continuously remained fiscally prudent and through no fault of our own, we have been put into a negative fiscal situation.

Without HB 124 and through no fault of DACC, we will need to go back to the voters. It will be difficult for many to understand why we are back in just two years when we promised we would not be back for 10. People in the community do not follow the news for the area career center as they do their home district. We carried out a successful levy campaign and won overwhelmingly. I ask this committee to support HB 124 which would allow only those whose ballots did not include our levy language, to vote; and those votes to be added to totals from November 2015. The passage and the collection of the November 2015 levy will support the continuation of the many educational experiences available to our students.

Thank you for your time and attention.