Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent for Senate Bill 241. My name is Ben Rein and I am the Director of Outreach for the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC), based outside of Cleveland, in Gates Mills, Ohio. I joined the Mastery Transcript Consortium 14 months ago having spent the first 25 years of my working life in independent school education as a teacher, coach, senior administrator, and Head of School. My work has taken me from Indiana to New Jersey, Pennsylvania to Virginia and eventually to my last stop at a school in Cleveland, Ohio. The organization I now support, the Mastery Transcript Consortium, or MTC, is a fast-growing, 1-year old, not-for-profit collaborative of 175+ independent schools from around the country and the world interested in improving the current educational model of instruction for the betterment of students, and I am excited to tell you more about our work and it’s connection to Senate Bill 241 today.

At the MTC we are encouraging a serious conversation about teaching and learning in our schools, and in so doing, we are looking ahead not only at preparation for college, but also at the ever changing world of work in the 21st Century. We want to provide a new transcripting tool that allows high schools to alter their educational model in order to inspire a next generation of students who are curious thought leaders, inspired innovators, and fluid intellectuals, prepared to wrestle with and to lead an uncertain and potentially volatile future. We believe our current industrial model of education - focused on sorting and ranking students based solely on their performance in an often rigid progression of courses, seat time and subject credits - no longer serves our students well, and by changing the way we transcript our students, we believe we can provide a vehicle for a vastly improved educational output.

At the most basic level, the Mastery Transcript Consortium is building a tool - a revised high school transcript - that will no longer rely on grades, GPA or Carnegie Units as the measure of a student’s path through high school (exhibit 1). As we re-imagine what schools can look like in the future, our Mastery Transcript will be built to focus on Mastery Credits – explicit, measureable, transferable learning objectives – that allow students to represent their growth as individuals, differentiating their strengths, skills and accomplishments, without diminishing their learning, motivation for growth, or self-assessment to a simple letter or grade point average.

Instead of submitting a graded transcript sorted by courses in traditional academic departments, the Mastery Transcript will reflect a student’s acquisition of traditional content as a means to exhibit mastery of complex skills and attributes that are not only necessary for success in school, but are also highly valued by CEO’s and business executives of today (exhibit 2). Our transcript does not dismiss traditional academic content as the vestige of a world before the i-Phone. We recognize subject content as a vital piece, but just one piece, of the learning process. Schools in the consortium are asked to develop an approach to learning that does more than just repeatedly measure a student’s ability to review, memorize and regurgitate academic content for performance on traditional or standardized tests. They are asked to design Mastery Credits and courses that require the application and creation of knowledge as the student develops new skills and dispositions.

This effort to create more complex, dynamic and layered learning outcomes cannot be accomplished in traditional “stand and deliver” classrooms where students sit – often passively – in desks as a teacher dispenses their knowledge (exhibit 3). Effective learning should be active, hands on, and engaged, and tailored to the needs of the individual student. Mastery exposes students to complexity while connecting learning to the real world, allowing for authentic engagement in a way that encourages rigor and celebrates growth without creating winners and losers in the educational system. The effort to produce a new transcript that allows high schools to promote more authentic and deeper learning through the application of knowledge toward mastery is not just innovating and exciting, it is backed by data. For almost 50 years, educational research has show that grades reduce a student’s interest in learning, reduce a student’s preference for challenging tasks, and reduce the quality of student thinking (exhibit 4). Moreover, research has also shown that instruction focused on a mastery learning model is more effective than conventional models of instruction (exhibit 5). The research is clear and compelling, the industrial world of the 20th century has faded, and our model of educations needs to change too.

We were blessed as an organization last year to receive the $2 million E.E. Ford Foundation Collaborative Leadership Grant - the largest grant ever by the E.E. Ford Foundation – to pursue the development and construction of our Mastery Transcript. This affirmation for the objectives and outcome of our work has brought wide-spread attention and energy to our project, and has only reinforced our belief that the time is not only right, but right now, to move this project forward. While we have still not completed construction of the ultimate version of our mastery transcript, our 175+ and growing school membership suggests that we are not alone in this belief, and we believe over the next few years our transcript will become a tool and catalyst for improving teaching and learning for all schools – not just those in the independent realm.

But in addition to sharing news about our work at the MTC, I am here today to advocate for Senate Bill 241. Work like ours – transformative work designed to fundamentally alter and improve the way we educate and prepare our students for college and the world – could be stifled in Ohio if independent schools accredited by ISACS are not given the autonomy to explore and innovate their educational programs. It would be a great loss if current state regulations prevented forward-leaning independent schools from exploring how to not only strengthen their own communities, but to serve as field laboratories for educational initiatives that we at the Mastery Transcript Consortium believe will one-day transform and improve the educational and instructional model for all students in all schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding SB 241. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions you may have