**Senate Education Committee**

**Testimony on**

**Sub. HB 154**

**Lisa Gray, Ohio Excels**

**September 10, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 154. My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels.

Ohio Excels is a new business coalition focused on helping to improve the educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Our focus on education includes early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education experiences. And, as part of that, we are committed to working with the broader business community, policymakers, educators and other community leaders to support our students, educators and schools.

Helping turnaround our lowest-performing schools and districts is one of the most complicated and daunting challenges policymakers face in education. Ohio’s model of Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs) has been around for many years, and it has not yielded the results policymakers and the public were hoping to achieve, nor which our students need.

There has been much discussion and debate about the best way to address our lowest performing schools and districts in Ohio, especially over the last few months with the introduction of House Bill 154. Ohio Excels did not support the original HB 154 because we believe it would have instituted a weakened model of school improvement with little oversight and insufficient supports and resources. The children in our lowest performing schools and districts deserve better.

While Ohio Excels did not develop a specific proposal, we do believe that any policy meant to address Academic Distress Commissions and low-performing schools and districts should adhere to a few key principles:

* We should get ahead of problems before they get out of control. The state should do more to **identify low-performing school districts that are beginning to trend downward** and provide additional supports and interventions before they reach the lowest levels of performance. These supports should include an independent **root cause analysis and review, as well as an outside turnaround partner**.
* Ask the school’s community for help. Business, philanthropic and other community leaders need to be included as **key partners** in helping chronically low-performing school districts develop and implement improvement plans.
* Engage local government. There should be **more mayoral involvement** in the leadership of districts identified as chronically low-performing to help improve public accountability and better activate community engagement and support.
* Prioritize a districts’ schools most in need of help. While the state and local community should support the district as a whole, the majority of the turnaround **efforts should focus on the lowest-performing schools** in the district.
* Accountability shouldn’t be taken off the table. There should ultimately be a **final consequence** for chronically low-performing school districts that do not improve over time, such as state takeover. However, there should be additional options available for chronically low-performing school districts to forestall this consequence, such as partnering with third-party providers, adopting proven intervention strategies, collaborating with local, high-quality charter schools, and other turnaround strategies.

We believe that Substitute House Bill 154, which you are considering today, meets the principles we have identified by:

* Including appropriate state oversight through the creation of the School Transformation Board;
* Providing supports and resources for root cause analyses and outside improvement experts;
* Requiring more local and community involvement in the development and implementation of local plans;
* Providing flexibility in options and a realistic timeline for improvement by allowing six years for schools and districts to demonstrate improvement;
* Making provision for final consequences if schools and districts are unable to improve; and
* Providing an opportunity for districts currently in ADC status to seek a dissolution.

This is challenging work, but critically important in making sure that all Ohio students have the opportunity for educational success. Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.