



Greater Ohio Virtual School

1879 Deerfield Road, Lebanon, OH 45036

The Honorable Peggy Lehner
Chair of the Ohio Senate Education Committee
Senate Building, 1 Capitol Square, 2nd Floor N., Rm. 222
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairwoman Lehner,

My name is Shawn E. Lenney, and I am the Executive Director of the Greater Ohio Virtual School (GOVS), a Dropout Prevention and Recovery E-school serving over 700 students throughout the state of Ohio. We are located at the Warren County Educational Service Center in Lebanon, Ohio, and are currently sponsored by St Aloysius Charter School Specialists. Unfortunately, due to funding constraints placed on our school our governing board is likely going to vote to close our school before the 2020-2021 school year. For this reason, I contact you today to plead for the Ohio Senate to consider revisions to Ohio's method of funding Dropout Prevention and Recovery E-Schools. For the past year we have been working with legislators on developing an undated funding model, which I have included for your review.

The Greater Ohio Virtual School was created in 2002 as an alternative option for students in Warren County who were attending the Electronic School of Tomorrow (E.C.O.T.). Since its inception, our school has graduated over 1500 students, including a school-record during the 2019-2020 school year of 170 students. Our governing board consists of five Warren County Superintendents including Pat Dubbs, Superintendent of the Wayne Local School District, Tom Isaacs, Superintendent of the Warren County Educational Service Center, Larry Hook, Superintendent of Carlisle Local Schools, Tim Ackermann, Superintendent of the Kings Local School District, and Mike Sander, Superintendent of the Franklin City School District. In addition to these five school districts, GOVS works with over 120 different school districts throughout the state of Ohio. The schools we work with trust GOVS and support our school in numerous ways offering testing and tutoring sites in their facilities and sharing their teachers and tutors who have become vital parts of our teaching staff. This trust between the Greater Ohio Virtual School and our partner schools is represented in the fact that our enrollment has more than tripled over the past three years while spending little to no funding on advertising of any kind. The Greater Ohio Virtual School was recently awarded the Excellence in Education Award last November at the GEMS of Excellence Awards banquet hosted by the Mason Deerfield Chamber of Commerce. In front of over 400 area businesses, politicians, and residents, the Greater Ohio Virtual School was honored for the role it plays in supporting at-risk students in the area.

As the Ohio Senate considers legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge you to consider Dropout Prevention and Recovery E-Schools who have been able to successfully educate students throughout the crisis. A new funding method is necessary to ensure Dropout Prevention and Recovery E-schools are able to continue offering these same services to our students entering the upcoming school year. It is incredibly challenging to put into words the struggles our school has endured since 2015. Many of my colleagues at similar schools would agree that we have been challenged with what would seem an impossible task. We have, however, overcome in so many ways while improving accountability at all of our schools. The lasting hurdle that has proven to



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be unobtainable has been school funding. Specifically, the funding of Dropout Prevention and Recovery E schools strictly on seat time when dealing with a school whose population consists predominantly of at-risk students. While we have spent countless amounts of time, resources, and energy on finding ways to get at-risk students to engage, we still can't get around the simple fact that many of those elements go unfunded at our schools. If you were to ask the Ohio Department of Education or the State Auditor's office what they think of our ability to track and document student attendance and seat-time, you would hear very favorable feedback concerning the work we have done. Those entities often recommend us to other schools that are struggling to come up with appropriate methods to track this data. Yet, our funding has been cut by almost 50% since 2017. How is this possible? When funding is strictly calculated by seat time, it punishes our school for the type of student with which we are working. Many of those students are coming to us with a lengthy background of truancy issues that have made them unsuccessful. Funding by seat time means that those students, with years of baggage accumulated from traditional schools, will not receive full funding at GOVS unless they have 100 percent attendance immediately. Again, the expectation is that we have to have 100 percent attendance if we are to receive full funding for our at-risk students.

Truancy issues are not the only at-risk definitions our students carry with them as they search for a non-traditional way to receive their diploma. At-risk doesn't always equal low achieving. Many of our students come to us with anxiety issues, medical issues, and bullying issues that have held them back in the traditional setting. Often, those students can work quickly and efficiently when the barriers they have been battling at their traditional school are eliminated. Those students sometimes don't need 920 hours to earn five credits for the year or a few credits to get them back on track. In this scenario, those high achieving students who have made progress without the requirement of 920 hours hurt the Greater Ohio Virtual School financially because we only receive funding based on their seat time. I want to emphasize that our best and most highly performing students hurt us financially.

The three-tiered funding system that we are proposing would provide solutions to the funding issues that have been created when only taking into consideration seat time for funding. We are not asking for more money than what each student is currently funded in the state of Ohio. We are merely asking for a funding system that provides additional pathways to achieve full funding. Tier one or base funding would fill the large funding void for resources we use to onboard and work with truant students to get them to re-engage. The second tier is the current system of documenting seat time to continue to have the ability to track and monitor how our students are engaging at our schools. This tier also allows for us to continue utilizing the numerous additions to software and staffing we have implemented over the past few years to meet compliance standards. The third and final tier offers funding for achievement or the completion of credits. The accrual of the appropriate amount of credits to earn a high school diploma should be one of the main goals of all schools in the state of Ohio. Again, I can't stress enough that we are not asking for additional funding. We are merely asking for the ability to earn full funding through multiple pathways. We are already receiving a non-traditional report card for working with non-traditional students. It would seem to me that a non-traditional funding system for working with non-traditional students would make sense.



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I want to share with you some GOVS success stories to show how the school is making a difference in the lives of at-risk students.

Kobe: Came to GOVS in February of his 10th-grade year, having only earned 2.25 high school credits. The student got off to a slow start but graduated on time, having earned 14.75 credits in a single school year. Kobe is currently attending Kent State University.

Faith and Julio: Married couple with a young daughter living on their own and working full-time jobs. They Graduated together last year. Faith earned 9.75 credits her senior year through GOVS. The three-year-old daughter was yelling, “Daddy, daddy,” as Julio walked across the stage at graduation.

Tyler: Student living independently with three kids and working full time for his brother. Graduated from GOVS, just shy of turning 22. He came to GOVS with 1.25 credits and slowly, but steadily got through the work with the help of his Intervention Specialist and the program’s flexibility.

Holden: Came to GOVS with eight credits in January of his 11th-grade year. Holden was in the custody of Children’s Services and incarcerated in a juvenile detention center. He met graduation requirements in exactly four months, was released from JDC, and gained stable employment.

Sevdalin: Student was adopted internationally and placed in a residential facility due to contact with the juvenile justice system and emotional concerns. After two years of residential placement, Sevdalin was able to receive independent living services through the Coordinated Care program at the Warren County Educational Service Center and enrolled at the John Lazarus Learning Center. When it was determined that he was too credit deficient to graduate on time and needed the flexibility to work a job, the Greater Ohio Virtual School was brought in to join this student’s support team and offer more flexibility to his education. GOVS provided IEP services, tutoring, a mentor, and a workforce development coordinator to add additional support. Sevdalin eventually graduated a year after he enrolled at GOVS and is currently working two jobs in the area and living independently.

Mavluda: She was a Princeton City Schools student originally from Uzbekistan. I first met her in 2017 at Princeton High School during a GOVS orientation/MAP testing session when we first began our partnership with their school. She was very behind and the language barrier made things challenging throughout the process but once enrolled she did well until life got in the way multiple times. She dropped out of GOVS and moved back to Uzbekistan to get married. Upon returning to the United States she reached out to our counselor who helped her re-enroll at GOVS and continue making up credits. Then life got in the way again as she withdrew from GOVS again, moved back to Uzbekistan, and this time returned to the States with a baby. Once again, she reached out to our guidance counselor who worked with her to get her to become GOVS graduate!

I love inviting people to our school, and I am sometimes met with a response similar to “What the heck am I going to see at an E school?”. Well, you don’t necessarily need to walk into brick and mortar classrooms to see student’s lives being altered for the better. In many cases, our



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students come to us with life occurrences that have made school and education secondary to them, and we, and other similar schools, provide the last line of defense to allow students to continue, catch up, recover, and achieve. Do we have students at our school that aren't engaged?

Absolutely! All schools, traditional or non-traditional, have students who aren't engaged. The difference is that a traditional school is funded fully for that student and has the ability and time to utilize resources to attempt to get those students to re-engage. A funding system in which seat time is the only mechanism to generate funding does not adequately fund those resources, in turn adversely affecting the rest of the school and those students who are engaged. We need a change in the funding system to keep our school open. When schools like ours close, students don't simply go back to their resident district and try again. They drop out. I implore you to consider appropriately supporting Dropout Prevention and Recovery E schools in an effort to continue providing a lifeboat for students who are in danger of dropping out of school. It is probably too late for our school, my 80 employees, and 700 students, but there are more schools out there that will be in danger of closing during a time in our world where our platform is needed the most.

Thank you for taking my comments into consideration.