

Louis W. Blessing III

State Senator
8th Senate District
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8068



Committees

Ways & Means, *Chairman*
Primary & Secondary Education,
Vice Chair
Finance
Transportation

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 229. This bill is intended to give our schools necessary flexibility as they navigate the school year in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The bill language has changed since its introduction based on feedback we received from stakeholders and the Department of Education, and I will highlight the key provisions.

Ohio's schools have been working diligently to keep their students safe and healthy. They have adapted to changing guidelines and continue to prioritize safety. This year, districts had the option to notify ODE before the start of the school year if they intended to operate using a blended learning model. A blended learning option allows students to continue their studies if they are at home in quarantine. In order to have a blended learning model, schools must teach students in-person for a majority of the year, but allows some flexibility for times that is not possible.

Unfortunately there have already been many COVID-19 positive cases and exposures in classrooms this year, leading schools to send many students across the state home to quarantine for days at a time. To help schools keep children safe while still ensuring their education continues, SB 229 provides an extension to April 30, 2022 for a school to notify ODE of its intent to operate a blended learning model for this school year. In addition to this deadline extension, SB 229 states that schools and districts that opt for blended learning this year must follow the established requirements for operating a blended learning model in the Revised Code and do the following:

- Ensure students have internet access and devices necessary to access online content, and to provide these resources to the students who do not have them

- Monitor and assess student achievement and progress
- Report the number and duration of students participating in a blended learning environment

Senate Bill 229 also ensures that community school funding will not be reduced for taking advantage of the blended learning option. We do not want to put schools in an unfair situation where taking measures to ensure health will hurt them financially.

SB 229 allows special education students and students receiving the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship or Autism Scholarship to receive care and instruction remotely from a licensed provider upon a parent or guardian's request. This is modeled on a previous provision enacted by the General Assembly in HB 164 for the last school year.

We know that the pandemic has resulted in a regrettable loss of learning. Acknowledging this, SB 229 requires each school district to create a remediation plan to address this reality. ODE will develop the standards and a template for these plans and schools will provide their plans to the state and post on their website, demonstrating what strategies, tools, and programs they are utilizing.

There are a number of provisions regarding state report cards. First, SB 229 adds a school district superintendent to the state report card review committee. The bill also modifies language concerning the use of the chronic absenteeism indicator on the state report card to ensure it is not used in determining any potential sanction or penalty this school year. Finally, it requires ODE to calculate the adjusted four-year graduation rate for students continuously enrolled at the same building/district all four years of high school and report that information on the state report card.

The provisions in this bill are meant to make an already challenging school year just a bit easier for districts to educate and meet the needs of their students. Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 229. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.