



STEM Entrepreneurship & Innovation Program for Students to Help Develop Ohio's Future Workforce

Popularly Known as the “Believe in Ohio Student STEM Innovation & Scholarship Program”

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee. I am pleased to provide written testimony in support of Amendment SC2521X1 to Substitute House Bill 110, “STEM Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program for Students to Help Develop Ohio's Future Workforce”, which continues funding of what is more popularly known as the “Believe in Ohio Student STEM Innovation and Scholarship Program”.

Hello. My name is Melanie Kirin. I am a teacher at Bedford High School in Bedford, Ohio, a Cleveland first ring school district. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony about the Believe in Ohio program, the impact it has on my students and how it is an integral part of entrepreneurial education at Bedford High School.

I have had the privilege of providing career technical education in this district for the past 8 years as the entrepreneur/marketing instructor. I am an adjunct professor at Kent State University in the College of Education. Previously, I worked in professional services, digital marketing and operated a small business consulting practice. I am a graduate of Miami University's Farmer School of Business with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a graduate of Kent State University with a Masters in Education.

I'd like first to address the typical challenges of effectively teaching and motivating youth entrepreneurship. Statistically, in the United States, minority business ownership represents only 18 percent of the population. In contrast, many of the students at Bedford High School have entrepreneurial pursuits. Students sell everything from lip glosses to retro sneakers to homemade goodies to offset the new lunch standards. The students hustle to create new products and meet demand. This reality has led to significant changes in curriculum, extracurricular activities and a school store, launching in 2021. Students can now earn college credit for the entrepreneurship course.

The work to teach entrepreneurship is very difficult. You may recall Apple's marketing campaign of the 1990s of “Think Different.” In reality, entrepreneurial teachers struggle with two concepts both centered on this phrase. First, how do we get our students to think?. Second, how do we get our students to think differently? The largest challenge I face as a teacher is addressing the global competency skills my students need in order to be successful regardless of their life's future calling. The ability to solve problems, work in teams, research solutions, effectively communicate orally and in written form, and to be motivated to succeed. Students are used to getting the quick answer and not creating a real solution. That's the bad news. As students would say, “The struggle is real.”

Tasked with the large responsibility of shaping the future workforce and business owners of Ohio, career tech education teachers often lack support. Thankfully there is good news. Several years ago I found the Believe in Ohio program, a true partner in entrepreneurial education. For the first time since leaving the private sector, I had a team who was willing and able to help me help my students be successful.

The Believe In Ohio program exceeds my expectations. Financially, the program costs me nothing but provides great wealth to my students. It serves all of my students. It focuses on global competency skills which is what I need as I prepare my students for college and career. This program has provided thousands of dollars to students who earned it and who need it. The program has developed powerful networks for my students. Students receive one on one mentorship and engage with business owners, elected, local officials and school administrators in our local Shark Tank competition. The results are undeniable, my Believe in Ohio program completers are successful.

Lastly, I consider myself a fiscally responsible and conservative individual. As a taxpayer, I believe all monies spent should be justified. This program justifies the expense. And, without a doubt, in the near future, we will see biomedical chips that internally monitor glucose levels, a reusable graphene water filter that purifies drinking water, football shoulder pads that react to body temperature to reduce injury, a smart toothbrush that provides the exact amount of toothpaste you need, and an app that provides young entrepreneurs the marketplace for selling their wares to audience around the world. And, these ideas all started at Bedford High School through the Believe In Ohio program.

Thank you for investing in my students.

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