

## **Ohio House Finance Committee**

### **House Bill 312**

Proponent Testimony from Matt Sheridan, Superintendent  
Mid-East Career and Technology Centers

May 8, 2024

Good morning, Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRue, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee. I am Matt Sheridan, Superintendent of the Mid-East Career and Technology Centers (MECTC). Thank you for providing me the opportunity to offer proponent testimony regarding regional partnerships.

Mid-East CTC's high school operations serve primarily juniors and seniors from 13 partner school districts spanned across three and a half counties (Muskingum, Guernsey, Noble, and Perry counties) in southeast Ohio. Enrollment at our two campuses has increased steadily since the pandemic and now sits at a combined 1,125 students. Although the population of Appalachia and enrollment in our K-12 districts continues to decline, our enrollment at MECTC continues to climb. On average, one third of the juniors and seniors from our partner schools are enrolled at MECTC. We provide 33 programs to high school students with only our Welding and Multi-Skilled Health Technologies programs being offered on both campuses. Additionally, we provide Adult Education, preschool, and high school equivalency services.

While I am in my fourth year as superintendent at MECTC, I previously was superintendent at one of our partner schools for six years. It was there that I became involved in the AOP-20 Council. This organization is comprised of community leaders who examine regional student and workforce needs and strategize ways to use our resources to invest in opportunities for student success. The council's work helps to define the future of the community and strength of the workforce. As a member, our goal is to help young people, from birth to age 20, to imagine their futures, discover their strengths, and build a plan using the information to determine the next steps of their lives. The counties we serve include Coshocton, Guernsey, Hocking, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, and Washington. I have had the opportunity to serve on the Advisory Committee for the AOP-20 Council for the last five years. As a K-12 superintendent, I was able to use the information I learned in the meetings to reimagine our high school library into a Makerspace and to start the Dolly Parton Imagination Library in Perry County before it became a statewide initiative, all because of the resources I was exposed to through our regional meetings.

Two years ago at Mid-East CTC, I was able to leverage a partnership with the AOP-20 and the Ohio Valley Educational Service Center to write a regional partnership grant for \$200,000 to pilot an elementary career exploration program. We were able to hire an individual who worked for six months with local community leaders, business people, and educators to develop a Kindergarten through grade 6 curriculum centered around the top five career fields in our area -- agriculture, construction, transportation, manufacturing, and healthcare. Just as many students attend music or gym twice a week, we now offer a hands-on curriculum, tied to English and Math standards, that is tailored by grade level for grades K-6. These 30- to 40-minute lessons are delivered by our instructor over a six-week period. Often, the lessons include guest speakers, such as employers from our local hospital or electrical trades union, as well as hands-on learning. Our instructor began delivering these lessons last school year and has continued to rotate elementary schools to deliver the content this year, as well.

As a former elementary principal and middle school assistant principal, I saw a great need for this program. Some students struggle with the traditional school setting, yet may be very successful in life using other skills they may possess (spatial awareness, working with their hands, etc.). Unfortunately, some of these students do not have an opportunity to experience success using these skills until they reach a career center, and they may become discouraged with the traditional educational setting before they have a chance to explore their unique talents. This program enables these students to experience success at a much younger age and see hope for their futures. Additionally, students only know about the careers to which they are exposed. Unfortunately, we often face generational poverty where perhaps no one in the home is working. This program gives us the chance to introduce students at a young age to a variety of careers they can do right here in our communities.

My wife is an elementary teacher. This year, her school was able to experience our Careers in My Community Program (CiMC). She and her colleagues raved about the program and how much their students enjoyed it. It is not easy to impress an educator with an educational program who is also the wife of a superintendent! Additionally, as a parent, I was able to see both my first grader and kindergartener go through the program this year. Each week, CiMC was their favorite activity.

The program has been such a success that our district has committed additional resources to the program. We will employ two full-time facilitators for the program starting next year. This addition will allow us to expand the offerings to more elementary schools we serve.

Ultimately, this program was made possible through relationships, connections, and funding from a regional partnership. Partnerships like these are critical to help shape the future of Ohio's workforce. I would welcome any of you who are interested to visit our program in action or at least view one of the promotional videos or slide decks we created to highlight the programming. Finding ways to create, support, and fund regional partnerships is southeastern Ohio (and throughout Ohio) is critical to ensuring that our state has the next generation workforce it needs.