

Testimony on H.B 312
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
November 28, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and distinguished members of the House Primary and Secondary Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on the proposed regional partnership legislation.

I am Barbara Hansen, founder and Director of the Appalachian Ohio P-20 Council (AOP- 20). I am a Muskingum University faculty member with former regional Appalachian leadership positions as well as superintendency and principal experience. I am an elected governing board member of an educational service center and am leading AOP-20 collaborative of nine (9) Appalachian Counties. The counties which define two Educational Service Centers include: Guernsey, Monroe, Noble, Washington, Morgan, Perry, Hocking, Muskingum and Coshocton. AOP – 20 is in its 9th year. Our mission is “To inspire a regional commitment to student success.” As a non-profit organization, we describe ourselves as grass roots and fueled by passion. We are not a “bricks and mortar” organization, and my faculty office at Muskingum University serves as the AOP-20 office.

Partners / sponsors of AOP-20 comprise a 12-member planning team and include: Mid-East Career and Technology Centers, Ohio University Zanesville, Muskingum University, Muskingum County Community Foundation, Ohio Valley Educational Service Center, Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center, Zane State College, the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD), local Business Advisory Council leaders, and workforce development services. We meet to plan the larger council meetings and make decisions regarding direction for submission of grants, future projects, or any other initiatives. The planning team connects our work to the nine-county region and encourages people to attend the council meetings.

AOP-20 Council members (50-60 individuals) meet quarterly, representing K-12 education, higher education, business, philanthropy, governance, and community. We convene people and connect them to ideas that serve as a catalyst for change around topics of need that were identified through a SWAT Analysis (2014) from the Voinovich Center at Ohio University. The major needs identified have resulted in emphasis being placed on the following: career development, workforce needs, development of a business and education collaborative, focus on building of hope and aspiration with children K-12, connecting with state initiatives.

We convene and connect people to new ideas that can serve as a catalyst for improvement. Our meetings are very well planned and organized to emphasize the areas identified by the SWAT analysis. We seek speakers well known for their expertise in our areas of emphasis and all have provided their services as a gift to AOP-20. Additionally, we share examples of regional best practice and current data that tell our regional story. Attendees leave with current data, and ideas for best practice, as well as the focused comments of an expert on the topic of the day. Different attendees have invited the same speakers to their business or school district. Many have asked for our power points and contact information for presenters of best practice. We are aware of situations where information shared at AOP-20 was applied across the region. We share widely on our website.

We may not have bricks and mortar nor an impressive budget, but we do have a carefully built and very strong collaborative relationship with the partners previously listed as well as service agencies and other educational institutions. Other agencies and services are often asking to join us. For example, tomorrow I will be meeting with representatives of the Ohio STEM Collaborative to determine ways we can partner. One of the strengths of AOP-20 is its diversity of sectors that don't commonly convene with each other. They often arrive early at our meetings to have their own small group meetings or stay after to chat with those from other sectors.

Grant Funds have lifted us to collective impact and sharpened our focus to Work Force Development. Over time, we have become a recognized representative voice of an Appalachian region and invited to participate in several workforce-focused initiatives, including the Ohio Attainment goal of 65% by 2025. We were awarded the Ohio Cradle to Career Partnership Grant in collaboration with Zane State College and Muskingum University. In an effort to help grow the work force, we were able to identify and return thirty stopped out students to their majors and a return to their graduation track. We participated in Philanthropy Ohio's work, the Community Partnerships for Post Secondary Attainment, and the FAFSA work.

What Could Work Force K-6 look like? We are trying to answer that as one of the state's current 11 Regional Partnership Grant recipients, representing Southeastern Ohio. Our Regional Partnership Grant is focused on helping students in elementary education have the opportunity for career exploration and awareness. Its goal is to help students explore career choices at an earlier age that will help them better understand what type of education they need for careers, where they can obtain that education and what the needs are for their local region. The curriculum has been developed by curriculum development specialists, elementary teachers, and Mid-East Career and Technology Centers Career Development team. It was developed in year 1 and piloted in three school districts. In year 2, it is being expanded to five districts. The pilot program, called "Careers in My Community," explores 5 areas of study: agriculture, construction, healthcare, manufacturing, and transportation. A Mid-East staff member has helped develop the curriculum and travels to the pilot districts for 6-week periods while she delivers the units of instruction for the students. The program has been well received and Mid-East is considering adding this program to its permanent programs beyond the life of the grant.

What Could Work Force preschool look like? This is what we hope to research next! While we are grateful for the current Regional Partnership Grant, we are excited that the new grant includes the opportunity for preschoolers and even younger. We will definitely be applying for funding to help expand our program to even younger students. While no one is expecting a 3-year-old child to make a career decision, it is possible that awareness can allow a child to dream and consider a direction that he/she might otherwise never have considered. Imagine the work force that might emerge with students learning early on what it might mean to be an engineer, a doctor, inventor, or legislator?

Thank you for any consideration and support you may give to this proposed legislation. The building of a quality workforce is the responsibility of everyone, and by that, I mean everyone working together. AOP-20's mission is to *inspire* a regional commitment to student success. Ohio's Cradle to Career Network is to eliminate barriers to student success. The future of our state and workforce is in the hands of our children. We will be only as strong as they are.

