



November 15, 2016 – Testimony for the Senate Education Committee on HB 410

Thank you Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Hite, Ranking Minority Representative Sawyer and Senate Education Committee members.

My name is Gabriella Celeste and I offer this testimony to you today as Policy Director of the Schubert Center at Case Western Reserve University and an interested party in legislative matters concerning school truancy and discipline, specifically House Bill 410. As I noted in my written testimony on HB 410 submitted to this Committee in September (and in prior House testimony on the same bill), our Center supports developmentally appropriate policy efforts which in this instance includes this approach to decriminalizing truancy, promoting positive school climate and student success, and keeping students subject to discipline effectively connected to school. Additionally, the amendments to HB 410 that I understand Chair Lehner is planning to propose, including not carrying over student suspensions between school years, allowing students to make up missed work during suspensions, using out-of-school discipline as a last resort, and limiting the use of expulsion and suspension for our youngest children, those in pre-K through third grade, would align with these best practices.

Truancy and out-of-school discipline are early warning signs that a young person is potentially headed for delinquent activity, social isolation, educational failure or all of the above. A Council of State Governments study found **students with even just one disciplinary contact were five times more likely to drop out of school** compared to those without any disciplinary contact.¹

In addition to the key facts on Ohio's use of out-of-school discipline, potential cost savings and other data presented in prior testimony on HB 410, I'd like to reiterate one critical consideration: **positive social connection is essential to our children's healthy development. More specifically, school connectedness matters.** When students feel cared for and have a sense of belonging to their school community, they become less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance use, violence, or sexual activity at an early age.² Conversely, removing a student from the school environment and socially isolating them, can be extremely harmful to a youth's healthy development and positive social engagement.³ In short, **excluding a student from school is not only contrary to what works for children and youth, but can inadvertently contribute to even more negative outcomes. As such, disciplinary removal from school should only be an option of last resort.**

¹ Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, *Breaking Schools Rules*, Council on State Governments Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute (July 2011). Available at: https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf

² McNeely, C.A., Nonnemaker, J.M., Blum, R.W. "Promoting Student Connectedness to School: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Journal of School Health*, Vol. 72 (4), 2002. Accessed at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12029810>

³ See e.g., Valtorta, N.K., Kanaan, M., Gilbody, S., Ronzi, S., Hanratty, B. "Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke." *Heart Online First*, published April 18, 2016 as 10.1136/heartjnl-2015-308790. Accessed at <http://heart.bmj.com/content/early/2016/03/15/heartjnl-2015-308790.full.pdf+html>; Hall-Lande, J.A., Eisenberg, M.E., Christenson, S.L., Neumark-Sztainer, D. "Social Isolation, Psychological Health, and Protective Factors in Adolescence." *Adolescence*, Vol. 42, No. 166, 2007. Accessed at <https://facweb.northseattle.edu/lchaffee/PSY100/Journal%20Articles/Hall-Lande%20et%20a%202007.pdf>

It is no exaggeration to say that Ohio's future economy and prosperity depends on the success of our students today. School-based prevention, early intervention, and collaborative targeted support efforts, offer the most promising behavioral management and prudent fiscal strategies for keeping students in school, reducing social isolation and increasing the likelihood of healthy student engagement and academic achievement. We have seen success around the state using these preventative approaches – such as Mahoning County's Early Warning System, the School Responder model in Jackson and Summit counties, and the Social Emotional Learning model in Cuyahoga county. To the extent HB 410 advances these school-based approaches, reduces the chance for court intervention by decriminalizing truancy and positively involving parents, and limits the use of out-of-school discipline as a last resort, this policy will best serve the interests of Ohio's students, their families, our schools and all Ohioans.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on these important matters.