



**Testimony to House Education
February 23, 2016
The Ohio 8 Coalition**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Hayes, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education Committee, on behalf of The Ohio 8 Coalition we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony related to House Bill 410. We are happy to have this opportunity to offer unified District Superintendent and Union President recommendations on several components of HB 410. Because our districts serve more than 11% of the state's student population, legislation affecting attendance and truancy policies is of particular interest to The Ohio 8 Coalition.

In our districts, and likely in other districts throughout the state, attendance and truancy issues are often symptomatic of broader family and community challenges such as chronic health issues, homelessness, and mental health concerns. As such, it is crucial that we remain mindful of these broader non-academic issues as this legislation is discussed. The number one priority of The Ohio 8 districts is improving the academic performance of students- something that is very difficult to accomplish if the student is not regularly present in the classroom. We hope the information below will help to inform and shape the ongoing dialogue on this critical issue.

The first concern of The Ohio 8 is related to flow of the intervention process. Prior to sending a student to an absence intervention team, **The Ohio 8 recommends an initial intervention step to support dialogue and address barriers to student attendance.** This first step will allow districts to support students and families in an initial dialogue to identify and address barriers to student attendance prior to referral to the absence intervention team. We believe a tiered intervention system would allow each case to be matched with the appropriate/commensurate degree of intervention services. This will help avoid a one-size fits all approach.

The second recommendation is related to required truancy filing with the juvenile courts. The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that requirements to file complaints with the juvenile courts be a last resort for school districts. While we think this is the intent of the bill we have concerns that this has not been fully remedied through the current language. The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that in order to best support the unique needs of each student we must have the ability to build trust and relationships with their families. **As a result, The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that complaints only be filed with juvenile courts when the attendance team approach has been proven unsuccessful or if the student and family refuse to participate in the process.**

Additionally, The Ohio 8 Coalition is concerned that the provision that mandates parent participation in the attendance intervention team may unintentionally prevent districts from addressing urgent student needs. It is important that if a parent fails to participate in the work of the absence team it does not prohibit the school from developing or implementing

interventions that support the needs of the student. **In order to not delay these important interventions, The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that schools be required to invite, encourage, and welcome parents to participate in the absence intervention team and the development of the student’s intervention plan but not mandate parent participation.**

The fourth recommendation of the Ohio 8 Coalition is that public charter schools be required to implement the same level and scope of intervention (using their existing resources) for students with attendance issues as traditional public school districts. It is important for students transitioning between traditional public schools and public charter schools to experience a continuity of service and intervention. With our highly transitional student base, we cannot allow for these students to be lost. We are highly dedicated to providing our students with rigorous intervention and our students deserve that this be continued no matter where they attend school.

The fifth recommendation from the Ohio 8 Coalition is related to the implementation timeline. Though the substitute bill extends implementation to the 2017-2018 school year, The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that the significant policy and operational changes that will be required, particularly in large districts demands a longer implementation timeline. In order to ensure that local school boards and districts have time to appropriately implement new policies and programs related to truancy, **The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that new policies be effective at the start of the 2018-2019 school year.** The Ohio 8 Coalition is further concerned that HB 410 will result in increased staffing needs and capacity concerns for urban and other large districts that have high numbers of students struggling with attendance. The bill currently does not provide any funding to support increased truancy intervention activities.

Finally, The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that additional EMIS codes be considered under absence and withdrawal coding to better support local and statewide tracking of attendance and intervention.

- The attendance codes include
 - Absence due to suspension
- The withdrawal codes
 - Completed a GED
 - Attendance team referral to juvenile court

Thank you for the opportunity to share these recommendations. We look forward to continuing to help in any way we can as you continue to work on this legislation.

[The Ohio 8 Coalition](#) is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio’s eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition’s mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to help shape state education policy.