WRITTEN Testimony to Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 127 – Opponent
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Ohio 8 Coalition in opposition to Senate Bill 127. My name is Dr. David Lawrence, Superintendent of Dayton Public Schools and a member of the Ohio 8 Coalition, a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's urban school districts: Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lorain, Toledo, and Youngstown.

Our primary concern is the bill's reliance on percentage-based criteria to define a "poor-performing" school. Under SB 127, any school serving grades above third grade that ranks in the bottom 5% of the state's performance index and the bottom 10% of the value-added progress dimension for three consecutive years would be required to close or undergo significant remedial action.

This approach is fundamentally flawed because a percentage-based system guarantees that a bottom tier of schools will always exist, regardless of overall statewide achievement. Even if every school in Ohio met or exceeded state standards, some schools would still fall within the bottom 5% or 10% simply because of the ranking structure itself. As schools are closed or restructured, other schools—despite maintaining or even improving performance—would inevitably move into those bottom categories. The result is a cycle of perpetual restructuring and instability that could ultimately affect schools that are otherwise meeting state standards.

Ohio's current law already defines poor-performing schools using multiple measures, including performance index scores and state report card ratings. SB 127 would replace this comprehensive framework with a rigid, percentage-based model that lacks meaningful safeguards and creates arbitrary consequences for schools and communities.

Ohio already has a robust school improvement framework through the Ohio Improvement Process. This system aligns with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and provides support through the Department of Education and Workforce, State Support Teams, Educational Service Centers, Information Technology Centers, and professional organizations. This framework has produced measurable results. In 2018, 127 public schools were identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). By 2022, that number had declined to 32 schools.

Rather than mandating closures and disruptive restructuring, we urge the committee to strengthen and build upon Ohio's existing improvement systems and allow districts making progress to continue that work. If concerns exist regarding academic performance, the solution should focus on proactive support structures, effective interventions, and increasing district capacity for sustained improvement.

In addition to concerns surrounding accountability measures, several of the bill's proposed alternatives to closure reflect a long history of unproven and impractical school "turnaround" strategies.

Ohio has already experienced the consequences of this approach through House Bill 70 and the creation of Academic Distress Commissions, Parent Trigger policies, the transfer of educational control to third parties without a proven record of success, and state-based coaching strategies led by individuals lacking meaningful experience in school improvement.

For the most part, these failed policies stripped local school boards, communities, parents, and educators of democratic control over their schools while failing to produce meaningful, stable, or sustained academic improvement. The bipartisan repeal of HB 70 and similar proposals reflects a clear recognition that state-imposed governance structures are both ineffective and harmful to community trust. SB 127 risks repeating many of those same mistakes.

We agree with the intent behind this legislation: every child in Ohio deserves access to a high-quality local public school, and the state should continue pursuing strategies to improve struggling schools. However, punitive measures driven by arbitrary percentage rankings and lacking proven effectiveness will not produce the outcomes students deserve.

These concerns demonstrate the need for additional discussion, stakeholder input, and public vetting before advancing legislation with such significant consequences for Ohio's schools and communities.

A more effective approach would focus on early intervention, targeted support, and evidence-based improvement strategies. Schools showing signs of academic struggle should receive immediate assistance before challenges become entrenched. For more than a decade, the Ohio 8 Coalition has supported policies and proposals that provide preventative, evidence-based support to school districts in order to help avoid academic decline. This approach reflects best practices, embraces partnership with local communities, and maintains accountability where it matters most—with local administrators, educators, and parents.

At Dayton Public Schools, we are guided by our 5Cs principles: Culture, Customer Service, Communication, Collaboration, and Commitment. These principles drive our comprehensive Academic Action Plan, which focuses on improving third grade reading proficiency, eighth-grade mathematics proficiency, daily student attendance, and college & career readiness.

At Dayton Public Schools, we are proactively addressing student needs through our Academic Action Plan. The plan was developed collectively and in collaboration with community partners, including Learn to Earn, Omega CDC, the NAACP, and others. Unlike the district's Strategic Plan, the Academic Action Plan contains short-term, targeted goals that the district is already actively implementing.

The plan focuses on five key areas: culture and climate, third-grade reading, high school readiness, freshman success, and college and career readiness. In essence, we are returning to the fundamentals of education through the following strategies:

1. Restructured schools through a feeder model designed to create smoother academic transitions from elementary school through high school.
2. An emphasis on effective teaching practices, data-driven instruction, and stronger communication between schools and families.

These efforts have resulted in:

- 6% increase in third grade reading scores
- 10% reduction in chronic absenteeism
- 2.6% increase in eighth-grade mathematics performance
- 4.5 out of 5-star rating for Career Technical Education including an 87% CTE graduation rate
- 5 out of 5 rating in the Career and Postsecondary Readiness Component
- A full one-star increase in the Achievement Component within a single school year

While we still have work to do, with ongoing partnership with the community, educators, parents, and administrators, nearly every measure of success is moving in the right direction.

Many districts across the state face comparable challenges, and creating stronger systems for collaboration and knowledge-sharing would help build statewide capacity for school improvement while reducing unnecessary costs and disruption. Ohio should identify and share best practices from districts that have successfully improved student outcomes under similar circumstances. Identifying common factors among schools experiencing persistent academic difficulties, understanding these trends, and leveraging shared expertise would help districts address root causes and implement proven strategies for improvement.

Ohio's students deserve thoughtful, sustainable solutions that strengthen public education rather than destabilize it. We respectfully urge the committee to oppose SB 127 and instead focus on proven policies that support meaningful improvement through collaboration, local engagement, and evidence-based intervention strategies.

Thank you for your time and consideration.