



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Building Pathways to Careers

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Senate Education Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 328

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As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding **Ohio Senate Bill 328**.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am a senior research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

Ohio ingenuity—from steel to rubber to aviation—has long anchored the national economy. Having suffered through its “rust belt” years, Ohio again finds itself playing a meaningful role at the center of technological transformation.

Massive investments in semiconductor manufacturing and dramatic growth in data centers driving artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping Central Ohio. Battery innovation and advanced energy storage are expanding in Northwest Ohio. And next-generation defense technology is growing through innovators like Anduril Industries. The emerging changes and technologies are structural, not incremental.

But economic development announcements and press releases do not guarantee prosperity. Semiconductor fabrication plants, battery factories, or defense systems integrators do not create economic opportunities unless Ohio workers have clear paths to the jobs they can offer. Senate Bill 328 helps create those paths.

The bill does three critical things: it provides clear career guidance for every student; it establishes a framework for real-world work-based learning; and it ensures usable data for workforce development.

Education and workforce systems have operated on parallel tracks. With insufficient communication between educators and employers, Ohio students often must make life-shaping decisions with limited information about the labor market, wage outcomes, and the evolving skill-sets needed by industry. Employers, meanwhile, struggle to find talent. Senate Bill 328 begins to address this disconnect by aligning education, training, and labor market data. It builds a coordinated framework to help students understand not only what they can study, but where that study can lead them.

First, Senate Bill 328 requires the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) to create professional skills standards aligned with Ohio employers’ workplace needs and establish a statewide career coaching framework with career and workforce stakeholders. DEW must also guide districts on implementing the framework with business advisory councils and career-technical planning districts.

Second, Senate Bill 328 requires every student, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, to complete an academic and career plan. The plan must be reviewed annually to track progress and adjust while identifying each student’s strengths, interests, and aptitudes. The plan must also include work-based learning integrated into coursework, as well as a strategy for developing professional skills through in- and out-of-school experiences. Twelfth graders must complete a

professional résumé by January 1. And schools must involve parents or guardians in developing the student plans.

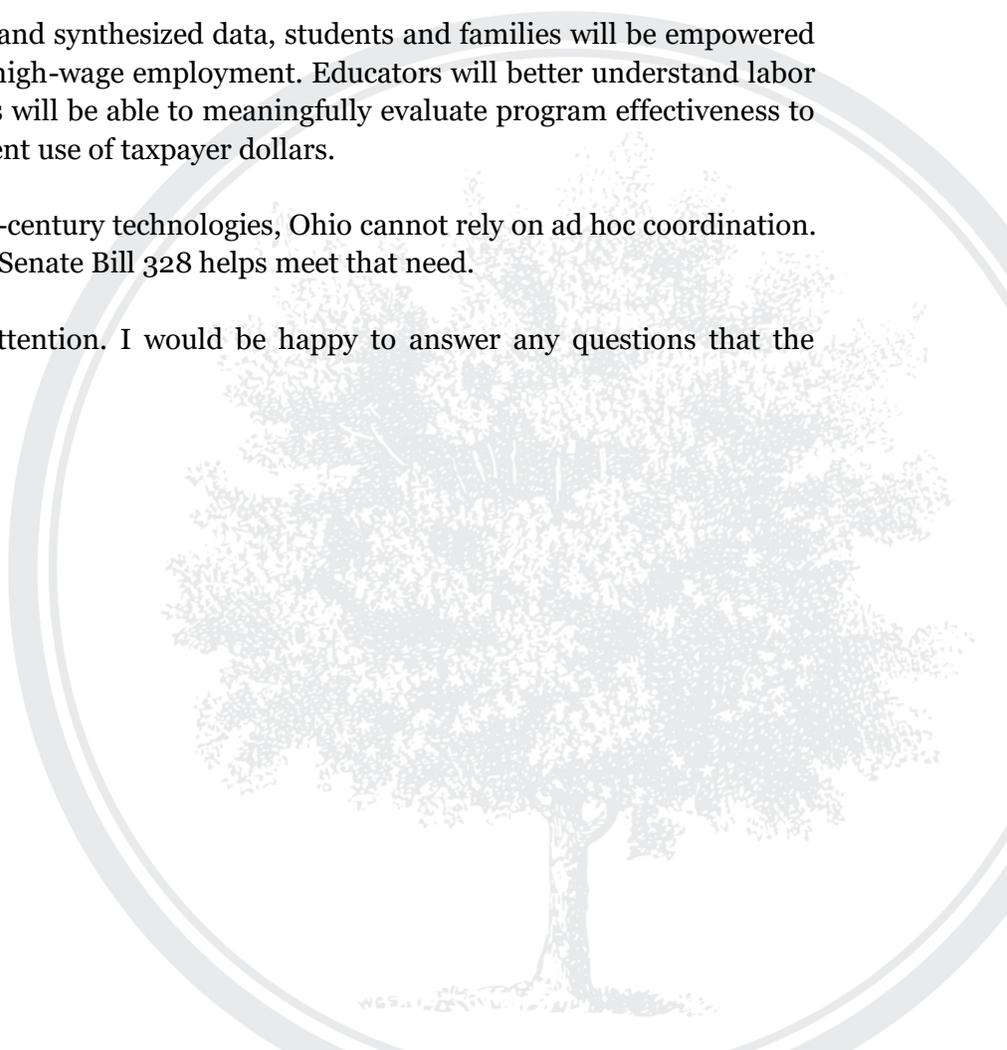
By emphasizing earlier, directed career exploration, Senate Bill 328 helps connect student interests and aptitudes to tangible career paths in middle and high school. That connection makes education more meaningful. Geometry and algebra become less abstract and more practical. Computer science becomes a gateway to AI-driven data centers. Some skeptics may worry that new career connection policies may yield unfunded mandates and higher administrative costs, but current funding sources such as **weighted career technical funding**, and **Career Awareness and Exploration Funds** can minimize cost increases to the districts. And ultimately, when students see real connections between classrooms and careers, learning engagement rises and graduation rates improve.

Finally, Senate Bill 328 aligns data systems to measure outcomes and return on investment. Such efforts have already begun in higher education, but not in K-12 schools. Under Senate Bill 328, DEW shall establish the Education and Workforce Return on Investment Initiative to make Ohio's education and workforce data more valuable and actionable. It requires cross-agency data links, capacity-building, and research to inform students, families, educators, employers, and policymakers while protecting privacy. The initiative's leadership includes six directors from state education, workforce, higher education, and related agencies who will create a research framework to guide policy priorities, adopt a cross-agency data access policy, streamline data collection for local entities, and support state and regional education and workforce initiatives.

Armed with this comprehensive and synthesized data, students and families will be empowered to see which credentials lead to high-wage employment. Educators will better understand labor market trends, and policymakers will be able to meaningfully evaluate program effectiveness to ensure the responsible, transparent use of taxpayer dollars.

To sustain its momentum in 21st-century technologies, Ohio cannot rely on ad hoc coordination. It needs durable alignment. And Senate Bill 328 helps meet that need.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

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