

Testimony from DECA and DECA PREP

Senator Gardner and Committee Members, it is an honor to share this testimony regarding our ten year experience preparing urban students from Dayton for college entrance and graduation. The Dayton Early College Academy (DECA) is Ohio's oldest early college high school, one of two public charters. Our original design targeted grades 9-12, with a fifth year option for students who needed additional time. We soon learned that the overwhelming gaps in students' skills required more than we could address during high school---even with extended school days, Friday night school, Saturday review sessions, and summer bridge programs. In 2008, we enrolled our first seventh graders, determined to use the two additional junior high years to ground students in the prerequisite skills needed for chemistry, physics, and calculus. Our efforts have resulted in gains in almost all of our metrics---a steadily improving average ACT (near Ohio's state average), markedly lower attrition, and enrollment of almost 100% of our graduates into college. The National Clearinghouse data indicate an astounding 86% retention rate for DECA students in college. Compare that to the national profile for prospective first generation college students of color: less than eleven out of 100 students will earn a college degree. Our data for those who have completed their undergraduate degrees reveal about 25% go directly to graduate school. Of the remaining 75%, about two-thirds of these have jobs in the greater Dayton area.

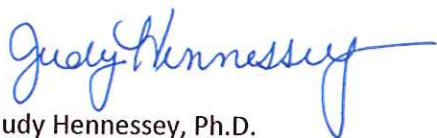
As a result of our performance, DECA has been named one of the five most innovative schools in the country by WestEd, a Gates-funded research and policy think tank. DECA was named as a bronze designee on *US News and World Report's* List of America's Best High Schools for the third year. We have hosted visitors from thirty-plus states and over twenty foreign countries, educators who are seeking answers to the complex, illusive issues of urban school reform.

In an attempt to close the achievement gap in the primary grades, we opened an elementary partner school this year. Not only is our attrition almost nonexistent, but our students in kindergarten, first, and second are meeting grade-appropriate or above expectations. We have repeatedly informed our parents that there will be no social promotion, creating urgency among parents to partner with DECA PREP in the true sense of the word. Parents are reading with their children, teaching new vocabulary, and engaging in "parent academies" designed to strengthen the capacity of the home to impact their young readers. Again, our early data are mirroring that of our suburban counterparts, despite the fact that nearly 60% of DECA PREP students entered school this year behind academically.

While we have reached a "critical enrollment mass" to sustain daily operations, to significantly impact the Dayton economy we must expand. Actually, we need to double the number of students enrolled in our program. However, we are challenged to secure the funding necessary to remodel existing structures; building new schools is clearly out of our financial reach. With the addition of one more school, we could serve about 6-7% of the Dayton school market, around 1300 students. Our "brand" is well established. Our rigor, retention policy, and required parental involvement have not reduced demand as our current waiting lists verify.

We echo the appeal of our high performing charter colleagues: please see fit to invest through the Straight A Fund in the expansion of charter schools that work with Ohio's neediest learners. Increasing

facility allowances for charters that outperform district averages will afford Ohio learners quality choices. I close this much appreciated opportunity to speak to you with a quote from one of our parents, "DECA gives me hope that my child will not have to live the way I have, that he can move out of this public housing he has always known as home, that he can go to college and can earn his way in this world."



Judy Hennessey, Ph.D.
Dayton Early College Academy
Superintendent/CEO