

Testimony on House Bill 59-Biennial Budget
Tuesday, May 7, 2013

Education Finance Subcommittee, State Senator Randy Gardner, Chair

Chris O'Brien
Head of School
E Prep-Woodland Hills Campus, a Breakthrough School

Good morning Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Minority Member Turner and members of the Education Finance Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today. My name is Chris O'Brien and I am the Head of School of E Prep-Woodland Hills Campus, a Breakthrough School. As a leader of one of our nine incredible Breakthrough Schools, I am passionate about making sure every child we serve has the opportunity to attend the college of their choice. Since 1999, our schools in the Breakthrough network have been dramatically eliminating the achievement gap for children in Cleveland and providing a high quality choice for families that are surrounded by failing schools in the neighborhood. We have shown, through a variety of approaches that urban children, despite many challenges, can achieve at the highest levels in the state of Ohio.

Only 7% of students attending schools in Cleveland are graduating from college. Breakthrough Schools stand to completely turn this statistic around. Our goal is simple: a 100% graduation rate for our scholars from the college or university of their choice. In just 3 short years, we have grown from 4 schools to 9 schools and from serving 800 students to just short of 2,000 students. Over 80% of our students come from economically disadvantaged households and often come to us 3-4 grade levels behind their peers. Thankfully schools like ours are dramatically changing the trajectory of our scholar's destiny so that they can be cycle breakers and discover a life of prosperity instead of poverty.

Prior to being Head of School, I was fortunate to be a 6th grade math teacher at one of our flagship schools, E Prep-Cliffs Campus. It was my time there that proved to me that every child can learn if given the right environment and that a high expectations/no excuses culture in a school is needed for every child in Cleveland and throughout Ohio. Of the many positives I see in our schools, our value added data is most encouraging. We are turning around scholars' math and reading numbers in such significant ways that we recently found out in the recent CREDO report by the University of Stanford that our schools are ranked in the Top 5 urban charter school networks in the United States in math and reading improvement.

My passion is to make sure that every child receives the kind of education that our scholars receive in one of our Breakthrough Schools or in other high performing schools in our state. That is one of the reasons I applaud the idea of the Straight A Fund in the education budget. It looks to award innovation and replication of high achieving schools and it excites me to think that our schools could compete for those dollars. More resources to my school, to other schools in Breakthrough, or to great schools in Ohio would be a huge boost for our sustainability and the ability to replicate sooner. We know what works in our state and we know that all our children need and deserve an outstanding education. Now is the time for additional state investment so that more students have access to proven education so that the leaders of tomorrow are ready for the jobs of today. Finally, purchasing/renovating facilities and implementing the latest technologies are important to the continued success of our schools. Our Breakthrough Schools have launched a \$16 million New Schools Initiative: *Breakthrough Vision 2020/Building Cleveland's Future* so that we can meet our goal of 20 schools by 2020. While we appreciate knowing that this budget would allocate \$100 per student to facilities, we know that other states like Massachusetts invest nearly \$1000 per student for facilities.

In closing, I believe that investing in proven and innovative education models in our state is one of the best investments that can be made. The theme of Governor Kasich's budget is Achievement Everywhere and our goal is to continue to spread achievement throughout Cleveland. Restoring the original Straight A Fund funding in the Governor's proposed budget, removing the caps and increasing the investment in facilities for community schools would go a long way to making sure Ohio is the best state in the Union for education outcomes. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. I am happy to answer and questions you may have.

Facts about the Network

- **Number of schools:** 9
- **Students served:** Nearly 2000 - growing to over 2,500 in 2013 – 2014
- **Demographics:** 97% of Breakthrough's students are minorities -- 91% black, 3% Asian, 3% mixed race, and 2% Latino -- and 82% qualify for the National School Lunch Program.
- **Achievement results over several years:** Breakthrough Schools is the highest-rated network of free, public charter schools in Ohio. Within our network, we have consistently highest rated charter school in Ohio (The Intergenerational School), the most successful turnaround in Ohio public school history (Citizens Academy), the top-rated urban middle school in Ohio (E Prep), and the highest first-year rating for any urban middle school in Ohio (CLA).

Results:

2012 OAA Grades/Subjects	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 3 Math	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 4 Math	Grade 5 Reading	Grade 5 Math	Grade 5 Science	Grade 6 Reading	Grade 6 Math	Grade 7 Reading	Grade 7 Math	Grade 8 Reading	Grade 8 Math	Grade 8 Science
BREAKTHROUGH Passage Rates	98	98	93	94	98	90	94	83	75	84	77	99	98	86

2012 AVERAGES by SUBJECT	3-8 Reading	3-8 Math	3-8 Science
OHIO (estimated)	77	71	64
Cleveland (all schools)	59	47	35
BREAKTHROUGH	92	89	90

Awards:

- The Intergeneration School has been ODE rated *Excellent or Excellent with Distinction* **EIGHT** times in a row. It is the only public charter school in Ohio to achieve this.
- Citizens Academy is a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School. CA has been ODE rated *Excellent or Excellent with Distinction* the last **FOUR** years in a row.
- Entrepreneurship Preparatory School has been ODE rated *Excellent* for the past **TWO** years in a row. In 2012, E Prep was rated 17th out of all 832 total schools, whether it is district or charter, in *value added measures*. E Prep was the *highest rated stand-alone middle school* in the entire state for value added.
- According to recently released CREDO study out of Stanford University, Breakthrough Schools were the #1 rated urban charter school network in the country for student growth in *reading*.
- According the same CREDO study, we were the #4 rated urban charter school network in the country for student growth in *math*.

Biography

Chris O'Brien is the Head of School at Entrepreneurship Preparatory School in Cleveland. E Prep is one of the Breakthrough Schools, the highest rated network of urban charter schools in Ohio. A graduate of Miami University, he is in his 14 year in education as a teacher and administrator. He has taught in grades 3 – 7, teaching math and language arts. Mr. O'Brien is committed to eliminating the achievement gap and having 100% of his scholars graduate from the college of their choice.