

AS PREPARED  
STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS  
GOVERNOR MIKE DEWINE  
HOUSE CHAMBER  
THE OHIO STATEHOUSE  
COLUMBUS, OH  
MARCH 12, 2025

## **OPENING**

Speaker Huffman,

President McColley,

Leader Antonio and Leader Russo,

Members of the General Assembly,

Chief Justice Kennedy and Justices of the Ohio Supreme Court,

Elected State Officials,

Lieutenant Governor Tressel,

Members of Our Cabinet,

My Fellow Citizens of Ohio....

The state of our State is STRONG!

Ohio. Is. STRONG!

## **OHIO OPPORTUNITIES**

Together, we have accomplished so much in the last six years.

We have hit the highest number of jobs EVER in our State's history!

We have added more than 81,000 private sector jobs and have nearly 5.7 million Ohioans -- right now -- employed in our workforce!

And, these job numbers don't even reflect the NEW jobs that will come soon from all the wins we have already announced. Take a trip with me now across Ohio and see just some of what is being built currently and think about all of the new jobs that will come when this construction is complete.

Let's start in Defiance County, where soon we'll see work start on the largest job creation project in Defiance County history, where First Quality Tissue will soon be employing 400 people in Northwest Ohio.

From there, head southeast, and we'll find a brand new soybean processing plant being erected in Wyandot County, with a half-a-billion dollar investment from the Louis Dreyfus Company. This plant will create 114 new jobs that will help farmers in Northwest Ohio.

Then, let's go to Dayton, where soon in the Miami Valley sky, we will see air taxis actually flying in the air, made by the 2,000 employees at Joby Aviation!

Keep going south and east to Fayette County to Honda's nearly complete Electric Vehicle battery factory. Set to open later this year, this plant will employ 2,200 Ohioans!

Farther down in the Cincinnati area, Worldpay -- a leading global financial technology company -- has picked Symmes Township for its new corporate headquarters, bringing more than 500 new jobs.

From there, we'll head east to Jackson and visit Speyside Bourbon Cooperage. Here, skilled Ohio craftsmen in Southeast Ohio will be making even more charred white oak bourbon barrels. They will increase production from 400,000 barrels per year to 600,000 per year, adding 42 new jobs in Jackson and Pike Counties.

Follow the Ohio River upstream to Jefferson County, where JSW Steel will be adding 42 new jobs and retaining hundreds more, as they upgrade their Mingo Junction steel plant to cleaner and higher quality specialty steel.

Just three counties to the north is Ashtabula County, where Plastpro is investing almost \$53 million to nearly double their fiberglass door manufacturing staff, adding 145 more jobs as they begin to make a brand new product line of Ohio-made interior doors.

From there, we'll head west to downtown Cleveland, where now we see a whole different skyline with the completion of the new Sherwin-Williams skyscraper on Public Square. Their new headquarters soon will bring 400 jobs to downtown Cleveland. A short drive over to Brecksville takes us to their new Research and Development Center, which will bring an additional 132 jobs.

Farther west in Lorain County, we can see Ford Motor Company's Avon Lake expansion as they double their workforce with 2,000 additional jobs!

Now let's head back south to Pickaway County where we had another remarkable economic win! Anduril -- the world's new leader in defense technology -- is bringing the single largest job creation project in Ohio's history, creating more than 4,000 high-paying manufacturing jobs. These Ohioans will produce cutting-edge technologies and build revolutionary aircraft that will transform both our aerospace industry and our military.

And finally, we'll head back north and a little east to Licking County -- and the Silicon Heartland!

Intel is completely changing the landscape. They've invested \$7 billion dollars already of their \$28 billion of planned capital investment. And they have poured enough concrete to build the Ohio State Horseshoe six times over!

Their 3,000 future jobs will make Ohio the world's leader in the manufacturing of the microchips critical to our innovation economy and to our national defense. This investment -- right here in Ohio -- is a clear signal to China and to the rest of the world -- that from now on, our essential manufactured products will be made in the United States of America and -- once again, it will be Ohioans making the things that keep us safe.

And, these are just a few of Ohio's recent victories!

Ohio is blessed with nearly 350,000 construction workers. Please welcome to the Chamber two of our fellow Ohioans, who today are building Ohio's future: Mike Kimevski, a 5<sup>th</sup> year electrician apprentice from Akron and Syesha Lewis Roberts also from Akron, who is a member of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 219.

To both of you -- we thank you -- and we thank all the skilled trades and craft workers in Ohio!

And there is more!

Fifteen years ago, CNBC ranked Ohio 34<sup>th</sup> of the best states to conduct business. But today, we are ranked seventh nationally and first among our neighboring states!

Also, for the second year in a row, Site Selection Magazine ranked Ohio as the "Number One" state in the nation for infrastructure and economic development investment. This means that Ohio is doing more than any other state to prepare for future job growth.

Our income tax rates are the lowest they've been in over 50 years!

And, companies are coming here because of our exceedingly business-friendly regulatory environment. Since taking office, we have created a culture in our agencies that is not a "gotcha" culture, but one where we help businesses get from point A to point B. In partnership with the General Assembly, all of our agencies have reduced their rules by 30 percent, and we will continue these efforts to ease the burdens on business and streamline our government.

Further, we have sliced more than 930 Ohio regulations -- and at least 2.3 million words -- from the administrative code. Our proposed budget will slash another 2.3 million words and delete 3,200 additional, unnecessary rules.

We also successfully fought the federal regulatory process to get energy to both Ohio businesses and homes much faster! And, our proposed budget will make it easier for energy generators to provide power directly to Ohio businesses.

What we have all done together in Ohio is extraordinary. These weren't empty promises. These are TANGIBLE results!

While we celebrate our victories, the job of the Governor is also to point out our State's unfinished business.

Our goal remains the same: To work each day so that every Ohioan has the tools to live up to their full potential and has the opportunities to live their version of the American dream.

To do that, we must remove the barriers preventing Ohioans from entering the workforce. That means we must make sure all Ohioans receive a good education, starting with learning how to read.

And, we must do all in our power to build a system that enables every Ohioan who has a mental health challenge or an addiction problem to receive the care that they need -- right in their own community.

For the truth is, we cannot achieve our full potential as a state unless each Ohioan first achieves theirs.

Workforce remains both our greatest opportunity -- and our most significant challenge.

Together, we have created all of these incredible economic opportunities and new jobs in Ohio, but now, our mission as a state is to act with great urgency and intense focus on filling these jobs!

## **OHIO'S WORKFORCE PLAYBOOK**

That is why I have asked Ohio's new Lieutenant Governor, Jim Tressel, to lead an exciting and innovative new effort to create "Ohio's Workforce Playbook."

Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. Tressel: Would you please stand?

I want to take a moment to thank the Lieutenant Governor and to thank Ellen, who is in the Gallery with Fran today, for joining our team. We are thrilled to have the Tressels by our side as we continue to move the ball toward the goal line.

They are a real partnership. Ellen has her own distinguished career in business and also understands the workforce needs of Ohio.

The Lieutenant Governor has been a leader in every job he has ever held. I saw that up close during his nine years running Youngstown State University. He knows education. He knows workforce. And, he knows Ohio!

Ohio's Workforce Playbook is really the logical extension of our economic success. The Lieutenant Governor is ready! He's ready to help clear the barriers holding Ohioans back and ready to recruit everyone we can onto our Ohio Workforce Team!

And so, I am asking Lieutenant Governor Tressel to focus on identifying the job, skillset, education, and talent needs in each region of Ohio. In doing this, the Lieutenant Governor will bring people together.

He will work closely with our four-year universities and colleges, our career tech schools, our state agencies, as well as local businesses and leaders and develop a regionalize strategy that meets the specific needs of each region of Ohio.

And, he will focus on how we produce enough workers to meet those needs, as we strive to retain homegrown talent, recruit new talent into Ohio, and rally our existing workforce.

## **OUR OHIO WORKFORCE TEAM**

Let's look now at the Ohioans who we can help seize more opportunities by removing the roadblocks that slow them down.

### **Ohioans with Disabilities**

Let's start first with Ohioans with disabilities. We need them on our workforce team.

Our state agency -- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, known as O-O-D -- serves Ohioans with disabilities and helps them get and keep jobs. Since the start of our Administration, we have helped almost 32,000 Ohioans with disabilities to reach their goal of employment.

To parents of students with disabilities across Ohio: We want your child to live up to their full potential and to know that we have the services to assist you and your child on a career plan and to achieve their goals. Make sure you are talking with your high school to get access to an O-O-D career counselor, who can help your child find a path to employment or higher education. Meet with these counselors, include them in your IEP meetings, and take advantage of this service.

O-O-D has guided Kelsi Weaver, for example, throughout her educational journey. Originally from Martins Ferry in Belmont County, Kelsi has spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. O-O-D has provided her with the essential career assessments, assistive technology, and job readiness training that have ultimately enabled her to complete her college degree and pursue her passion for helping others.

Today, Kelsi lives in Waterville in Lucas County and works as a social worker at Clearwater Council of Governments. I am very pleased that Kelsi is here with us today on the House Floor. Will you please give her a round of applause?

## **Formerly Incarcerated Ohioans**

We also need those who used to be in prison on our workforce team.

That is why we are encouraging Ohio employers to hire those re-entering the workforce after incarceration. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction releases about 18,000 people back into society each year. It is in everyone's best interest to get them into the workforce, which is why we are proactively preparing inmates for re-entry through specialized job training for Ohio's most in-demand industries.

Our trained ex-offenders want to work. I say to the employers in Ohio: Give them a chance. Help them find the dignity, purpose, and hope that comes with a job.

When I was in high school, I had my own experience working closely, day after day, with a man who spent 18 years in prison. His name was Leonard Steele. He was one of the hardest working people I have ever met -- and no one had a bigger heart than Leonard.

There are a lot of Leonard Steeles in Ohio -- people who have paid their debt to society. They just need to be given a chance to work.

There are a number of tremendous programs run by non-profit organizations across Ohio to help the formerly incarcerated assimilate back into the community and into a job. EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, for example, is doing some incredible work and is really a model for the nation.

EDWINS is a non-profit in Cleveland that offers formerly incarcerated adults training and hands-on work experience in the culinary and hospitality industries. Brandon Chrostowski, the founder of EDWINS, operates on the belief that "every human being, regardless of their past, has a right to a fair and equal future." He's right.

Fran and I got to know Brandon when we had EDWINS cater an event we hosted for other Governors. We are so pleased he is with us today in the Gallery.

Brandon -- Will you please stand? We thank you for all the good you are doing.

## **Youth in State Custody**

We also need, on our workforce team, Ohio youth who have been in state custody with our Department of Youth Services (DYS).

Each DYS facility helps youth with job interview preparation, resume writing, and job search availability to prepare youth for when they leave custody and return to our communities. Through such efforts, DYS has prepared many young people, who today, have purpose and are very productive citizens of our State. We've prepared them to make a living with good wages in construction, landscaping, retail, warehouse work, the food service industry, and even one youth who has recently become a licensed barber!

## **Ohio Seniors**

Not only do we need these young people on our workforce team, but we also need our retired Ohio Buckeyes!

As our State's population ages, older residents will be vital to growing our workforce and stimulating our economy. I say to our employers: Don't forget that our Seniors are a hidden gem and are often an untapped resource. They're experienced, skilled, and have a strong work ethic.

## **Ohioans with Mental Health Challenges**

Let me now turn to Ohioans with mental health challenges. We need Ohioans who are in recovery on our workforce team, too.

To address addiction and mental health challenges in Ohio, all of us working together have:

\*\*\*Reduced drug overdose deaths by nine percent -- while the national rate only dropped by two percent;

\*\*\*We've opened Ohio's first new state behavioral health hospital in nearly a decade with plans to build more;

\*\*\*We've helped construct or expand 11 pediatric behavioral health facilities, which served more than 100,000 youth just since last year;

\*\*\*Since July 2022, we've answered more than 440,000 calls, texts, and chats to Ohio's 9-8-8 crisis and suicide lifeline. That's an average of more than 18,000 communications each month;

\*\*\*We've attracted more than 2,100 behavioral health professionals into the field since 2022 through our Great Minds program;

\*\*\*We've served nearly 16,000 youth and families since 2019 through our mobile crisis services;

\*\*\*And, since the start of our Administration, we've treated nearly 50,000 men and women with substance-use disorders who, at the time, were in one of Ohio's 28 prisons.

Despite these significant efforts, stigma, sadly often remains when it comes to hiring someone with a serious mental illness or someone once addicted to fentanyl. These Ohioans can work, and they can contribute.

Someone who has been in recovery for many years from drug addiction is often the best person to help others trying to get into recovery. That is why we are investing in "Certified Peer Supporters." It is a pathway to employment for individuals who have personal experience with

behavioral health challenges or have helped someone with similar challenges to navigate services. They then, in turn, can help others.

Peer supporters really are becoming a whole new workforce. Since 2019, we have helped more than 6,400 Ohioans successfully complete that training, and they now work in a variety of settings, including HR departments, hospitals, jails, veteran's homes, treatment centers, recovery housing, and as part of crisis response teams.

One of the peers creating better outcomes for Ohioans is Laurel Ridenour, a Certified Peer Supporter with Hope Recovery Community, where she works with families in our Ohio START program through Medina County's office of Job and Family Services.

Laurel knows what it's like for parents struggling with substance use disorder, because she used to be one. After time in prison and a winding road to recovery, she is now employed as a Peer Supporter and works to engage families in treatment, so they can reunify with their children.

Laurel is with us today. Will you please stand? Laurel, your resilience is inspiring. Let's please give her a round of applause.

### **Children's Services and OhioRISE**

Laurel understands the deep trauma that children and families face when kids are placed into the custody of children's services. Let's now talk about these kids.

Children in foster care are our among our most vulnerable Ohioans, and we have a moral obligation to help them.

Today in Ohio, we have the lowest number of kids in foster care since 2016 -- and that is great -- yet all-too-often when a child is taken from their parents' custody, our public children's services agencies still have nowhere to place these kids, sometimes leaving them to spend the night in a county office or hotel.

These are children! They have already endured enough trauma. Surely, we can do better than this!

I am so very grateful to the General Assembly for your support in taking meaningful steps to do better by these kids. Through continued investments in local children's services and with our planned creation of regional child wellness campuses, we will work to ensure that no child is ever left without care. These new wellness campuses will provide safe, supportive environments for children when they cannot be with their families -- keeping them close to home, connected to treatment, and on the best path toward reunification or independence.

At the same time, we remain fully committed to OhioRISE -- our program that coordinates care to serve the kids with the most complex physical and behavioral health needs. OhioRISE now serves over 42,000 youth by getting them the specialized help they need and by keeping families together.

And so in summary, all of these Ohioans -- children in foster care, youth who have been in the justice system, retired Ohioans, individuals with disabilities, adults who used to be in prison, and also those who are in recovery -- deserve the chance to live up to their God-given potential and lead healthy, productive, meaningful lives. And, we need all of them on our workforce team!

## **DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY**

The key to success in life is the ability to read. No one recognizes that in children more than my bride of nearly 58 years, First Lady Fran DeWine.

Because of Fran's incredible dedication to expanding Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Ohio, today 70 percent of Ohio households, who have a child under five years-of-age, are getting a free book in the mail each month. And since the start of our Administration, more than 20 million free books have been mailed to Ohio children.

As Fran and I traveled around the State and have talked to young families across Ohio, so many of them tell us that receiving these books each month has changed their bedtime routine. They are reading more to their children, and their children are asking them to read to them more.

Receiving these books results in families bonding more, and this helps more children get prepared for kindergarten.

Fran and I want to thank all of you in the General Assembly for your belief in this program. We also want to thank our local partners around the State, who raise part of the money and ask parents to sign their kids up for the books.

## **SCIENCE OF READING**

We also know that the very best method for teaching young children how to read is the Science of Reading, which goes back to the basics of phonics and sounding words out.

Members of the General Assembly: Two years ago, I asked for your help to bring the Science of Reading to every school in Ohio -- and even to our colleges and universities as they train our next generation of teachers. We are already seeing encouraging signs.

This year's School Report Cards showed significant improvement in English Language Arts proficiency among elementary students, climbing by 2.2 percentage points among Ohio third graders, 5.2 percentage points among fourth graders, and 3.1 percentage points among fifth graders.

Every day, more schools are becoming fully aligned with the Science of Reading. And, while this kind of foundational change is not easy and takes time, perseverance, and persistence, the rewards will be so well worth the effort! As more of our children become proficient in the essential life skill of reading, they will be more prepared to thrive in the classroom, in the workforce, and in life.

## **ReadOhio Coaching Initiative**

We are currently providing literacy coaches to support teachers in the lowest performing schools to implement the Science of Reading. Our budget continues this program.

And, when students are falling behind, our budget requires districts with low rates of proficient readers to focus more of their dollars on teaching kids to read.

## **Science of Reading Recognition Program**

Schools that are improving literacy instruction and outcomes for Ohio students should be recognized and celebrated! And so today, I am happy to announce that some high-achieving schools across Ohio will soon be honored through our new “Governor’s Science of Reading Recognition Program.”

This program honors schools that are totally aligned with the Science of Reading, where teachers have fully embraced the training and where students’ reading scores are improving. We have selected over 40 schools across Ohio that we soon will be honoring, including Austintown Elementary School in Mahoning County.

Their focus on literacy achievement is making a real difference for their students. In two years, they more than doubled the number of kindergarten students who are on-track with reading. And the District’s 3rd grade reading proficiency rate is now at nearly 84 percent, which is 12 percentage points higher than their pre-pandemic levels.

Austintown Superintendent Timothy Kelty and Austintown Elementary Principal Catherine Dorbish are with us today in the Gallery. Let’s give them -- and all the teachers at Austintown Elementary -- a round of applause for their commitment to ensuring that their students learn how to read!

## **OHIOSEE VISION PROGRAM**

Today, school-aged children in Ohio are required to receive vision screenings at school, yet shockingly, only a fourth (26 percent) of the students who need additional vision care -- whether that be a comprehensive eye exam or glasses -- actually receive it. That leaves tens of thousands of Ohio children behind in school, not being able to see as well as they should.

Last year, we announced the creation of a “Children’s Vision Strike Force” to develop Ohio’s first ever statewide plan to ensure that every Ohio child who needs glasses will get glasses. We have taken their recommendations and are very pleased to announce today the creation of the new “OhioSEE Program.”

This innovative program will focus on children at an age when vision is critical to learning to read. It will ensure that all Ohio students in kindergarten through third grade -- including those who may be home-schooled or attend private schools -- will not only get a vision screening, but

they will also receive comprehensive eye exams if the screenings indicate a correction is needed. And if they do need glasses -- they will get them!

We anticipate that through OhioSEE, more than 33,000 children will be served throughout Ohio over the next two years -- including children like Sharnetta Lyles, a sixth grader at Medina Middle School in Columbus City School District.

Her school nurse referred Sharnetta to the Nationwide Children's Hospital school-based eye clinic following a vision screening at school. Sharnetta had been struggling in school, but she had never seen an eye doctor. Once she got a comprehensive eye exam, it was clear she needed eyeglasses. She got them -- and then a whole new world opened up!

Sharnetta had been living in a blur for a very long time, and suddenly everything came into focus. She was understandably emotional leaving the clinic in her new glasses. Staff asked what was wrong. She said, "I can see clearly now. I'm just taking it all in!"

Sharnetta and her mother, Sharleia, are with us today on the House Floor.

Thank you sharing your story. Let's give them a round of applause!

Our OhioSEE program is modeled, in part, after the amazing work of the non-profit organization Sight for All United in the Mahoning Valley. They were instrumental in helping Jaxson James see better -- and ultimately read better, too!

When Jaxson -- a second grader at Jefferson Elementary in Warren -- first met with Sight for All United, he was severely far-sighted and had a drifting eye. His vision problems were causing him to slip far behind his peers in reading.

But, after getting eye surgery, Jaxson now thrives in reading and was recently recognized at school -- not just for reaching his reading goal, but for surpassing it!

Jaxson is also with us today. Jaxson, please stand so we can give you a round of applause!

OhioSEE will change lives, and I ask the Members of the General Assembly for your support of this program.

## **DENTAL SERVICES**

Equally important is dental care. Poor dental health can make it hard for a child to eat, sleep, or even talk -- let alone learn.

It's clear that many Ohio children have untreated, serious dental problems that follow them into adulthood. We must step up for these children.

That is why our budget establishes our new "Children's Dental Services Pilot Program." We will start by serving children in nine Ohio counties that are designated as Dental Health Professional

Shortage Areas and lack non-profit dental facilities to provide care to low income families. We will partner with dental professionals in the community and school districts to deploy dental programs directly into schools -- providing screenings, preventative care, and treatment to children who need these services the most.

I ask for your support of this program, as well.

## **SCHOOL-BASED CLINICS**

Now let me turn to school-based clinics. These are another way that schools across Ohio are helping their students get proper medical care so they can focus and learn.

These clinics work when schools partner with a local healthcare provider, and we have seen how these clinics can, in fact, be self-sustaining.

We have a model, and we will show schools how to do it. So, I urge all Ohio superintendents to reach out to our Department of Education and Workforce. We will walk you through the process -- step-by-step.

We know that schools are the center of our communities, and these clinics are cost effective and bring primary care directly into the school, where everyone can have access to it.

Just look at 12 year-old Kylie Wainscott, a fifth grader at Warner Middle School in Xenia. She visited her school-based health clinic with speech and hearing concerns. The clinic set her up with ENT and audiology specialists, and now she has hearing aids.

Kylie's hearing has greatly improved. Today, she can hear her teachers, and her grades in school have gone up, too!

We are so happy to have Kylie with us today in the Gallery. Kylie, please stand up so we can give you a round of applause, as well.

## **CELL PHONE BAN**

Addiction to screentime and the non-stop barrage of notifications rob our children of precious time to learn from their teachers during the school day. I thank Senator Andy Brenner, Representative Tracy Richardson, and former Representative Jessica Miranda for their unrelenting work to pass a bill, which I signed into law in May, to require all schools to implement policies to address the use of cell phones in schools.

I also thank our schools, parents, and communities -- and especially Ohio's former Lieutenant Governor -- and Ohio's newest U.S. Senator -- Jon Husted. I want to thank Jon and his wife Tina for their early leadership on this very important issue.

Tina is with us to today in the Gallery. Let's give her -- and Jon -- a round of applause.

We have heard repeatedly from teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, and parents who say that when cell phones were banned during the school day, the school transformed before their eyes. Kids are focused in the classroom. And, the sound of laughter and banter echo throughout the lunchroom because the kids are actually talking to each other instead of having their heads down, buried in their phones.

Teays Valley Local School District in Pickaway County implemented a policy where students lock their phones in pouches during the school day. The results have been profound!

Superintendent Kyle Wolfe told us that student engagement and attendance have both greatly improved. Grades are better. Socialization is improving and becoming more positive. The number of students being disciplined was cut nearly in half almost instantly! And, even communication between students and teachers has improved because they have more opportunities to interact with each other.

I want to thank Superintendent Wolfe for having the courage to say, “Enough is enough!” He is here with us today, so let’s give him a round of applause!

What is happening in Teays Valley is happening in school buildings all across Ohio that have banned phones during school hours. As a country and as a state, we have learned a lot in this past year, and the evidence today is much stronger than it was even a year ago. It’s overwhelming. And so, it’s time to finish the job and ban cell phones in all Ohio schools!

I ask the Legislature to approve the language in our budget to put an end to cell phone use during school hours in all Ohio School districts, to give the precious time during the school day back to our kids so they can learn -- and teachers can teach!

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

For too many working parents, balancing work and childcare has become very difficult. That is our budget continues our significant investment in helping more parents go to work with the peace of mind that their child is being well cared for and is learning.

Together, through our “Childcare Choice Voucher Program,” we have expanded access to quality state childcare support to assist families up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This program has been around for only 10 months, but already 5,100 more families and 7,700 more children are getting the childcare they need!

I ask the Members of the General Assembly for your continued support of this, because our voucher program -- really an education and workforce program -- is making a significant positive impact on young children and working families throughout Ohio.

## **\$1,000 PER CHILD TAX CREDIT**

Today, more than ever, young families are feeling financially constrained.

And so, for every Ohio child under the age of seven, we are going to give working parents a \$1,000 tax credit to ease the financial burdens of raising a family!

This will help parents fund childcare or healthcare or pay for groceries, diapers, rent, and any other costs.

It will help them as they create the family of their dreams.

And it will help Ohio get more parents onto our workforce team!

## **PRAISE TEACHERS**

I have heard it said that teaching is the greatest act of optimism, because teachers believe in a better future and they have faith in the ability of every student. Put a good teacher in the classroom -- and kids will learn!

Few things make more of a difference in a young student's life than the impact of a truly outstanding teacher. Countless teachers across Ohio pour their heart and their soul into their work -- and into their students -- every single day.

In the Gallery with us today are Ohio's 2025 Teachers of the Year. Please stand, so we can give you -- and all the outstanding and dedicated teachers across Ohio -- a round of applause!

## **PRINCIPAL APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

A strong school principal has the power to transform the culture at a school and improve outcomes. That is why our budget establishes the "Ohio Principal Apprenticeship Program." This two-year training program will match aspiring principals with veteran principals to better prepare them to embrace the challenges of school leadership, so they can create the conditions for students, teachers, and staff, alike, to thrive.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES/OHIO HISTORY CURRICULUM**

Another goal of education should be to develop good citizens. An essential part of that is the teaching of basic critical thinking skills -- being curious, asking questions, making arguments, and supporting a position with solid evidence. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it best when he said:

"Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction. The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically."

To promote critical thinking and open dialogue on our college campuses, we took a major step in our last budget -- along with the General Assembly and higher education leaders -- by creating five new "Centers for Civics, Culture, and Society" -- one at Miami University, Ohio State, the University of Toledo, Cleveland State, and Wright State. I thank President McColley and Senator Jerry Cirino for leading the way on this effort, and I'm pleased that leaders from the new

Civic Centers are with us today in the Gallery. Please also stand, so we can give you a round of applause.

Well before college and exposure to places like the Civic Centers, we know that teaching children critical thinking skills most often comes through classes in history, civics, and social studies.

Earlier this year, I sat down with a number of high school and elementary school social studies teachers from across Ohio. What a dedicated group of teachers! They told me that one of the biggest problem today is that too many kids are simply not being exposed to enough social studies content, especially in elementary school.

We intend to change that by putting a deliberative focus on civics, social studies, American history, and Ohio history. The best place to start is in the elementary grades by embedding social studies content directly into materials that teachers use to teach reading and writing skills. And so, I am directing the Department of Education and Workforce to develop such a model curriculum and asking the General Assembly to support that effort in our budget.

Further, we are going to increase our kids' exposure to Ohio history. Today, students receive the majority of their Ohio history education in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Instead, we are going to expose kids to our State's history in every grade, starting in kindergarten!

I thank the Ohio History Connection for serving as terrific partner in this effort by supplying schools with excellent teaching materials. They share our pride in Ohio's rich history and the vital role our State has played in the development of this great country.

## **DRIVER TRAINING**

Today, too many Ohio children are driving on our roads without any training.

Fran and I have heard from parents all over the State. They tell us -- and we know from experience with our own kids -- that driver training programs in Ohio are either not available at all or not available nearby. If they are available, the courses are often too costly, putting this training out of reach for many Ohio families. Because of this, many teens are waiting until they are 18 to get their license -- the age at which training is no longer required.

The result is that there are more crashes -- and more fatalities -- among 18- and 19-year-old drivers than among 16- and 17-year-old drivers. Further, if a teen waits until age 18 or 19 to get a driver's license, many high school students miss valuable opportunities to get a job, an internship, or other work-based learning experiences when they are still in school.

Schools are the logical and most accessible places for teens to learn how to drive. Yet, very few schools currently offer driver's ed. We are going to change that!

Our budget helps schools partner with independent driver training schools or start their own driver training programs. With the support of the General Assembly in allocating a permanent

revenue stream, all Ohio high schools will have the opportunity to receive funding to make driver training available to their students.

We're going to make driver training affordable.

We're going to bring it directly to students.

We're going to enable teenagers to get jobs and internships.

And, we are going to save lives.

It is time to put driver's education back into our high schools!

## **BASIC LIFE SKILLS**

Learning basic life skills is so essential to succeeding in work and in life.

Before you can decide on a career or educational path, you need to first understand who you are. What are your interests? What are you good at? What is your passion? Are you resilient? Hardworking? Grateful? Do you have a purpose or a goal in your life?

Far too often, when young people are interviewing for jobs or starting out in their careers, it isn't that they lack talent. Rather, they lack practical life skills. Things such as time management. How to get along with others. How to stay on task. Problem-solving. Teamwork. Resilience. Adaptability. Curiosity. Creativity. It's all the non-technical skills and traits related to how you work that are part of any workplace.

Kids need to be ready for life in the real world after graduation. They need to learn to overcome adversity and develop a work ethic and the grit and determination that goes with it. They need to know how to make a budget, how to pay bills, and what to do in an emergency. And, they must understand the importance of fulfilling their civic duties -- and that, of course, includes voting.

Further, they need to learn basic first aid, how to prepare a simple meal, and understand nutrition, dietary needs, and the importance of physical fitness.

Speaking of physical fitness, stay tuned for a future announcement, as I have asked Lieutenant Governor Tressel to lead a statewide initiative to promote fitness in our schools. More on that to come!

Lacking these skills is a barrier to employment, but it is also a barrier to a happy and successful life. That is why I am directing the Department of Education and Workforce to review the State's learning standards and model curriculum to emphasize the development of practical life skills. The Department will report back to me with recommendations to make sure that we are adequately focusing on these essential skills in our schools.

## **STADIUM FUND**

Just as basic life skills are important, so is a student's ability to participate in sports and other extra-curricular activities that teach so many important lessons. I want to take a moment to talk about how we can help make sure that no Ohio student is denied the chance to participate because they can't afford the fees or equipment.

We love our sports in Ohio! We love our teams.

For decades we've used general fund dollars to help with the building or renovation of ballparks and stadiums. These sports facilities are spread all over Ohio. They include the Toledo Mudhens, Lake County Captains, Lake Erie Crushers, Akron Rubber Ducks, Dayton Dragons, Chillicothe Paints, and many, many more.

The way the State has historically assisted these facilities means that they compete for dollars with education, mental health, and many other vitally important items in our budgets. We now have an opportunity to stop using our general fund dollars to build or renovate ballparks and stadiums.

My proposed increase on on-line sports gaming companies will allow us to do this and also help kids afford to play sports and participate in other activities in their schools. Many times, the opportunity to participate in sports, theater, band, and other activities are, frankly, the only things kids are excited about and the only thing keeping them in school.

The language in our budget proposal is truly win-win -- and we should do it!

## **CAREER PLANNING IN SCHOOL**

Too many students graduate from high school without a plan for their future -- both what they want to do and how to get there. Equally troubling is that many students also lack a trusted adult who can help guide them in these important decisions.

Our budget addresses this by integrating career planning into existing high school graduation plans to help students map out their goals and identify the education or training needed to achieve those goals.

We know this will make a difference. Take Alexis White, for example, a junior at Fort Frye High School. Her involvement in 4-H and FFA ignited her passion for agricultural communications. Through an internship at Campbell Farms and other opportunities with local agriculture media outlets, Alexis discovered her calling -- to combine her love of agriculture with her talent for telling a story.

Alexis is with us today. So Alexis, will you please stand? Let's give her a hand!

## CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Career technical education in Ohio is thriving, and I want to take a moment to thank the Legislature for your generous support in our past budgets.

Over the last four years, we have seen a 10 percent growth in the number of students participating in career tech. That is over 13,000 more students earning credentials and engaging in career tech education than in 2021.

Let me tell you about Drew Corbitt's career tech path. Drew was a great student at Jonathan Alder High School in Plain City. He played sports and was an active member of the school community. When his mother, Cathy, started working at Tolles Career & Technical Center, Drew got a healthy nudge to apply at Tolles for engineering. At first, Drew wasn't thrilled about leaving his friends for two-and-a-half hours a day, but he trusted his mom, and knew he could still stay involved in his extracurricular activities at school.

During his senior year, he landed a great paying internship at Hikma Pharmaceutical Company in Columbus, where he got real work experience that solidified his choice to continue his education at the University of Cincinnati for chemical engineering.

Drew, will you please stand up? Let's give Drew a hand!

## COLLEGE PATHWAYS

For students who see college as their pathway to a career, it is so important to expose them to all of the great colleges and universities we have right here in the State of Ohio.

### Governor's Merit Scholarship

Thanks to the General Assembly's strong support, last Spring, we were able to award the very first "Governor's Merit Scholarships" to graduating seniors in the top five percent of their class who attend an Ohio college or university. These are \$5,000 scholarships and are renewable each year for up to four years.

Funding for the Merit Scholarship remains a top priority in our budget. Last year, a whopping 76 percent of students eligible for the scholarship accepted it and are today attending Ohio colleges and universities.

Of the students eligible for the scholarship in this year's senior class, an astounding 87 percent of them have accepted it and are remaining in Ohio for college!

Prior to the creation of this scholarship, only about 60 percent of the top five percent of Ohio's students stayed in Ohio for college. Now, because of this scholarship, this year, an additional 1,700 of our top students have decided to go college in Ohio -- and not go to college out of state! And that's on top of the 1,000 additional students from last year!

Last year, Ellie Baker was among the first Ohio seniors to receive the Merit Scholarship. She graduated as valedictorian from Claymont High School in Tuscarawas County and is currently pursuing her education at Kent State University. Here is what Ellie had to say about the Merit Scholarship: “I come from Appalachia, a historically low-income area, where paying for college isn’t the easiest thing. However, I didn’t want that to hold me back from achieving my aspirations.”

And then there is Ella Semancik, currently a high school senior at Nordonia High School in Macedonia. Ella recently received our Merit Scholarship for this upcoming academic year and plans to accept it, so she can stay in Ohio to study Computer Science and Spanish.

Both Ellie and Ella are with us today. Let’s give them a round of applause and wish them our very best as they continue their academic pursuits here in the State of Ohio!

### **Guaranteed Admission**

We have so many excellent colleges and universities in Ohio. But, one of the biggest complaints that Fran and I have heard over many years from Ohioans -- including legislators -- is that it is too hard for Ohio students to get into some Ohio campuses.

We are going to change that in our budget by guaranteeing admission to the main campus of every state college or university for all Ohio high school students, who are in the top five percent of their class!

And I am happy to say that Ohio’s independent colleges have expressed interest in matching this pledge.

### **Ohio College Opportunity Grant**

We also must remain focused on making college more affordable for Ohio students. That’s why our budget includes continued support for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, known as O-COG, which provides financial assistance to students who have the highest levels of financial need.

Today, nearly 59,000 students from across Ohio are receiving help through O-COG. Helen Huffman, a senior at Cedarville University, is a recipient of this grant. She was considering taking a year off from school to work and save enough money to pay for her senior year. However, because of this grant, she has been able to continue with her classes and is expected to graduate in May. She plans to work in Springfield to provide translation services to assist the Haitian Creole immigrant population.

Helen -- Would you please stand so we can all congratulate you, as well?

### **Work-based Learning Opportunities**

Work-based learning opportunities can be a core component of a student's academic success. As part of our budget, I am requiring each state institution of higher education to implement a meaningful work-based learning program.

Ohio has many leaders in work-based learning, including the University of Cincinnati (UC) co-op model, created over 100 years ago, and Miami University's Work-Plus (Work+) program on its regional campuses that allows students to earn an essentially debt-free degree with tuition and wages paid by an employer.

I recently sat down with UC students and leadership to discuss how this type of learning has enhanced their overall academic experience. One student, Zach Sullivan, who graduated from Indian Hill High school, recently completed a rigorous co-op in sales with Western & Southern in Cincinnati. And now, Zach, who is expected to graduate in the Spring, has already accepted a full-time job in the service and sales department at Western & Southern!

Zach -- Congratulations on your job offer! Please stand so we can give you a round of applause.

## **EMPLOYMENT AS QUALIFICATION FOR UNIVERSITY FUNDING**

We need more business experts, like Zach, and also more engineers, chemists, data analysts, cybersecurity analysts, software developers, social workers, behavioral therapists and so many, many more.

Our State's workforce needs are clear. So now, it is time to match those needs with students graduating with the appropriate education and training.

Today, we determine the amount of state funding that colleges and universities receive by the number of students completing courses, certificates, and degrees. Our budget takes this to the next level by partially funding our state colleges and universities based on actual student outcomes, including how many students get a job after graduation.

This will make Ohio the first state in the nation to tie a significant portion of funding for colleges and universities to graduates who are getting jobs!

## **CONCLUSION**

This past year, we lost three legendary, former Ohio legislative leaders and champions of education and workforce development: House Speaker Jo Ann Davidson, Majority Floor Leader Kirk Schuring, and Senate Minority Leader Ben Espy. They shared a deep love for this State and for our people and a great optimism about our future. We think about them at this moment.

Working together over these last six years, we have had a lot of incredible wins for Ohio, and we, too, have every reason to be optimistic!

Yes, our great State is still a work in progress, as it is with everything in life. But, we can always progress further, especially when it comes to filling the jobs and fully realizing the opportunities that we have created.

But, we will get there!

We have the playbook. We have the team. And now, together -- let's go win!

As we do, let us also remember the words of then Coach Tressel, who reminds us that "our success is measured not just by wins, but by the legacy we leave behind."

He's so right.

And that legacy is the future of our great state. It is our children. It is our grandchildren. It is our great-grandchildren.

It is also what we prioritize, the investments we make, and our commitment to each of the young people who are here with us today. We owe it to them to open all of the awesome possibilities and life-changing opportunities that Ohio has to offer.

For they are our future.

They are our hope for tomorrow.

And they -- they will become Ohio's legacy.

Thank you -- and may God bless this Great State!