

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP)
“ESEA Reauthorization: Career and College Readiness in Practice,” April 1, 2010
Presented by: Jacqueline A. Silas-Butler, Esq., Executive Director, Project GRAD Akron

On behalf of the national Project GRAD network, let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Senator Sherrod Brown and his colleagues for authorizing Project GRAD as a federal program in the Higher Education Act (HEA). Additionally, thank you for inviting Project GRAD Akron to represent our organization as I share about the important work that we do throughout the United States to assist students as they successfully prepare for college and career and become lifelong productive members of our country.

Project GRAD is a national reform model which initially began in 1993 in Houston, Texas in one feeder pattern. Today, we have thirteen sites in ten states serving 213 schools and more than 134,000 students, their families, and teachers. We work in collaboration with local school districts to ensure academic achievement from Pre K-12, and successful completion of high school and college for economically disadvantaged students.

Project GRAD is a unique model with an ambitious mission of increasing the high school and college graduation rates of the students we serve, who typically come from some of the lowest performing schools. Ninety-two percent (92%) of PG USA's students are African American or Hispanic and eighty-three percent (83%) of the students served are low-income. Most of the students we serve are the first in their family to consider college as a viable option.

Project GRAD is the only education reform effort that has been cited as a promising whole school reform leading to college success by many national organizations including Building Engineering and Science Talent, the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, Business-Higher Education Forum, American Youth Policy Forum, and the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO).

In the longest-served group of schools, Project GRAD students are completing college at a rate 92% above the national average for students from similar backgrounds. Nationally, Project GRAD has already offered college scholarships to more than 9,600 students, worth over \$40 million, and has nearly 13,000 high school students in the scholarship pipeline, making it one of the country's largest college access organizations for low-income students. Nationally, Project GRAD's scholarships have sent high school graduates to more than 100 institutions of higher education, including, The Ohio State University, The University of Akron, Kent State University, The University of Cincinnati, Lorain Community College, Cornell, Morehouse, Harvard, Emory, Rice, Spelman, Georgetown, Texas, Virginia, Howard, Princeton, and Yale.

The uniqueness of our model centers around our belief that **Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (GRAD)** and that we work with **all** students in **any** school we serve. Our model includes the following areas: Community Partnerships/Engagement, Academic Support, Student Support and Parent Engagement, College Access and Retention, and Scholarship.

As the Executive Director of Project GRAD Akron, I can personally attest that we are seeing tremendous gains for the students we serve. The success we have experienced is due in great part to the collaboration we have with the Akron Public Schools, local universities, as well as engaging the community in our efforts. Since 2002, our reading and math scores have increased, our schools are making a year or more growth in overall performance and have outpaced similar schools in the district, and our high school was the only high school in the district that met the federal benchmark in reading and math (AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress). Since 2006, Project GRAD Akron has awarded nearly \$600,000 in scholarships to Buchtel High School's graduates and two students were the recipients of the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarship. In May, we will award \$228,000 in additional scholarships to the Class of 2010.

I would like to close my testimony by presenting some of the evaluation results that demonstrate Project GRAD's success. Dr. Eric Bettinger of Stanford University conducted studies in 2007 and 2009 at Project GRAD sites in Ohio. His results included a number of positive findings:

- Graduation rates have improved across all Project GRAD high schools in Ohio since the inception of Project GRAD.
- Fourth grade math scores have increased in Project GRAD schools relative to comparison schools.
- Student disciplinary rates have fallen in Project GRAD schools relative to comparison schools.
- Student truancy has fallen in Project GRAD schools relative to comparison schools.
- Teacher attendance has also improved relative to comparison schools.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present my testimony in support of the reauthorization of ESEA.