

HB176

May 31, 2017 Proponent Testimony

Patty Russo / Parent, Loveland City School District

Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee.

As a parent of two children, I have perspective on the changing landscape of public high school education in Ohio – before and after Common Core. Both of my kids are high academic achievers, curious, and competitive. Both excel when the bar is set high and when pushed. They both test well. They each have different strengths and interests.

My daughter graduated in 2015. She is half way through college and thriving. She loved and still loves to learn. I consider her my control group.

My son is in the class of 2018. He loved school and also loved to learn. That is, until Common Core entered his world. It was a full 2 years after Common Core was snuck into our district that I learned courses named and described the same as those my daughter had taken just 3 years prior - Honors Algebra and Honors Geometry – were actually Common Core Integrated Math. He did well but loathed these classes and learned to hate math – a subject he had always loved. A kid, who as a 6th grader exclaimed that he loved soccer because it was “all about the angles” learned to hate Honors Geometry. And of course he did, because it wasn’t Geometry at all. When I learned of this reality, I immediately enrolled him at Huntington to “re teach” him traditional algebra and geometry. He didn’t love the extra work but appreciated the opportunity to learn to enjoy real math again. Reality is that many kids’ parents can’t afford outside tutoring. And, none of us should have to.

I work with engineers so I have perspective on what leads to success in that field. In middle school my son expressed interest in engineering. But with the introduction of Integrated Math, any engineering spark was extinguished and I blame Common Core.

When it comes to high school level Language Arts/English/Grammar/Literature, the Common Core content was dramatically watered down compared to what my daughter had – this at a time when teenagers’ brains are essentially “learning machines” with greater synaptic plasticity. Why not optimize this and challenge them? Why not expose them to abstract concepts, critical thinking and classic literature?

And, with the amount of test prep and testing that took place this year, there were at least 6 school days (42 hours of instruction time) missed. My son didn’t even have classes that required EOC exams yet 42 hours of instruction time was zapped. This is not OK. While I don’t pay tuition, I pay for his education through my property taxes- and I equate lost time with wasted money.

These are not local district issues. These issues directly result from federal mandates on education in our state public schools and local districts. Ohio had a longstanding, excellent track record. In 2010 Ohio was ranked 5th nationally. Last year Ohio was 23rd. In 2010, our district, Loveland City School District, was ranked “excellent with distinction” with an above average “value added” rating; and a performance index from the years 2008 – 2015 was consistently at 104. Then, from 2015 to 2016 our performance index dropped from 105.9 to 88.9 on the Ohio District Report Card. While I personally don’t put

HB176

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much faith in the current report cards, others do, so these scores validate my position. The scores suggest a negative anomaly – typically the result of change.

Just as the demographics in our state have not dramatically changed in this timeframe, students, demographics and teachers in our district are consistent. Yet our district performance index dropped by 17 points in one year. This is a direct cause and effect of federal education mandates, Common Core, teaching to the un-vetted tests.

Our state and district implemented Common Core without a peep. A major shift in curriculum, testing protocol and graduation requirements – and no heads up! Teachers, taxpayers and parents had no say in whether or not Common Core was a fit for our district – no direct say and no proxy through our elected representatives. Our school board was also neutered. We had no choice and many parents still have no clue. Until now – because we see the negative effects on our state report cards, our district reputation, our teachers' and students' morale.

I have watched my son and his peers for the past 4 years be relegated to guinea pigs in a grand education experiment that is expensive with no ROI. Having a “control” subject with which to compare, I can say without question that students in the education experiment class of 2018 in Ohio have been cheated out of a positive, quality educational experience.

I have also witnessed our local school board's purpose and function become a mere fiduciary arm of the district rather than the representative voice of the community.

More importantly, many parents have seen a deleterious affect on their kids – and it's not just grades or test scores. It's about the opportunity for their kids to learn to love to learn.

I am here today to speak not only for my kids or myself - we're nearly done. I am also here to share perspective of other parents and teachers who can't attend and/or can't speak openly, but who are in support of House Bill 176, the return to true local control, a common sense approach to education, and real educational freedom in the classroom that we should be afforded under our Constitution.

Parents see their children who used to love and thrive in school because they were learning and growing –now hate school because they feel like little robot test taking machines who must get a good score even though they are not really comprehending anything they're spewing back on a test.

One parent with children in elementary school shared with me, “My children have been directly and negatively impacted by the practices of massive testing measures and no good plan to deal with Common Core and testing efforts imposed upon us.” This parent was an IT professional and applied math and critical thinking in her job, and she can't help her elementary aged kids with math.

Another parent in the #3 ranked district in Ohio says that her children only know US history because she teaches fundamentals at home... Her eldest is on his way to 8th grade and has yet to study the Civil War...Her fifth grader's friends did not believe that

HB176

May 31, 2017 Proponent Testimony

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Woodrow Wilson was an actual president. And, they haven't [even touched on] the first, or second World War. She continued, "Why no chronology at all? Why no cause and effect? What we are doing to our kids' generation is horrible."

We are also seeing the negative affect of NCLB, ESSA, Common Core and the one-size-fits all approach on the most critical front line in education - our teachers.

My husband was a 30-year teacher, 25 of those in a public middle school that changed from suburban to urban in his time there. He lived to teach and was well respected, but retired five years sooner than he had planned - because of the federal mandates and Common Core he faced.

A 15-year veteran high school teacher who works with special needs students in a diverse urban district shares that he spends the majority of his planning time and much of his own personal time - on administrative paperwork related to testing. He used to commit that time creating plans to help his special needs students develop successful strategies for real LEARNING and for life. By the time he wraps up testing logistics and paperwork, he has no time for what is really important to these students who truly need his extra time and attention. This is just one teacher. Consider the exponential impact on special needs kids.

Another 15-year teacher in a rural district shared that she lost 8 days of instruction this year due to EOC tests. (That doesn't count in class test prep days.) She and her colleagues also spent an additional 50 hours on before school test prep lessons and practice with at-risk students. 50 hours. Unpaid. And, she spent 8 of her 24 planning hours wit the assistant principal discussing how to make gains on tests rather than developing ways to enhance instruction lessons! 1/3 of her planning time - lost. "It's a daunting pressure to put on students and teachers that their entire worth and growth is measured by the state test."

Meanwhile, a 19 year veteran teacher who is regarded as one of the best in the Loveland district – a teacher who challenges students by setting the bar high to bring out their best, said, "With where my district is right now and all of this circus [of state] legislation, I'm working hard to find other options outside the classroom. It is a shame that education has gotten to be what it is." This teacher is requested by more parents than his class holds – and he may leave teaching! When Common Core hit his district, he sent his own children to a private school. What does that say about confidence in the current state of public education in Ohio?

These are real stories of real people who care about the quality of education but whose voices have been all but muted.

I understand that Ohio has rebranded Common Core as "Ohio's new learning standards". Having reviewed the comparison chart on the adjustments to English learning standards, more than half were marked "no change" and those changes reflected more semantics than substance. It appears to be a mere rebranding exercise – again with no input from those whose insights are the most critical. Thus, contrary to what Betsy DeVos has said, Common Core with its federal mandates are alive and well in Ohio - and it's hurting our kids and our teachers.

HB176

May 31, 2017 Proponent Testimony

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For these reasons we need to pass House Bill 176. It is about more than just Common Core. It will allow community partners, parents, taxpayers and teachers to regain their voices and control of their education tax dollars. It will restore classroom learning time - by reducing testing and test prep. And, it will untether Ohio from ESSA, which as enacted, mandated that every state must have their standards approved by the federal government. ESSA is not local control and it is not educational liberty. And, although President Trump's late April executive order temporarily stopped the standards approval requirement, we should not legislate to comply with perpetually changing federal edicts - for which other current legislation, House Bill 181, seeks to do.

HB176 will truly allow Ohio to hit a reset button on education. It will allow districts to decide what's best for their community based on its unique needs and real community input. It is a step to restore broken trust between parents and district administrators - and between constituents and our elected representatives. And, it will allow our teachers the freedom to return to what they were called to do – teach. But, most important of all, it will give students a chance to learn to love to learn again.

For the reasons I've covered here today, on behalf of the parents who are unable to attend this meeting and for the teachers whose voices have been silenced, and for the sake of our children and their future, I ask each of you to support - and pass - Ohio House Bill 176.

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I thank you for your attention, and the opportunity to speak in support of HB176. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.