

Thank you to the Ohio House of Representatives Committee on Government Accountability and Oversight for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding my opposition to House Bill 512. As a Social Studies Teacher at Elyria High School, I believe that this bill undermines democratic principles, my professionalism as an educator, and my students potential for success.

“...the percentage of students meeting required scores on end of course exams is roughly the same as it was when students needed to pass the Ohio Graduation Test.” So said former appointee and President of the State School Board, Tom Gunlock, in testimony last week in favor of HB512.

When I read the above quote, I was disgusted. Passing rates like the OGT? And he is presenting this nonsense to a House Committee as if it were factual?

Mr. Gunlock is either terribly misinformed, or lying.

His testimony is dangerous.

At the high school where I teach, from a senior class of fewer than 500 students, more than 200 are being tracked because they ARE NOT meeting the required scores on the end of course assessments. I am willing to bet that my school is not an anomaly. Fortunately, the currently democratically elected (in part) State School Board encouraged the state legislature to provide additional pathways for these students. Without these pathways, my school that had a 90% graduation rate a few years ago would be looking at a grad rate of 60-70%, optimistically.

In a system devised by our Associate Principal in charge of assessments, each student is assigned a counselor who assures that they sign a contract to move forward with 3 of the potential pathways for the class of 2018, & attend remediation and retest where necessary. The counselors then maintain contact, and track the progress of their set of students.

It should be noted that the counselors indicated above are still responsible for the progress, scheduling, and college or vocational application processes for their usual contingent of roughly 500 students, as well as being the group of people who administer what I can only imagine are tens of thousands of assessments and retakes throughout the year. As a matter of fact, we bring in a few retired counselors at certain points during the year, the recent administration of the ACT was one, not to “counsel” students, but to assist with the administration of state assessments.

Perhaps if we provided time for our counselors to counsel, then these students might have better guidance on their paths to career and college readiness. In light of recent events, freeing up counselors to counsel would also go a long way toward providing students in need with the mental health services appropriate to their situation, and increase school safety.

Instead, we have House Bill 512 seeking to eliminate the power of the largely democratically elected school board, in favor of a megadepartment headed by an appointee who is likely to be just as ill-informed as Mr. Gunlock. The Governor defended his decision by saying that most people don't even know who their board member is, anyway.

On February 1st, I emailed every State School Board Member to explain that the Graduation Requirement is still a Graduation Problem. I thanked them for their attention to this issue that is so very important to students in my school. I also encouraged them to push for an extension of the additional pathways for 2018 to the classes of 2019 and 2020, so that a suitable long term

solution to this issue can be crafted in an informed manner.

That night I received a phone call from Board Member Pat Bruns to discuss the issue. Over the next week, I heard from Board Members Manchester, Johnson, Haycock, Kohler, McGuire, Fowler, Woods, and Bruns again. On other occasions, I have had personal conversations regarding the issues of assessments and graduation with Board Members Dodd, Johnson, and Fowler, as well as former Board Member McGervey. It is largely due to the courage of former Board Member A.J. Wagner, with whom I have also spoken and corresponded, that the Graduation Problem was even recognized.

This is significant. I am a teacher, an expert in my field if I may be so bold, and these individuals have been open to my input. I am reliant upon elected officials like many of these board members, who are willing to listen, and legitimately serve the interests of their constituents based upon the facts at hand.

Let it be said that I am fortunate enough to currently have representation in Columbus in both the House and Senate who value my opinion on education policy because of my experience as a teacher. None of these things that I have written is a slight on the quality of their service. It is, I believe, evidence of the importance of the policy shaping role of the State School Board. Furthermore, these things I have described here are proof of the importance of civic engagement in a democracy. House Bill 512 seeks to undermine this democratic spirit. It undermines my professional efforts as a teacher, and it undermines the potential success of my students.

Thank you for your consideration.

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