



Interested Party Testimony

House Bill 166 (Operating Budget FY 2020-2021)

Kevin Bacon, President & CEO

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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Kevin Bacon, and I am the President & CEO of School Choice Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 166. Specifically, I am here to speak to you on the proposed changes to the state report card.

In 2012, House Bill 555 was passed and enacted, creating the state report cards in place today. HB 555 phased-in the A to F accountability system for schools and created six component grades for each district and building. The goal of that legislation and the A to F system was to provide a clearer picture of the academic performance of Ohio's schools. The six component grades were created to show in more detail where schools are excelling, and where they need to improve. As this system was phased-in, concerns that too many schools were receiving low grades were raised over and over, and in response, the state passed "safe harbor" measures to provide schools with additional time to implement these accountability measures and prevent the state from using report card data to determine whether a school would be subject to any performance-based sanctions or penalties. The State Board of Education also reworked cut scores in an effort to address the concerns that there were too many low grades. The "safe harbor" provisions were supposed to be temporary.

Unfortunately, provisions have been added to the substitute bill for House Bill 166 that mirror the previously passed "safe harbor" provisions and greatly reduce accountability and arbitrarily raise a school's performance. Many of the proposed changes in HB 166 remove using both Performance Index and Value-added measures. The Performance Index (PI) is one of the measures used for the Achievement component, and it shows how well each student at a school is doing, based on state tests. The Value-added measure is used in the Progress component, and it is an evaluation of academic growth for all students. Performance Index is about how many

students have passed the test, whereas Value-added is about how much growth each student makes.

Using only one of these measures misses the full picture needed to evaluate whether our students are receiving the education they need. These proposed changes are a setback for our students and sets up an unclear picture for parents of their child's school. Rather than arbitrarily changing the accountability measures, the state needs to determine why scores on measures like PI and Value-added grades are low and take meaningful steps to help students improve and increase academic achievements.

Additionally, the proposed report card changes reinstate the prohibition of using this data to determine whether a school is subject to certain sanctions and penalties. One of these so-called sanctions is providing students at a low-performing school the option to use an EdChoice Scholarship. The EdChoice Scholarship is Ohio's performance-based scholarship, where students are only eligible if the public school they are assigned to or attending meets certain performance criteria. Providing students with the opportunity to choose to use an EdChoice Scholarship should not be listed as a sanction on schools because it's not a punishment. Thousands of Ohio families are using the EdChoice Scholarship because they know their children need a different learning environment, and limiting the availability of this option through these types of changes is harmful to these students.

Conclusion

As you move forward with the budget, I ask that you remove the provisions changing the report card because it is in the best interest of students to ensure that Ohio's accountability system is accurate. Often, arguments are made that the schools "need more time" before these measures will take effect. Students do not have any more time to give if they are not receiving the high-quality education they deserve. Now is not the time to pick and choose which report card measures should count or how grades will be reported and used. If there are needed changes to report cards, this ought to be done outside of the budget, in stand-alone legislation, to ensure that changes are in the best interest of Ohio students.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.