

Chair Blessing and members of the Committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony in support of HB239 - The Test Reduction Act. I urge you to support this important bill.

I am an 18-year educator and National Board Certified Teacher in the Columbus City School District. I have a job that I love as Library Media Specialist at Fort Hayes Arts and Academic High School.

I want to share with you today about the sheer amount of time, energy, and resources it takes to administer 7 End of Course exams and what it would mean in my school to get that time, energy, and those resources back by passing HB239.

My school spent over 12,000 minutes of testing in the fall and spring administrations. That's 200 hours. Imagine what we could do with 12,000 minutes...what if kids spend those minutes, those hours reading good books, writing poetry, practicing their instruments?

We need to remember what is really lost in this "whole testing universe." We lose more than just weeks of instructional time. In this current culture the year becomes the test and what is lost is an education, a lifetime of seeking and creating knowledge. For our most vulnerable students, what is lost cannot be regained when we drill test prep causes student to disengage from school and end up straight on the school-to-prison pipeline.

This past fall, one senior came to me and said, "I'm sorry I missed the math 2 test today, but I'm just going to get another 1 on it, and I need to pass English. I have an F because I haven't been there because I've been over here taking these tests." He had to retake all 7 tests. Just a reminder the committee, each test has 2 parts. Every second he spent in the library taking the AIR test were seconds that he missed instruction in classes he needed to graduate.

And he was right. Data shows that retaking the tests doesn't improve scores. The farther students are removed from the content, the harder the test becomes. Another reason to support HB 239 is to limit the number of retakes a student must take.

Our special education students, ELL, and 504 students and teachers tested for even more hours. One teacher told me she didn't see her IEP students for 11 straight days. These students get extended time. Currently, sophomores take 4 tests. Many of our students with special needs must retake tests that have not yet scored proficiency on. I want to tell you about a sophomore who had to take 6 end of course tests. She took her time and spent 6 entire school days in front of a screen taking a test in her non-native language. She wasn't the only one.

Another student speaks 4 languages, is at the top of her class and spent the morning of the test sobbing in her English teacher's arms.

Another student asked why she needed to take the English 2 test. She'd scored a 5 on English 1 and had demonstrated beyond proficiency.

It's not just the hours spent testing, it's the energy and human capital it takes to organize this many tests. My colleagues and I spent countless hours creating a testing schedule, trying to limit the disruption to instruction, printing hundreds of testing tickets, and learning how to ensure testing security. What if teachers spent those minutes planning and delivering engaging lessons, conferencing with students, communicating with parents and guardians?

For three fifteen-day windows in this school year, intervention specialists were pulled from their classrooms to administer the AIR end of course tests. This meant that their students had to receive instruction from other interventionists in our school.

Our school counselors' spent hours administering the tests; time that should be spent helping students through the college application process and through mental health crises. This year, college applications were down and mental health crises were up. It's hard to think about college when you don't have the "AIR points" you need to graduate.

Our school resource and security officers had to go get students who refused to leave their classrooms to come take the test.

On a personal note, the AIR test shut my library down for 9 weeks - 3 in the fall and 6 in the spring. I administered hundreds of tests this year. In September, I had 270 kids in my book club. Imagine: 270 kids signed up for a book club, but then imagine how it fell apart when we couldn't meet in the library or I had to give a test. Literacy should be my focus, not testing.

Our district is not a one to one technology district, so the test ties up our limited technology for all of these weeks further disrupting instruction and learning. HB239 will cut in half the time we take away from technology access.

The current testing regime is a literal nightmare that affects every single person working in schools across the state of Ohio.

Educator and author Chris Emdin says, "Energy is currency," and this bill will allow teachers and students to spend our precious energy on the things that really matter: teaching and learning.

Time is a finite resource, and this bill will give us precious hours back with our students ensuring that they achieve the high standards that we set for them.

The students with me today wrote and performed an award-winning poem titled, "Suffocating on AIR," and that title might seem like hyperbole, but it's not an exaggeration. These tests feel like a choke hold, they give us literal chest pains, and they cheat us out of time to teach and time to learn. Please help us pass HB 239, and give us our time, energy, and resources back.

Thank you.

Courtney F. Johnson