



Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for extending the invitation to submit written testimony to the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee. My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired public school teacher and president of *Public Education Partners*, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve.

The Board of *Public Education Partners* (PEP) believes that our elected leaders need to cut back on as many of the high-stakes testing mandates as possible to abolish the practice of punishing schools, teachers, families, and students for arbitrary test scores. We also feel that it's necessary to do away with the mandatory retention attached to the 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee and the high school end-of-course state tests.

Furthermore, the PEP Board believes that the test-and-punish philosophy presents a racial and economic bias that is beneficial to white middle/upper class students and is detrimental to second language students, impoverished students, and students of color. Research has shown that high-stakes test scores correlate more with socioeconomic status than student learning.

WHY does our state still overuse this imprecise measure of performance to reward and punish students and the public schools they attend?

Since the early 1990s, the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio General Assemblies seem to have depended heavily on edicts from Washington, philanthropic foundations, and anti-public education "think-tanks" for advice and direction in education issues.

The time has come to finally pay attention to the thoughtful input of thousands of educators, parents, community members, and other school stakeholders.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act, asked Ohio and other states to clearly articulate how they would use federal funds to ensure that schools educate every student. According to the Ohio Department of Education's website, "passed with bipartisan support, ESSA represented a shift from broad federal oversight of primary and secondary education to *greater flexibility and decision making* at the state and local levels. Ohio is committed to involving educators, parents and other stakeholders as we explore new ways to ensure that all our students receive the education they need for bright futures."

In 2016, the Ohio Department of Education, Philanthropy Ohio, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute presented a series of regional meetings across Ohio to “share thoughts and perspectives on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Ohio’s developing state plan. Each meeting was billed as “an exciting opportunity to gather valuable input from various perspectives from local educators, funders, parents, students and community members.” In an effort to reach out to more Ohioans, ODE also created an online survey to get feedback on focus areas within ESSA, including accountability measures.

Members of the PEP Board attended the regional meetings and participated in the Ohio Department of Education’s online survey, because we honestly believed that ODE was “actively engaging with stakeholders, school leaders, teachers and parents as the department worked to develop the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan.”

**The massive amount of feedback from the statewide ESSA stakeholder meetings and the ODE online survey (11,287 responses from Ohio’s 88 counties) was overwhelmingly in support of less state-mandated testing and less test-based accountability.**

Philanthropy Ohio, the organization asked to make sense of the input from stakeholders even reported that, **“All sectors of the community—parents, families, teachers, administrators and community members—raised concerns about the assessments.”**

PEP believes that if national standardized testing is to continue, testing in Ohio should be limited to the federal minimum guidelines, and there should be no state standardized tests beyond those mandated by ESSA.

The Board of Public Education Partners fully supports the Testing Reduction Act, House Bill 239, because it will reduce state-mandated standardized tests to the federal minimums. The bill has other important testing changes that would provide more accountability on the time spent on state and district testing in Ohio’s schools. We commend the lawmakers who created HB 239 by discounting the advice of the anti-public education think-tanks and decisively paying attention to the thoughtful input of thousands of Ohioans involved in forming the state’s ESSA plan.

Please listen to your constituents, esteemed Legislators. It’s time for the Buckeye State to end its test-and-punish philosophy, and replace it with an ideology of school district investment and improvement. Say YES to HB 239.

Jeanne Melvin  
Public Education Partners

