

Good evening – Chair Blessing, Vice chair Jones, Ranking member Robinson and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today regarding the bill to develop health standards for Ohio K-12 students. My name is Kara Morgan, and I am a former appointed member of the Ohio State Board of Education. I am currently a research scientist and lecturer at the Ohio State University. My background is in quantitative policy analysis, and my general area of work is in decision analysis in the public sector. I worked in the federal government in Washington, D.C. for a public health agency for 11 years as a senior advisor on risk analysis. I'm here testifying today to help provide an understanding of the role that standards play in K-12 education, and how they work in Ohio.

I have two main points to make. First, the use of standards is a great help to districts, as I will explain. Second, Ohio uses a stakeholder-driven process for standard development which includes educators and parents, so the decisions about the standards are made using that input.

To start to understand the role of standards, we first need to understand that, in Ohio, local districts have responsibility for developing curriculum for their students. As a local-control state, having this role delegated to the local school boards allows for the curriculum to be tailored to meet the needs of each district. Local school boards are close to the community and parents and are in a position to solicit local-level input on what will be taught in their schools. State-level standards provide information to inform these decisions. Specifically, they help local school boards understand the full set of information that each area includes, that is, the full list of topics that could be part of a course in language arts, mathematics, geography, history, etc. The standards also provide reasonable age-based expectations, based on research, so that the districts do not need to go out and gather that information themselves. The state-level standards are an important resource to address inequities that may exist in the level of expertise a district has in any content area. Having the state-level standards ensures that information access about these content areas is consistent across the state.

To help illustrate the value of this, I'd like to share an example from my experience. I teach an undergraduate class on decision making in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at Ohio State. Although there are 50 years of research that have built a large set of knowledge about decision science, there are no college-level standards for what undergraduates should know about decision making. So, to develop the syllabus, I had to search on-line for existing examples of courses that had been taught and for which syllabi had been posted on line. There were at least 10 that I found, all at different universities and in different departments. Each was very different; some emphasized only one area of decision making research. Some provided a broader view, but included topics that were not relevant for my students. Some were extremely analytical and model based. I had to decide which parts I would include in my course, and I had to make sure it all fit together into a cohesive set of knowledge for the students. I would have very much appreciated having a set of standards that had been vetted by other decision science educators as a guide to work from. That would have given me confidence that I was not leaving anything important out inadvertently. It would have given me a strong base to start from, to adapt for my students' needs. This is what standards do. Without that, I am certain that a student taking a decision making class at another university in Ohio will be exposed to a different set of knowledge and skills than my class does. In sum, having state-level standards for K-12 provides the opportunity for alignment, so that a class being taught in District A can cover the same content as that

class being taught in District Z, and takes the burden off the district to gather and synthesize all of that information.

In addition, the development of standards at the state level is followed by the development of a model curricula aligned with those standards. The district is able to use those to develop or adapt them for their curricula. These are not a requirement, but are a resource. This is a great help to the districts because they do not have to monitor all the changes in these areas and make updates to keep the curricula current. The standards provide a road map for the curricula that the districts adopt. Without standards, the curricula may not be coherent or comprehensive, creating possible equity concerns. There is a long list of subjects that must have curricula developed by each district. The burden of approving a curriculum for each of these topics for each of the grades falls to the local school board; having the standards as a guide and the model curricula as an example provides the local districts with a strong starting point to develop their own curricula.

My second point is about how the standards are developed and updated. One of the things I have been most impressed by at ODE is the process that has been established for developing and updating standards. It is a stakeholder driven process. Educators from around the state are invited to volunteer for the standard review advisory group in a particular area. There is a very structured process of going through the standards and considering needed changes. Further, the general public, including parents has an opportunity to engage at this early stage. Each time the Department begins a review of standards, they ask for public feedback through a survey to guide the work. The members of the standard review advisory group consider that input very seriously. Then, once the advisory group has finished its work and the process is completed, the Department again asks for public comment on proposed changes. The Department summarizes these comments for the SBOE before they make their final decision, so they have that public input as part of their decision process.

In sum, state-level standards are a valuable tool for the districts in developing their curriculum. They reduce the burden on the districts and help address inequities across districts. Further, the way that Ohio develops and updates standards provides the maximum amount of input from stakeholders across the state. The process provides meaningful opportunities for parents and communities to engage, first as part of the standard development process, and next as a part of their local district's decision making about what to include in their curriculum.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide you with this information to clarify your understanding of the important role that standards can play in education.