

## HB 239 Proponent Testimony: Tina Allen

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tina Allen. I am a fourth-grade teacher in Columbus City Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 239, the Testing Reduction Act.

One of the most devastating and heartbreaking days of my teaching occurred when one day, unexpectedly, one of my students silently put her head down on her desk. Upset with her score on a state-mandated middle-of-the-year test, she began to cry.

She had begun the new school year on the heels of attending summer school because she was unsuccessful in passing the high-stakes Third-Grade Reading Guarantee the year before.

She had been traumatized by testing. I had seen that expression before. I've discussed it with other educators as well as have seen it in other students equally traumatized by the testing process.

As the tears ran down her face, I was speechless and felt disgusted inside.

"What had I done?" I asked of myself.

Recognizing she had at least two more standardized tests on the horizon as well as I-Ready assessments, reading assessments, and progress monitoring, I then asked myself, "How can I help her through this?"

It made me realize that unknowingly, I, too, had been traumatized. I was becoming too concerned about "what they needed to know to pass the test" versus "what are they are learning."

I joined this profession to change lives, to educate, motivate and inspire. High-stakes testing almost took that away from me.

The tears of a fourth grader reminded me what is important.

I have witnessed the negative impact of over testing on students. Some students enter my classroom already traumatized by the 3rd grade reading guarantee (high stakes test). Some students are becoming ill and their ability to focus on learning is distracted. I have also received a phone call from a parent talking about their child's anxiety around testing time. I have also talked to parents who have said, "my child use to love school and reading before 3rd grade." Testing have taken the fun out of learning. High stake test takes away from learning and creates anxiety for staff as well. So much is riding on school report cards that we are made to focus on the tests even when it goes against our instincts as educators.

The focus should be on formative assessments and providing support through intervention during the school year to help students build skills. Teaching to test, do not work! I learned the hard way. It was one of my worst year as a teacher. I've learned that strong instructional approach, such as teaching clarity works, small group instruction works, parent engagement works, teacher collaboration works. I had the best MOY testing scores in my building this year, I switched to teaching and building skills, and away from spending months and months on test preparation (which this is how much time is typically taking away from test prep). Reduce testing, so we can spend more time educating.

One of the important aspects of HB 239 is that it forms workgroups in each district to look at the testing load on students. A major complaint of teachers and parents is the amount of time spent on testing. HB 239 gives teachers and parents a seat at the table along with administrators examine what the testing load is, how the data is used, how much the testing costs. Then the group can make informed recommendations to the board of education about how to reduce testing at the local level. Local decision making is maintained but it gives educators and parents more of a voice in making decisions about what we care about the most. Are our students learning? How can we best help them succeed?

I urge members of the committee to support this bill.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. Thank you all for your time and work on this issue.