

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: May 17, 2020
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Are you representing: Yourself Organization
Organization (If Applicable): N/A
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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): House Bill 239
Specific Issue: Testing Reduction

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Written Testimony attached.

Please provide a brief statement on your position: House Bill 239 is the logical reversal of a failed experiment in excessive standardized testing, and the most common sense piece of education policy that I have ever seen.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Committee Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of House Bill 239, The Testing Reduction Act.

As an American History teacher for over twenty years at Elyria High School, I believe, as do the majority of education stakeholders in Ohio, that standardized assessments administered in the state are excessive and intrusive, and their minimization is a long time coming.

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind at the federal level in 2001, the volume of standardized tests has increased dramatically and had no impact on student achievement. Over that time period, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas, have stagnated. SAT scores declined between 2006 and 2014, and ACT scores have been flat. There is absolutely no data in existence that suggests that standardized tests increase student achievement, college or career readiness, or any other positive outcome in a child's education.

When the federal law changed from No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Ohio Department of Education sought stakeholder input on the future of education in Ohio. They conducted surveys and held a series of forums statewide to collect data on how to move forward. When the ESSA stakeholder report was made public in late 2016, recommendations were dominated by "complaints of excessive testing." Unfortunately, ODE & Superintendent DeMaria did not call for a reduction in testing as a part of the state's ESSA Plan submitted to the federal government. After public outcry, the Superintendent agreed to form the Assessment Advisory Committee, made up of educational experts and leaders from around the state, to study and make recommendations on how to reduce testing. The Committee presented its recommendations to the State School Board in June of 2017. Among the tests they recommended for elimination were those originally included in House Bill 239: American History, American Government, one High School Math, one High School ELA, and the ACT/SAT requirement. One High School ELA and the High School Geometry test have since been eliminated by the revision in the graduation requirement crafted by the business lobby group Ohio Excels. At the time of the report, Mr. DeMaria ignored the bulk of the recommendations from his own Committee, ignored stakeholder input ODE had compiled, and only eliminated Social Studies assessments at the 4th and 6th grade levels, which were also included in the Committee recommendations.

Among his campaign promises, Governor DeWine stated that his administration would “reduce the number of tests that students are required to take.” House Bill 239 would effectively remedy the chief concern of education stakeholders in Ohio, follow the recommendations of educational experts and leaders in the state, and satisfy the Governor’s promise to his youngest constituents.

The test reduction that would result from House Bill 239 would make a child’s education more relevant, creative, and rewarding for all of those involved. Teaching, as I do, in an urban high school of approximately 2000 students, more than half of which are considered economically disadvantaged, means that success on standardized assessments is not guaranteed. Where some districts need not think about, or even mention state testing, in urban schools like ours, the assessments drive everything within the school year.

Superintendent DeMaria likes to discuss the idea that student learning is “jagged,” meaning students learn at different rates, have different interests, and different areas of expertise. A system focused on standardization does not make any sense within the reality he describes. There is, quite simply, no time for divergent thinking, creativity, or the pursuit of areas of interest, when the curriculum must be narrowed for the sake of assessments.

The intrusive nature of the system cannot be understated. While curriculum is criminally narrowed in the core classes, our entire school feels the impact during testing seasons. Counselors become test administrators for weeks at a time and are unavailable to students in need. Our small gym, computer labs, maker space, and classrooms become testing rooms. Technology becomes essentially unavailable for a month or more. Entire school days are devoted to testing, and when they are not, students are being pulled from classes in order to complete assessments. Reasonable teachers scale back academic activity during the testing season to optimize student effort and ability on assessments, and to avoid student burnout.

The rationale for Ohio’s excessive assessment system has been to assure that students are “career and college ready.” ODE repeated this like a mantra as if simple repetition would make it true. No data exists to prove their claim. No college references Ohio standardized test scores for the sake of admission or placement, and no employer uses these scores as a contingency in their hiring practices. Even the ACT is negligible in its function. Many colleges are abandoning the use of assessments like the ACT for admission, and it has been long accepted (including a 2014 study by the University of Chicago) that Grade Point Average is the “strongest indicator of college readiness” and is “much more predictive of college graduation

than any test score.” This information supports House Bill 239’s reduction of state assessments to federal minimums, as well as the elimination of the mandate for the ACT/SAT with parental consent. We have been told that forcing all high school students to take the ACT might encourage some students to attend college who may be unaware that they are capable. If their capability to graduate from college is best predicted by their high school grades, as the research indicates, then mandating the ACT is unnecessary, and quite frankly often inappropriate. In my experience, this assessment is being forced upon segments of the population who have no business attempting it based on their academic abilities.

It seems to me that if we were really interested in assuring that students were preparing for college or career, then we would facilitate an educational environment that does just that. In dramatically limiting standardized tests, House Bill 239 will promote “jagged” learning, differentiation, and student exploration. It will make available the facilities, faculty, and resources that are being monopolized by the administration of state tests. It will free up counselors to counsel, to assist students in exploring the possibilities that exist for them as they move forward in their lives.

I have heard critics of test reduction lament the loss of data from these standardized tests. Others believe that without the tests, students will not take these courses seriously. First, any data that educators receive from ODE related to these assessments is negligible. It arrives after students have left the class, and even if it arrived earlier it is far less informative than the summative and formative assessments being administered by professional educators like myself. As for the second concern... students do not take my American History class seriously because there is a state test attached to it. They take the course seriously because this is the environment in which the course is taught, because they are students who approach their work with consideration, and because I am a professional educator who brings to the classroom a sense of seriousness, relevance, and enthusiasm regarding the subject that I teach.

Based on current language in the O.R.C., at the high school level, students in the classes of 2020-2022 take 7 assessments for the state’s Graduation Requirement. Even under the recently revised requirement, students in the class of 2023 and beyond will take 5 assessments. ELA tests are frequently administered in two separate sessions due to the complexity and length of reading and writing prompts.

This means a given student will sit through 6-8 testing sessions even before they are asked to retake any assessments where the scores are not high enough. They also are currently required

to take the ACT at least once. They may take an assessment to qualify for CCP classes. They may take the ASVAB for military service, English language tests, or professional assessments related to their vocational pursuit. The volume of mandated and potential assessment is absurd. House Bill 239 brings the mandated assessments to federal minimums and requires districts to convene committees of stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and parents to analyze and report out the level of district specific testing that occurs.

When I first saw the information regarding HB 239, The Testing Reduction Act, I thought to myself, this is the most common sense piece of educational policy that I have ever seen. It is the logical reversal of a failed experiment in excessive standardized testing. The bill recognizes the input of stakeholders statewide, educational experts and leaders, and is in harmony with Governor DeWine's vision for education in Ohio. Furthermore, the actions taken through this legislation are supported by the research, and begin to bring ownership of the educational experience back where it belongs, with the students. Once again, there is absolutely no evidence that suggests that standardized assessments increase student achievement, college or career readiness, or any other positive outcome in a child's education.

Please consider supporting this bill, and thank you, again, for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony.

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