



## **The Ohio School Counselor Association**

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Proponent Testimony on SB 358  
Michelle Grimm, President  
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Ohio School Counselor Association (OSCA)'s perspective on Senate Bill 358. My name is Michelle Grimm and I serve as OSCA's President.

We would like to start out by thanking the sponsors for their attention to schools' ongoing need for flexibility as we start this unprecedented 2020-2021 school year. To that end, OSCA appreciates the intent behind SB 358 - to help schools, students and staff across Ohio respond to the extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in.

In particular, we'd like to express our support for the provisions of the bill that require ODE to request a waiver from the U.S. Dept. of Education for federal testing. For several reasons, this is not the time to be focused on testing our students. In general, tests are not always a great measure of knowledge due to cultural biases that often impact the writing of the tests. Application of what is learned is much more important for students than regurgitating memorized facts. Second, in teaching to high-stakes tests, we often don't reach the depth on various issues that more fully enable kids to understand concepts and apply standards. Third, with months of learning missed due to building closures last school year, we feel students', teachers' and staff's time would be much better spent attempting to get caught up on material missed last year. Testing requires hours upon hours of school counselors' time managing the process and tracking the results. In normal circumstances, this time commitment is not the best use of our master's degree level of expertise; but especially now, we should instead be focused on making sure we are meeting our students' escalating needs in our three domain areas: social/emotional, academic and career development. Fourth, with students' anxiety levels at unprecedented levels and mental health issues increasing due to extended time at home in sometimes adverse circumstances, adding high-stakes testing to the mix creates an additional source of anxiety that we predict will cause further mental health spirals and likely lead to lower performance on these tests. We have trusted educators that are specialists in the content in which they are teaching; OSCA's view is that we should trust these licensed professionals to follow their standards in teaching students and allow them to apply what they have learned. If this committee feels that diagnostic measurements are needed, schools could rely on other skills assessments like MAP or WorkKeys.

In addition, although this may not be a topic for today's consideration, OSCA believes that schools could potentially repurpose money that would otherwise be spent on high-stakes testing to support resources like school counselors. Our jobs are often the first to go when budget cuts

hit, despite the fact that the need for school counselors has never been greater than in current circumstances where students are trying to navigate drastic changes to their academic and social/emotional normal. As many of you likely know, reports of abuse and neglect were down almost 50% in the first few months of the pandemic when students went home. In our role as educational “first responders” of sorts, school counselors are often one of the primary reporters of abuse or neglect. Unfortunately, students in Ohio already have a serious lack of access to school counselors. Based on ODE data, the average student-to-school counselor ratio in Ohio is an abysmal 453:1, far above the recommended 250:1 ratio. Imagine having to manage the social/emotional, academic and career needs of 453 students on a daily basis, and being just one person. It is a job that we love and are deeply committed to, but it is not easy. Dedicating resources to get school counselors closer to the 250:1 ratio would ensure that we can do more intentional and preventative work to collaborate with other community resources and build partnerships with families and communities to support students.

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee: thank you again for your consideration of SB 358, which OSCA believes is an essential piece of legislation that will provide schools, staff and students the flexibility we need as we move further into this school year. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.