



Thank you, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony today on some of the education provisions in HB 166.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C. Our Dayton office is also an Ohio charter school sponsor.

Fordham believes that public education plays a critical role in helping every student to reach his or her potential. And we support efforts that ensure all students have opportunities to attend high-quality schools and exit high school with the knowledge and skills necessary for college, career, or military service.

There are a variety of provisions either in HB 166 or being debated that I will address.

Graduation requirements

In Ohio, we've long recognized that a high-school diploma shouldn't be a participation trophy but rather a credential awarded after young people demonstrate readiness to take their next step in life. For decades, Ohio has required students to meet course requirements and pass state exams to graduate. But upon concerns about the Ohio Graduation Tests' lack of rigor, the state moved to new standards that now ask young people to meet more stringent benchmarks on state exams, earn a college-ready ACT or SAT score, or earn industry recognized credentials.

These requirements have been strongly contested and alternative routes have been offered to the classes of 2018 to 2020. We have vigorously opposed lower-level options. Young people who graduate based on weak alternatives are harmed when they exit high school lacking the skills needed for lifelong success. Throughout this debate, however, we've recognized the potential need to modify the original plan in light of present realities. And we've said that students struggling to meet readiness standards deserve the time and supports needed to reach that goal.

With the long-term graduation requirements for the classes of 2021 and beyond still in question, we support the proposal of Ohio Excels, a nonprofit coalition of Ohio business leaders, and the Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE), a group representing seventy-four school districts.

Briefly, the proposal works like this. Students must demonstrate competency on the state's Algebra I and English II end-of-course exams. If, after receiving remedial supports and retaking these exams, they haven't met the competency targets, students may earn diplomas based on satisfying military enlistment requirements or meeting career-and-technical requirements that include either earning industry credentials, completing an apprenticeship, or passing state exams linked to technical courses.

Continuing current practice, all students must meet the state’s course requirements but the proposal also adds requirements that students earn seals based on non-academic skills.

Taken together, the Ohio Excels and Alliance’s proposal is a strong one. It assures us that students graduate with a solid academic foundation in English and math, are ready to join the military, or have the technical skills and experiences they need to embark on rewarding careers. We therefore recommend that the Ohio Excels and Alliance’s proposal be adopted as the state’s permanent graduation requirements.

School report cards

HB 166 would make the overall grade of a school (applies to districts, too) the higher of the performance index or the value added measure. This would result in a dramatic increase in grades in more than 200 schools around the state. At the same time, the letter grades for more than 200 other schools would decrease because of the change. Ohio families and taxpayers deserve a view of overall school quality that considers both student achievement and growth over time, not one or the other. We urge the Senate to remove this poorly vetted provision added in the House.

Nevertheless, we know Ohio report cards have come under fire in recent years and believe they can be improved. In a report released in December 2017,¹ we outlined several careful changes that would result in a fairer, more streamlined report card. The key changes we recommend include:

- Reduce the number of A–F school ratings from fifteen to just six and maintain a single overall letter grade to create a clear summary of overall school quality. The remaining components would include the following: 1) Achievement—based on the performance index score; 2) Progress—based on the overall value added score; 3) Graduation—based on the four-year rate; 4) Equity—based on the performance index and value added scores of subgroups; and 5) Prepared for Success—based on its current structure, which includes measures such as ACT/SAT and AP scores.
- Restructure the Gap Closing component and rename it “Equity.” Because it tracks subgroup performance (for instance, low-income students), the current Gap Closing component serves an important purpose. We suggest simplifying the component to clearly show whether each subgroup meets state achievement and growth targets, including subgroups like gifted children that typically achieve at higher levels.
- Create a better balance between achievement and growth measures in the overall rating. Achievement and growth measures provide different, complementary views of school quality—and both should contribute to the overall rating. By placing greater emphasis on growth measures, which aren’t linked to demographics, high-poverty schools would be treated more evenhandedly. A high-poverty school successfully helping students who enter behind would never be deemed a failure under this system.

¹ <https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/research/back-basics-plan-simplify-and-balance-ohios-school-report-cards>

We agree that there is room to improve school report cards. But the revisions need to be undertaken carefully, with transparency to Ohio families and taxpayers first in mind. We believe our recommendations would move Ohio toward a simpler, clearer, and fairer report card.

EdChoice Income-Based Expansion

Low-income students continue to have the fewest options when it comes to finding the right school. We support the continued expansion of this private school choice opportunity. Importantly, the demand for the EdChoice Income-Based scholarship has outstripped available funding the last couple of years. We support the state taking steps to ensure these students—all low-income—are subjected to lotteries and waiting lists.

Charter Schools

Since House Bill 2 reformed Ohio's charter school laws, the General Assembly has trod very carefully on the issue and hasn't made many changes. This pause in legislative action has given us time to identify some areas where changes are merited. HB 166 tackles some of those issues. While we are supportive of some of the changes, others could materially weaken charter school accountability just as the sector is showing signs of improvement.

Here are some of the provisions we believe are significant:

- Maintains the governor's proposal to provide additional resources to the state's best charter schools. This is vital given the well-documented, financial inequities faced by charter schools in Ohio. Although we continue to believe that all charters should receive increased funding, this is a big step forward. Importantly, driving additional dollars to top performers not only rewards and strengthens Ohio's top-performing charters but also creates an incentive for other schools to improve.
- The House sub-bill included language (before it was deleted in the House omnibus) that required e-schools to create an individual learning plan for each student, develop a process for notifying parents when students aren't participating, and eventually disenroll students that are not engaged. Given Ohio's recent experiences, we think these are smart, sensible changes and would urge the Senate to include these changes.
- Charter school sponsors receiving an effective rating for three consecutive years will need to go through the evaluation process only once every five years instead of annually. The sponsor evaluation process is incredibly laborious, and it makes sense not to require it every year. However, five years could be too long between evaluations. In addition, consideration should be given to requiring the calculation of the academic component every year and giving the sponsor a new rating if it receives an F on the academic performance measure.
- Dropout recovery school report cards would be put on hold until ODE does a report and the General Assembly acts on the department's recommendations. If the legislature doesn't act, this essentially ends report cards for dropout recovery schools. That would be a bad but predictable result of the current wording in HB 166.

- Charter sponsors under the bill would only have to provide opening assurances in a school's first year or when it changed locations. Currently, operating assurances provide an important annual accountability check on things like teacher licensure and background checks, special education plans, minimum enrollment and other non-building related issues.
- When Ohio's charter school automatic closure law was created it typically identified a handful of the very lowest performing schools each year. Without modifications, it could close many more in future years. We support the move to require three consecutive years of low performance instead of two out of three years.
- Similar to some of the report card changes, if ODE doesn't assign sponsor ratings by November 15 then every sponsor would receive a rating of effective or higher. We think this is bad policy and should be removed.
- Periodically, charter schools merge operations and become one. While we aren't opposed to this practice, it shouldn't be undertaken solely as a move to avoid charter school accountability provisions. The budget language appears designed to try to prevent that. To the extent it's as narrowly drafted as possible, we support that effort.

In recent years, Ohio has undertaken major reforms aimed at improving the readiness of students for college and careers. With some course corrections, Ohio can continue to build momentum towards its goal of having all young people graduate fully ready to tackle the challenges of tomorrow. If we reverse course, our students—especially the most disadvantaged—will suffer most.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.