Testimony to House Education
March 11, 2015
The Ohio 8 Coalition

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Chairman Hayes, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education Committee, on behalf of The Ohio 8 Coalition we appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony related to House Bill 74. It is The Ohio 8 Coalition's goal to provide a unified school administrator and Union President perspective on House Bill 74.

While we understand that this legislation, and the testing conversation in general, covers many topics, it is The Ohio 8 Coalition's goal to provide recommendations specifically related to the following:

- Student learning objectives (SLOs);
- The fall administration of the third grade reading assessment;
- State mandated testing limits;
- High-stakes testing strategy development; and
- Practitioner feedback.

Student Learning Objectives

Our districts have invested significant time, energy, and resources to support SLOs and as such it is our recommendation that SLOs be maintained in their current framework. We also recommend that any proposed changes to the teacher evaluation framework be transparent and accessible to all stakeholders.

Although not perfect, it is the system we have been working with for just one full school year and we believe that there should be a consistent system in place to avoid policy that is an ongoing moving target. **The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that prior to making any changes to SLOs or teacher evaluations more broadly, a policy should be developed, proposed, vetted by practitioners (including those from The Ohio 8 Coalition), and then implemented over time to allow acclimation at the administration and building levels.**

Additionally, The Ohio 8 Coalition is concerned that section 6, as proposed in HB 74, may prevent or make it difficult for educators, administrators, and policymakers to engage in the decision-making process related to the revisions of the teacher evaluation framework. Therefore, The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that **Section 6 of HB 74 be revised to require the**

Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to review and make recommendations to the General Assembly related to the framework for evaluating teachers (rather than simply reviewing and revising).

Fall Administration of the Third Grade Reading Assessment

The Ohio 8 Coalition would like to maintain the fall administration of the third grade reading assessment. This fall benchmarking opportunity is critical to The Ohio 8 districts from an administrative, educator, parent, and student perspective.

Maintaining the fall administration of the assessment ensures that school district administrators and educators have the ability to guide and tailor instruction to the unique needs of their students from the beginning of the school year. In addition, the fall assessment provides a baseline allowing for a true apples-to-apples comparison between the fall and spring assessment. As a teacher, this allows for a clear and defined trajectory to be established for that student at the beginning of the year instead of waiting until the spring assessment.

In addition to the benefits gained for students, the fall administration of the third grade reading assessment provides a unique opportunity for robust engagement among the teacher, parent, and child early on in the school year. It establishes an expectation among all parties from the start and allows for ongoing communication related to that initial assessment for the balance of the school year. It also allows us to engage the broader community on the relevance and critical nature of not only the assessment but progress and outcomes related to it. All Ohio 8 districts have seen gains in their 3rd grade reading results. There is certainly more work to be done, but at this juncture, the community has an expectation that we will improve year after year and an apples-to-apples comparison between fall and spring will help support community, parent, teacher and student engagements.

While it is our understanding that HB 74 would not prohibit districts from administering the third grade reading assessment in the fall, we are concerned that the language is not specific enough as to require ODE to make the assessment available. Therefore, **The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that the language in the bill be revised to include a requirement that ODE must make the assessment available to school districts wishing to administer the fall assessment.**

State Mandated Testing Caps

While The Ohio 8 Coalition appreciates that the testing limits in HB 74 apply only to state mandated tests, we are concerned that the hour limitations may not be appropriate for all students in all schools and would be curious to understand the research-based rationale supporting the proposal. The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that testing caps and limitations should be based on what best supports the needs of students, schools, and teachers.

We believe that every classroom learning moment prepares students for success and such success will be measured through assessments. As a result, it is critical that testing limits be developed in a meaningful way.

Our districts certainly want to limit time used for testing and preparation in order to provide as much classroom instruction as possible, but we also believe that some students simply need additional time and want the local flexibility to do what is best for those students. **We know that students with exceptional needs and limited English proficient students are held outside the testing limits, but we request additional flexibility for those students who are typically developing but just might need a little extra time.**

High-Stakes Testing Strategy Development

The Ohio 8 Coalition encourages this committee to elevate the statewide conversations related to high-stakes testing by establishing an advisory commission or taskforce that includes practitioners from rural, urban, and suburban school districts. We recommend that this commission work to develop a statewide framework that helps Ohio to do all of the following:

- Address why and how we use high-stakes testing;
- Review the process for issuing RFPs related to state assessments and the use of multistate consortia;
- Allow flexibility for districts to monitor and measure student growth in a strategic manner through local assessments;
- Maintain accountability for teacher performance;
- Establish consistent requirements across the state (based on what needs to be assessed, not a percentage of the school district's calendar); and
- Consider the total testing burden from the lens of the testing schedule not just the overall quantity.

Practitioner Feedback

While ODE and the State Board of Education work to engage stakeholders, The Ohio 8 Coalition believes that there is greater opportunity for input from practitioners and stakeholders across the state. As a result, The Ohio 8 Coalition encourages you to formally require that ODE provide greater opportunities for administrators and practitioners to provide meaningful feedback as they develop policies. **The Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that when legislation (HB 74 or any other) requires ODE or the State Board of Education to finalize policies, standards, etc. that ODE be required to formally engage teachers and superintendents from Ohio's rural, urban (including members of The Ohio 8 Coalition), and suburban school districts, and in addition, to further provide at least 60 days for public input both online and in person.**

We thank you for the opportunity to share these recommendations and look forward to continuing to help in any way we can as you work on this legislation.

The Ohio 8 is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition's mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to help shape state education policy.