Testimony on HB74

March 16, 2015

My name is Stephanie Adams. I am a mother of 4 from Ashtabula County . Thank you for allowing me to lend my voice to the many who have expressed great concern over the pervasive high stakes testing culture. I regret my inability to be in attendance, but my personal schedule would not allow it.

These are my children. It is my responsibility to protect them. The state doesn't know them, nor do they seem to realize how detrimental their mandates are. I am to care for my WHOLE child. Not simply the academic or profitable parts. In the end, I have to answer for the decisions that I made and the parent that I was. I need to teach my children to not simply comply, but to make a stand for what is right. Our government should be for the people and by the people. It seems as though it is for the corporation and by the corporation. Education should not be run on a business model where children are acquisitions and the bottom line is profit.

Allow me to share with you my stance on testing.

I used to only think in terms of my daughter. She was my oldest, and the only one of my children old enough to be subject to testing. She always tested well, or well enough for a child who was always told to just get in there and do it, and then it's done, and it doesn't at all reflect where you're at or who you are. It only determines how well you test under duress. That had always been my feeling regarding testing.

I then had 3 more beautiful children, and they were all growing into unique and incredible individuals. As they grew, I began to see beauty in their strengths and weakness. My world was no longer one-child dimensional, and my eyes began to open. Then Ohio passed the 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee, common core hit, and testing increased 2 and 3 fold. Data became a priority, and big corporate money began to funnel into public education. That sent up too many red flags to even list. Recess was being taken away for test prep, because there aren't enough days in a school year to prep for tests and have recess. I began to hear more and more about numbers, scores, data, and less and less about humanity in schools. There is zero transparency-none are permitted to see the tests and the cut-scores are determined by the testing company AFTER the completed tests are returned. There is zero accountability. The data is too easily manipulated by the testing companies and the ODE. It is these scores that are being used to determine a teacher's value, which is ridiculous and crazy. It no longer matters that he/she gives hugs willingly, will buy a cold child a coat, sees that a child is never without lunch or snack, holds their hand, sings with them, calls them her "darlings", keeps every single special note they are given, proclaims them all artist extraordinaires, or gives them each a little piece of himself every single day. If your child doesn't test well, their teacher's value declines.

If your child doesn't test well, their own value declines. It no longer matters that they stand up to bullies, take care of their younger sisters after school, offer a friend their gloves, tell them they look pretty, hold their hand, or color special pictures for them.

The 3rd Grade Guarantee...It no longer matters that you started out the year struggling, but have made such unbelievable progress. It doesn't matter that your teacher has built up your confidence, and that you once again have dreams-she tells you that you can be anything that you want to. It doesn't matter that you can read at a 4th grade level, but don't test well. Your grades, your teacher's thoughts and opinions, your effort, your progress, your hopes, dreams, and aspirations...none of it matters. The test is all that matters, and children with special needs are no exception. It is an oft-ignored truth that children from affluent zip codes score better than those from poverty-stricken zip codes.

We have lost sight of the children if we think it is ok to put the same pressure on an 8 or 9 year old, as we put on a 16 or 17 year old. These are babies, and when they are no longer babies, I want them to remember that they were children once. I want them to recall fondly a childhood of laughter and abandon, and devoid of labels, high stakes testing, and scores that define them.

While my oldest son and my oldest daughter, will likely always test proficient, I no longer fight for just them. I fight for every child. Every child is mine, is ours, and it is no longer alright for me to see the world as one-child dimensional. Though it may not seem like we are immediately gaining back the instructional time that would have been lost to testing, we are not feeding the machine. As long as I choose to let one of my children test, based on them testing well, I am doing a disservice to all children who cannot. When enough of us put our pencils (or mice) down, we can stop this for ALL children. I don't just fight for my child; I fight for yours, as well.

When we win this fight, when we speak loud enough for them to hear, when we stand together, when we are the voice of the voiceless, when we accept nothing less...things will change. Then we will gain our instructional time back. We will regain the value of humanity, and our children will be able to remember fondly that they once had a childhood.

I urge you to do more. I urge you to revisit issues that you have overlooked. I urge you to consider the value of the WHOLE child, and to restore the value of humanity to our classrooms.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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