

Andy Thompson
95th Ohio House District

Finance
Energy and Natural Resources
Agriculture and Rural Development

Chair: Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Development and Natural Resources



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Ohio General Assembly
Ohio House of Representatives
Representative Andy Thompson

May 15, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee: I am pleased today to offer sponsor testimony for Ohio House Bill 176. This is not my first rodeo when it comes to Ohio's Learning Standards, its multitude of tests, its abundance of data collection, and its virtual absence of any semblance of local control. Taming this beast may actually require a matador, but I assure you you won't find any bull in my testimony!

House Bill 176 seeks to change the status quo, the learning conundrum that confronts the students, parents, teachers and administrators of Ohio's schools. House Bill 176 is the epitome of a grassroots-driven, bottom up response to the top down, federally-driven mess that we have now.

I won't catalogue all of the grievances that I've encountered since I first undertook the mission to change our system starting in 2013; sincerely, the patience of students, teachers, parents and many concerned citizens has been exhausted. Common Core math is a mess; English has its own problems; testing in Ohio far exceeds any federal mandates, and our ranking nationally has plummeted from 5th in 2010 to 23rd in 2017. Ladies and Gentlemen, what we have is not working and we must seek a solution. We are more than 5 years into our latest 5-year plan and we must correct course.

We know that greatest factor in each student's success is the quality of that student's teachers. Not every teacher is excellent, but our current approach limits severely teachers' ability to do their best, because the demands of testing and the linkage of test results to teachers' evaluations create a climate that is at best stressful, and at worst intolerable. Many good teachers are fleeing the profession, recognizing that the current system is not what they had in mind when they took up their calling. Some potentially great teachers are declining to sign up because of similar concerns. We can do better, and we can start that mission by returning local control to our districts across the state.

Given the unique nature of each school, each district and each state, it would be prudent to embrace the idea that flexibility should be provided, so that each district can find an educational path that is suitable to the needs of their students, parents and teachers. One caveat: We must hold each group accountable. We will have excellent, proven state standards under this bill; we still have elected school boards; we have course grades, we have evaluations of teachers and principals; and in many cases we have open enrollment that provides some level of choice for parents who are unhappy with their particular public school.

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The LSC analysis of House Bill 176 is quite extensive; the bill itself is more than 300 pages, because it seeks substantial changes to the status quo. At the state level, we supplant the Common Core Standards, aka Ohio's New Learning Standards, with the Massachusetts pre-Common Core standards for English Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies. We reduce the current number of end of course exams from seven to three (English, Math and Science). We permit schools to choose the standards they feel will help them best educate their students. If a particular district wishes to continue along the path of Common Core, it may. But if it seeks a better path, we have excellent standards that district can embrace instead.

The elementary and high school assessments will be those administered prior to 2010 in Iowa, and will be norm-referenced, cutting the cord that connects the current standards to the current assessments. This will significantly reduce if not eliminate "teaching to the test."

House Bill 176 addresses a critical issue that the legislature has not addressed to date--the gathering of personally-identifiable data without the informed written consent of the parent or guardian of the students in question. This is not acceptable without some kind of opt-in. Most parents are not aware of this issue, but it is one that is corrected in this bill. Any date required for federal grants can be supplied, but only in aggregate form.

House Bill 176 converts the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Test from a mandated one that is used for retention purposes to one that is permissive, and merely a diagnostic tool. It eliminates the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment; the fourth and sixth grade social studies assessments; and the fall administration of the Third-grade English Language Arts assessment. It eliminates the Resident Educator Summative Assessment, the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System and the Ohio Principal Evaluation System, but permits districts to institute their own evaluations they may have employed in the past. We extend safe harbor until the 2019-2020 school year from the results of the students' achievement scores on the assessments and the state report card ratings. Graduation will be determined by coursework rather than the results of assessments.

Fundamentally, this bill reduces mandates and consequently the cost of doing business for our schools. In an era of challenging state budgets, this is one universal benefit we can provide to our districts that empowers them to redirect resources to the areas they feel need the most attention. Our teachers and students will benefit from increased local control. That same local control will encourage more parental involvement because local decisions will have much greater impact.

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House Bill 176 is not a panacea for whatever ails local districts, but it is a significant step in the right direction, to an educational system that is more bottom up and less top down, that is more responsive to local needs and concerns, and one that empowers those that are closest to the people they represent. I have a significant number of co-sponsors of this legislation, several more who have committed to vote for the bill, and have also met with interested parties across the board. I sense a willingness to consider this proposed legislation very seriously.

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I thank you for your attention, and I ask for your favorable consideration of House Bill 176. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.