

May 30, 2017

Chairmen Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I am pleased to offer testimony in support of HB 176.

My name is Nicki Gordon-Coy and I am an educator, a mother, an active community member, and a farmer. My husband, Jim, and I live on a farm in Carroll County, where we primarily raise beef cattle and three wonderful children: Lilly (12), Emma (9) and Noah (7). I have lived in the area most of my life and attended k-12 at Sandy Valley Local Schools, graduating in 1997. I graduated from The University of Akron with my degree in Secondary Education, Life, Earth, and Integrated Science 7-12. Before I had even taken my last Organic Chemistry final, I was hired at Sandy Valley local as their Biology/ Anatomy teacher. Since that time, I have received a Masters in Science Education, with a focus on grades K-8 from Walden University and am currently completing a Masters in Agriculture, in Integrated Resource Management from Colorado State.

When I came back to Sandy Valley as faculty, I re-started the science club and ski club and began coaching destination imagination. I am an active member of the Magnolia United Methodist Church where I help with teaching Sunday school, sharing the children's message and teaching Bible school. I am a registered Democrat, although, like many in my demographic, I don't strongly identify with any one political party. I am an active Carroll County Farm Bureau board member, where I am concluding my sixth year as the secretary. Through Farm Bureau, I have been blessed to participate in a plethora of local and state activities that have helped me grow personally and professionally.

I share this all with you, not to boast of my activities, but in an attempt to paint a clear image of who I am and who I represent. I represent in some facet or another, a large portion of your constituency. My perspectives are far from unique, and in fact, I find the more I talk to folks, the more I realize that there is wide sweeping agreement with the views I hold on the solutions proposed in HB 176.

Today I am going to share with you how my experience as an educator has drastically changed in my fourteen years of teaching as well as the related viewpoints of the good people that I am blessed to call my community.

For the first 11 years, I taught a variety of high school science courses from Physics to AP Biology. However, I get the greatest satisfaction out of my current assignment as our 8th-grade science teacher. I love teaching! I wake up every day and look forward

to seeing my students and my co-workers. Sandy Valley Local is a district that values the professionalism of its teachers and encourages us to bring the content to life, in whatever creative ways are truly best for our kids. Many of my friends that teach in other Ohio districts experience the same positive rapport with their districts and communities. However, the reality is, many teachers in Ohio are not in a situation where they can express those liberties. The unnecessary stress and restrictions that teachers experience have only increased. The changes at the state and national levels have ultimately altered the way my profession looks and feels state-wide.

When I began teaching, Ohio had statewide standards. I was not opposed to our standards and enjoyed brainstorming and collaborating with others to figure out how I was going to bring the standards to my students. My evaluations were completed by my building principal and I was provided a teacher mentor who was there as a support person when I had questions. (I thank Dr. Carol Butler, for all of her wisdom). I completed a one year "entry year teacher" evaluation by the state, and I was off and running. A few years later, I, in turn, became a mentor to two of our current staff members when they entered our district. It was an effective system, despite what others outside of education may have said.

But as effective (not perfect) systems often do, the education system has been turned on its head. From the perspective of teachers, parents and community members, this change is all rooted in the implementation of the current standards centered system. The first big change is that these standards are spelled out to the point of minimal opportunities for creativity, especially for those that teach in districts that have a top-down approach. Even being in a supportive school district, I find that I am rushed every day to "get to" all of the standards prior to the AIR test in April. If I have students who need me to slow down, or who want to learn more about a particular topic, I am hard pressed to spend any more than the allotted time on any particular topic. The next big change is the teacher evaluation system that has become reliant on the students' performance on the state standards. The relentless pace that is required for my students to cover all of the standards is daunting enough, but then the state adds in the pressure of the knowledge that 50% of my teacher evaluation is determined by the student's performance on their AIR test. The students express how confusing and frustrating the online tests are (even with constant practice). I have had several students express how much they miss the old fashioned paper/pencil tests. Also, although they recognize the topics and graphics, on a large scale, the level of stress and testing fatigue they experience diminishes their performance. Change is also seen in our resident educator program that has grown from a one-year program to a four-year, time intensive program. RESA (resident educator summative assessment) leaves our new teachers feeling overwhelmed and jaded, often questioning their choice of profession.

As I am concluding the first half of my career, I see “common core” drastically changing the narrative on teachers. I agree that teacher accountability is important, but what we have now feels more like a modern day persecution. To the extent that good teachers, solid teachers, young teachers are leaving the teaching field at an alarming rate. “A recent [study](#) in the *Academy of Management Journal* found that between 40-50% of new teachers [will leave](#) the teaching profession by their fifth year of service. The high rate of attrition, coupled with a [dramatic decrease](#) in the number of people enrolling in teacher preparation programs, has resulted in a [looming teacher shortage](#).” (1) This is a problem that needs addressing and we need to get to the root: Common Core. For those that say that we don't have Common Core in Ohio, that is like saying "my shirt isn't purple, it's a unique blend of blue and red". The modifications that have been made to create our current standards do not change the heart of their origin.

To us: “Common core” is teacher and administrator evaluations that are tied to standardized tests. “Common Core” is the ridiculous hoops of stress required for new teachers to jump through, for years. “Common Core” is the excessive and alarming data mining by those who have access to Google databases. “Common Core” is the high-stress 3rd-grade guarantee reading assessment, that caused my own daughter Emma to experience extreme fear and anxiety, for a test. “Common Core” is the slow choking out of teacher input, freedom and liberty in the classroom and a sharp increase in stress, anxiety and the general feeling of demoralization.

I hope I have effectively made it clear that when the members of my community are using the phrase “Common Core”, to them it does not simply mean nationwide standards. To us, it represents a top-down, homogenized approach to education. The perception of many of your constituents is that national common standards were not designed with the welfare of Ohio's learners in mind, but rather a plan to integrate standards, standardized tests, materials, and technology to produce a supply and demand marketplace. In a speech he gave in 2009, Bill Gates said, “When the tests are aligned to the common standards, the curriculum will line up as well—and that will unleash powerful market forces in the service of better teaching. For the first time, there will be a large base of customers eager to buy products that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better”. I assure you that this approach is not needed to make “every teacher get better” and when did we all decide to make our students and their data consumable goods? If in Gates’ perspective, causing intense stress in the classroom and angsts upon educators is helping, then I question everything that flows from Gates, in regards to education. I recommend that the current course is closely and objectively reconsidered and that this body steers Ohio towards the comprehensive, heterogeneous plan found in Ohio House Bill 176.

In my classes, I love teaching students about natural selection and how nature works well with genetic diversity and heterogeneous vigor to allow life to continue to flourish, even as environmental conditions may change. When a species becomes too genetically homogeneous, it struggles to stay ahead of predators and parasites. Our educational system is similar in this way, although our predators and parasites that we plan for are often economic. If we provide the means for districts to expand the learning diversity, then Ohio will be well situated to thrive in a diverse social and economic environment. When we accomplish this, there is no limit to the success we will experience as the great state of Ohio.

Ohio House Bill 176 is a unique opportunity for us to work on these issues with growing support from a grassroots perspective. Not only does it correct the issues I have addressed, the fiscal analysis for House Bill 176 indicates significant savings to the state. By reducing the amount of testing, HB 176 will save Ohio \$9.6 million per year. By moving from standards-based tests to norm-based tests, HB 176 will save Ohio somewhere between \$8 million and \$12 million dollars per year because of reduced test cost. By eliminating the RESA program, HB 176 will save Ohio \$5.3 million dollars per year. By eliminated OTES, HB 176 will save Ohio \$2.2 million dollars per year. Finally, Ohio House Bill 176 is an amazing opportunity for legislators to deliver on our desire for collaboration from both sides of the aisle (and different factions within); coming together for the support of common sense action in education.

I want the second half of my career to see education move back to a place where teachers are respected and treated as “called” professionals. I want to see Ohio’s education system thrive and produce students who are well-rounded and ready for the next step in their lives, whatever diverse destination calls them. I want the permissive variance that this bill cultivates, to lead to flourishing micro-climates which lead to a prosperous and prolific Ohio. I believe House Bill 176 will provide the means for us to make this a reality! Thank you so much for all that you do for those that you represent, and I would be happy to try my best to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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