



May 22, 2018

Chairman Andrew Brenner
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Vice Chair Marilyn Slaby
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 11th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee,

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding House Bill 591. My name is Kim Preston, and I serve as the Midwest Regional Legislative Director for Excellence in Education in Action. ExcelinEd in Action is a nonpartisan, nonprofit education advocacy organization.

You will also hear from my colleague, Dr. Christy Hovanetz, via Skype today. Christy serves as Senior Policy Fellow for the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd), a nonpartisan, nonprofit education policy organization, and she is a national thought leader on school accountability policy.

We appreciate the voices of educators in this debate and agree Ohio's existing accountability system could benefit from some thoughtful improvements. However, we believe this legislation heads down a path of lowering expectations and weakening transparency.

Our biggest concern with the bill is the move away from easy-to-understand A-F school letter grades. At the end of the day, parents deserve to know and understand how their child's school is performing. The best way to do that is through a transparent, objective school accountability system, and an A-F school grading system recognizes success and exposes failure in a way that everyone can understand. Vague labels, or numbers as required by this bill, that require an explanation just aren't good enough.

Our schools exist to educate students, so let's not forget to make them fundamental to this discussion on accountability. Low grades are a loud-and-clear message that schools need to do better in terms of student achievement and growth, and that message must not be ignored. We must bring performance to light in schools where students are struggling the most because those students will be competing with students worldwide once they graduate. If they don't have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, they will be left behind. So rather than hiding or diluting low performance, we must acknowledge it and act on it for the sake of our students. Sparing schools from an accurate reflection of their performance does the students in them no favors.

We also believe it's critically important to get each and every calculation just right. It is detailed for sure, but without sound foundational calculations, Ohio will be left with a meaningless system, and students will pay the price. To that end, I will now turn it



over to Dr. Christy Hovanetz who has worked on school accountability policy since 1999. She served as the Assistant Deputy Commissioner at the Florida Department of Education leading the A-F school grading, research/evaluation, and reporting offices, as the Assistant Commissioner in Minnesota leading assessment, school accountability, and all federal programs. She also is a certified teacher in the state of Minnesota.

Thank you, Kim, for the introduction. The purpose of a school accountability system is to spur school improvement and increase student performance by providing transparent, objective information to parents, educators and the public about school effectiveness. A, B, C, D and F school grading recognizes success and exposes failure in a way that everyone can understand.

Parents deserve to know and **understand** how their children's schools are performing.

A-F school grading remains the most commonly used rating system in the country— 15 states. It is overwhelmingly supported in public opinion polls¹ and has a positive impact on student outcomes as evidence in research studies² and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)³.

In the interest of time, I will highlight a few of the proposed policies in the draft bill language that are inconsistent with policies that have led other states to improve student learning outcomes.

Use clear and transparent descriptors of A, B, C, D and F. A-F descriptors are easily consumable by the public and draw a heightened amount of interest.

Calculate student growth toward proficient and advanced achievement. Students should be measured on their individual progress towards meeting pre-determined expectations to reach proficiency and advanced performance. By contrast, a value-added model (VAM) compares students to the performance of other students across the state - not how well an individual student progressed towards meeting a predetermined standard. With VAMs, there will always be winners and losers—students who make growth relative to others and students who do not make growth relative to

¹ May 2014 National Survey Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates: 84% support assigning schools a letter grade regarding how well they educate students. 2013 Public Opinion Strategies of likely Tennessee voters: 77% Favor an A-F grading scale for each school so parents can more easily identify where the good schools are instead of the current rating system. 2015 Georgia statewide poll Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates: 80% favor an A -F school grading policy, while just 14% oppose. Support for this policy is broad across key sub-groups.

² Marcus A. Winters. Education: Pre K-12. Urban Policy EducationNYC. May 24, 2016. <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/grading-schools-promotes-accountability-and-improvement-evidence-nyc-2013-15-8912.html>. Feeling the Florida Heat? How Low-Performing Schools Respond to Voucher and Accountability Pressure and Cecilia Elena Rouse, Jane Hannaway, Dan Goldhaber and David Figlio. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 251-281 [American Economic Association: http://www.jstor.org/stable/43189334](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43189334).

³For example: Florida saw improvement on all four 2017 NAEP assessments and is the only state that showed statistically significant improvement on three of the four assessments (grades 4 and 8 Math and grade 8 Reading). And, Florida is closing the equity gap all student subgroups significantly outperformed their national peers in fourth-grade Math and Reading. In Fourth-Grade Math, Florida Hispanic students outperformed the average student in 35 states and D.C. and low-income students outperformed the average student in 21 states and D.C. in Fourth-Grade Reading, Florida Hispanic students outperformed the average student in 38 states and D.C. and low-income students outperformed the average student in 17 states and D.C.

others, regardless of how well or how poorly the students are performing. When developing the “alternative growth measure,” consider a growth to proficient model because it fairly measures whether each student is learning enough each year to become proficient—not how well a student did compared to their peers, using an ever-changing scale.

Replicating a VAM requires student level data. For Columbus to replicate a VAM, they will need data for every student in the state, not just students in their district. A growth to proficient and advanced achievement model does not require state level data so there is no risk of breaching any privacy laws.

Explanations accompanying factors that influence student growth beyond the classroom should not be taken as excuses for a student not making growth. Regardless of a student’s background, we know all students can learn and that the educators and the school can strongly influence learning. Following a different research path reveals an explanation for why disadvantaged students tend to have lower performance: disadvantaged students are more likely to be exposed to low-quality teachers (Goldhaber, D., Quince, V., and Theobald, R. 2017)⁴. The report found the gap in teacher quality is pervasive and ‘not new’ but compounding over the students’ educational career.

Focus attention on the learning growth of the lowest performing students.

Effective school accountability systems place more focus on students most in need, without ignoring those who are performing on grade level or higher. Low performing students come from all races and ethnicities, all income levels and all curricular backgrounds, and they are found in all schools. Focusing on these lowest performing students ensures the ‘right’ kids in every school are getting the extra attention and resources needed to catch up with their peers and master the state standards. Ohio currently requires the reporting of the lowest quintile on a statewide basis. This should be adjusted to be a focus on the lowest quintile in each school. This ensures each school has a group of lowest performing students making the accountability system more equitable and ensuring there is a focus on closing the gap at the school level.

Measures used for school accountability should be objective and consistent across all schools and districts. The third grade reading measure includes alternative tests that are selected and scored by the districts making this measure incomparable statewide. Further it may prompt perverse incentives to score the alternative test favorably to help the school accountability score, but in turn will deny the student the extra help needed to become a grade level reader.

Use percent of students earning postsecondary credit, rather than average scores. Using the percent of 11 and 12 grade students or the percent of the graduation cohort that earns college credit on AP, IB, or college credit program plus will incentivize more students to participate in these opportunities. Using an average

⁴ Goldhaber, D., Quince, V., and Theobald, R. *Has It Always Been This Way? Tracing the Evolution of Teacher Quality Gaps in U.S. Public Schools*. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research 2017: <https://caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/WP%20171.pdf>



score creates a perverse incentive to discourage students from taking tests because only the score of tested student will be included in the measure. Some students may be discouraged from taking and AP, IB, or college course work because they may not score well.

Report results in a timely manner as close to the end of the school year as possible, so parents and educators have time to prepare over the summer. Waiting until September 15 to release the report card means school has already started and the school placement, resource allocation, and personnel decisions have already been made.

There are several technical considerations throughout the bill that should be reviewed to ensure the language captures the intent and that it is presented with absolute clarity. For example:

- Growth calculations for VAM as “within a school year” indicates a fall and spring administration compared to the alternative calculation “within one year” which indicates a spring to spring administration.
- Clarifying the meaning of “value-added progress composite gain score.” Does this mean the VAM score or the ‘gain’ of the VAM score?
- How a baseline will be set by the Department for VAM every five years given its normative nature.
- Gap closing measures are tricky. Clarify the intent so ‘bad’ gap closure, where the comparison group performance decreases and the group performance decreases less, is not rewarded even though the gap is narrower. And, smaller gaps are not always better. A five-point gap at a school with 10 percent FRL students proficient and 15 percent nonFRL students proficient should not be rewarded compared to a 10 percent gap in a school with 80 percent FRL students proficient and 90 percent nonFRL students proficient.

We are prepared to work with the sponsor and members of the committee to draft the best language for Ohio’s students.

Having a strong, understandable accountability system is the right thing to do for students. Putting students at the center of this discussion, makes it easier to forge a clear path toward high expectations. With that, we are pleased to entertain questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Preston".

Kim Preston
Midwest Regional Legislative Director
ExcelinEd in Action

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christy Hovanetz".

Christy Hovanetz, Ph.D.
Senior Policy Fellow
ExcelinEd