



EDUCATION  
COMMITTEE

Witness Form

Today's Date NOVEMBER 7

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Organization Representing

PLAIN LOCAL SCHOOLS

Testimony:  Verbal  Written  Both

Testifying As:  Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

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Special Requests: \_\_\_\_\_

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Chairman Peggy Lehner, Vice Chair Matt Huffman, Ranking Member Vernon Sykes, and members of the Committee. My name is Brent May, Superintendent of the Plain Local School District in Stark County, and I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill 216

The Plain Local School District covers 28 miles in Stark County and has an enrollment of 6005. Plain Local is the 42<sup>nd</sup> largest school district in the state of Ohio. Our high school has been recognized by U.S News and World Report the last two years winning a bronze and silver medal. Avondale Elementary has been recognized as a Blue Ribbon School and we consistently perform in the top 5% across the state with value added data. In addition, we have created STEM program schools at our middle school and high school and have a 1 to 1 technology initiative in grades 4-12. Finally, last week we welcomed two International Baccalaureate evaluators to GlenOak High School for the final site visit prior to the district being informed if we will achieve IB status for the 2017-2018 school year. We are excited about our future and the opportunities for all students in the Plain Local School District.

The Plain Local School District is very diverse. The district has 43% of students receiving free or reduced lunches. Also, the district is 12% special needs, 13% minority, and our EL students are growing each year. This diversity is embraced by our community and a characteristic that makes us unique.

I am proud to be the Superintendent as I am serving my 8<sup>th</sup> year in this capacity. I have been in education for over 22 years and have seen great change in those years. Some has been positive, but the current state of testing in Ohio must change for the sake of our children. Our children deserve better as they prepare for their future. I want to state that my district is not against high standards or accountability. Every occupation has standards that must be met. I am not complaining about some testing, but I have seen the impact it has taken on our students and staff.

Last year the Plain Local School District spent 91% of days in session with some type of state mandated assessment. 160 days of the school year students from various levels were involved with a state assessment. In my opinion, this must change quickly before we lose a generation with great potential! My teachers would like to see students developed as critical thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and risk takers as they grow and develop as young students. The exposure to the arts is an area that should be encouraged for all students. Research shows that exposure to the arts will enhance a child's ability in the classroom. The Plain Local School District believes strongly that the arts are a critical component of a child's development. We will continue to develop and offer these experiences to our youngest learners.

Kindergarten students should be excited to start school. Also, their parents should experience the excitement and joy of this new chapter in life. Instead, we create testing schedules for parents to have their child come to school and take a test as part of their first experience in a school. How can that experience build better relationships with parents and

strengthen a community? In my district, I talk with my staff often about building relationships with their families and students, but their first experience with a family is testing their child. This change would be supported by hundreds of teachers and parents that were involved in a collaborative strategic planning process recently in the Plain Local School district. The inclusive process brought our community together to discuss education and help set the vision for the future.

A second component that would be a great improvement is in teacher licensure. The consolidation of all teacher licenses into two grade bands would greatly support school districts in hiring and offering unique programming. The Plain Local School District has created grades 3-4 blended classrooms to advance our students quickly at an early age. Students in these classrooms are from both grades and their curriculum is normally at one grade higher. The current licensure structure makes it almost impossible to find a teacher qualified to teach these classrooms. My dedicated teachers have been gracious enough to pursue a generalist license or dual certification to teach in these classrooms. The current Pre-K-3 license and 4-9 license makes it very difficult to offer this great opportunity for students in my school district. The Plain Local School District will continue to push forward and provide opportunities and experiences that will prepare our students for a global world. The current licensure structure limits our ability to be creative and transformational.

Finally, I would encourage the committee to eliminate the requirement for 30 hours of professional development for teachers teaching gifted students. This is another layer added for teachers and administrators to facilitate. We have professional learning communities scheduled daily and weekly in our district where valuable and relevant training is taking place. Teachers are constantly learning new teaching strategies to reach all students. In addition, my teachers are analyzing and evaluating data to ensure they are differentiating in every classroom. I trust my teachers to make decisions based on their data to reach all students in their classroom. They are spending a great amount of time collaborating with their colleagues to deliver a first-class education to all students: hence, we need to trust our teachers who are experienced in the classroom.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for this opportunity to express my views on Senate Bill 216. I would be happy to address the committee's questions at the pleasure of the Chair.