



Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 216  
Education Deregulation Bill  
Ohio Senate Education Committee  
Senator Peggy Lehner, Chair

**Superintendent Dr. Susan Lang, Kindergarten Teacher Anne Keen, Parent Elise Foster  
Wyoming City Schools  
December 13, 2017**

**Superintendent Dr. Susan Lang:**

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding the proposed changes to public education regulation in Senate Bill 216. My name is Dr. Susan Lang and I am the Superintendent of Wyoming City School District. Wyoming City Schools is located in Hamilton County in southwest Ohio and is consistently found to be one of the highest-performing districts in the state with students in every grade level consistently scoring above the state and national averages in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

I'm here today with Anne Keen, a Wyoming City Schools Kindergarten teacher, and parent Elise Foster, a member of the district's Citizens Advisory Committee, which serves as Wyoming Business Advisory Committee. She has a master's in education from Harvard University and has worked for 16 years in engineering and organizational leadership.

On behalf of Wyoming City Schools' students and staff, we want to share our support regarding the proposals in Senate Bill 216.

**Teacher Anne Keen:**

Hello. My name is Anne Keen and in my 24 years as a kindergarten teacher in two of Wyoming's three primary school buildings, I have found assessment of students upon entrance to kindergarten to be a valuable tool. This beginning measurement of student knowledge, strengths and areas needing support informs instruction for each student from the start of school. Many parts of the current Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in Mathematics and Language Arts are useful in identifying this information.

However, I do not feel that there is value in reporting this data to the state to be used to rate district performance. Because the KRA is given upon entry to kindergarten, it assesses children before we have had the opportunity to instruct them. Children's scores are a reflection of their home and pre-school experiences rather than the influence of kindergarten classroom instruction, and should not be used to compare districts before we have had an impact on their education.

I believe in the internal value of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and in the value of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Continue to mandate that students read on a third grade level by third grade and hold districts responsible for that goal. Step in to address deficiencies as necessary and allow us to focus on doing the work to instruct and support our students in the classroom.

**Parent Elise Foster:**

Hello. I'm Elise Foster, a parent of a 4<sup>th</sup> and a 10<sup>th</sup> grader. I'm here to support the provisions in this bill that reduce unnecessary and counter-productive mandates and want to address the unintended consequences of well-intended mandates.

I've spent the last 16 years, either working as an engineer, recruiting employees, or helping organizations improve. What I learned from these experiences, is that, yes, reading and writing are critical, but the difference maker in organizations is a person's ability to solve complex problems and navigate an unpredictable and rapidly-changing future. With this in mind, I expect my child's classroom to encourage growth in critical thought, communication, and collaboration, along with teaching the basics. Yet, as a parent, classroom volunteer and district committee member, I have grown more frustrated by a system that is stripping administrators, teachers, and students of ownership and the space to learn, create, and innovate. State mandates such as requiring computer-based tests, largely because of costs and processing time, force teachers to make disappointing trade-offs.

I saw this first hand as I helped two 3<sup>rd</sup> graders with their persuasive essay. Imagine your 8-year-old writing a persuasive piece that includes original thought and references formatted as a multi-paragraph essay. Imagine them doing it with accurate punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, at the same time that they're learning how to type on the keyboard of an adult-sized laptop. Computer literacy is important, but not at the risk of short-changing students' opportunities to learn the fundamentals of writing, critical analysis, and communication – those skills that employers are craving, but struggle to find. I'd take a student who can think critically and articulate that thought over a student who knows how to use a computer, any day. Yet, because of a state mandate that requires computer tests, we force teachers to cram one more thing into their already full curriculum. I find Superintendent DeMaria's suggestion that favoring paper over computers during these developmentally-critical years is going to inhibit a student's ability to learn to use the computer to be flawed logic.

While this example covers just one of the many counter-productive state mandates, this bill is a step in the right direction of returning control to our districts and to our teachers, allowing them to focus on our kids. I support removing mandates that simply support the adults in our state, to make it easier for them to place a letter grade on our schools, but make it harder to keep the focus on our kids.

**Superintendent Dr. Susan Lang:**

Over the past 17 years, I have served as superintendent of Rossford Exempted Village Schools, Canal Winchester Schools, and Wyoming City Schools and I was humbled to be named this year's Ohio Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators. In the application process, I was asked to share strategies I implemented throughout my career to improve student progress. My answer to this and the focus of my dissertation was the implementation of research-based formative assessments and the fact that using common, teacher-developed assessment throughout the school year will show higher gains than any other effort.

I support the use of assessments and accountability for schools. I appreciate the fortitude that the state of Ohio showed in trying to model a system for teacher performance. Teacher evaluation is a very complex issue and I'm concerned about placing sanctions on districts that lack capacity and using complicated formulas that rely too heavily on the single snapshot of the performance of students on a single test. I'd like to give credit to the Ohio Department of Education for developing an outstanding teacher and principal rubric summary.

To be rated Accomplished under the Ohio Principal Evaluation System for continuous improvement, a principal must be found to collaboratively develop and set measurable goals that promote high levels of student and staff achievement. Under the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System instructional planning standard, the teacher is rated on purposefully planning assessments and differentiating assessment choices to match the full range of student needs, abilities, and learning styles, incorporating a range of appropriate diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments into lesson plans.

The Department does not need to convene meetings to discuss student growth. Ohio superintendents follow the rubric for their principals, which holds them accountable in using formative assessments. Teachers are also being held accountable for showing growth through their formative assessments.

Let the districts do their work and keep us accountable on the assessments required by the federal government. Have confidence in the system that was developed by the department and trust that the administrators will do our jobs and, if needed, hold us accountable when student do not achieve on the federally-required tests.

In summary, though I am most passionate about the teacher evaluation and kindergarten readiness portions of this bill, SB216 provides many opportunities to allow district to focus on what matters, while remaining accountable to the state.

Thank you for your time and please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.