

Senate Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on SB216
The Ohio Public School Deregulation Bill
December 13, 2017

Good morning Chairman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee.

My name is Brian Burkett, and I am the principal of Liberty-Benton Elementary School, Liberty-Benton Local District in Hancock County. Liberty-Benton is the largest rural district in Hancock County, just west of Findlay, serving a little over 1,400 students PreK-12.

I have been the principal at our elementary school for 18 years and prior to that I was a teacher for 7 years (regular education and special education). I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree from Anderson University and a dual Master's Degree in Educational Administration and Special Education from the University of Findlay.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Senate Bill (SB) 216; specifically, the portion regarding the elimination of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) within the bill. I would like to share with the committee how passing the bill as it is written will benefit the students and teachers of our school district.

- I. **First and foremost, the bill allows our district to make local decisions about what assessment program best meets our needs. Allowing school districts to decide which assessment to use will provide the most accurate and complete data about our students as well as provide information for our daily instruction and intervention programs.** We currently get powerful data from our kindergarten screener, The Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale (PKRS). This is an academic screener we use that typically takes approximately 15-20 minutes per student to administer. It provides sub scores in the areas of verbal, auditory, and perceptual processing. Additionally, an overall standard score (with percentile) is provided. This information is collected and provided to our kindergarten teachers prior to the first day of school. These areas closely align to learning styles and provide teachers with a great picture of their incoming students. Parents are also provided this information along with a list of suggested activities to improve any areas of weakness. These scores help us to make more balanced classroom assignments with standard scores ranging from 73 to 121 (current year). Standard scores and percentiles are something easily understood and used by educators. This test is infinitely more beneficial to our district than anything the KRA provides. It is already an assessment we are administering. It is done without one minute of instructional time being used during the first week or two of school. Teachers and parents receive the information within weeks of the screening...not months.
- II. **Administering the KRA is time consuming, costs our district money in substitute teacher costs, forces our teachers to forfeit quality instructional time spent teaching our students, and provides partial information that our teachers already know from their own observations and classroom assessments, and the PKRS.** We have to provide 2 full days of substitute teaching per kindergarten teacher to complete the KRA. Additionally, another 15-20 minutes is spent observing the students in the classroom. Approximately a half day's worth of time is spent by teachers entering data into the computer (which they have shared is "terribly organized",

“doesn’t have a natural flow”, and “the topics don’t match the grid lines”). The KRA cannot be administered inside the classroom during the first few days of school or even the first few weeks. It is interesting that the informational document provided by KRA found on ODE’s website states: “The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is a tool that teachers will use to get to know your child...This tool is primarily to help your teacher get to know your child in a way that does not interrupt the child’s learning.” We are fascinated with this and disagree because:

- 1.) Teachers are already getting to know our students each and every day in kindergarten through our own assessments, checklists, and observations. We don’t need the KRA to obtain this information that we already naturally obtain.
- 2.) It doesn’t interrupt learning? For those who are not familiar with teaching in a kindergarten class, let me share this: It’s like herding cats with water bottles during the first few weeks of school. Five and six year olds cannot self-regulate and carry on in class while the teacher is working one-on-one with a student for 30 minutes at the back of classroom.
- 3.) It is never a good idea to start testing students right out of the gate...while teachers are trying to help them make the tough transition into school, build relationships, and establish routines and structure.

Regarding data, our teachers naturally assess students over the first couple weeks of school for all 26 upper and lower case letters, sounds, and numbers through 10. The KRA assesses 6 letter, 4 sounds, and 0 numbers. The data we naturally obtain is far superior to that of the KRA. We merely give the KRA to fulfill a requirement and once administered, find any data it provides limited and at best redundant.

III. Data provided by the KRA doesn’t help our teachers inform their instruction. According to the KRA Fact Sheet provided through ODE website, it says, “The KRA is designed to support teachers’ learning about their students, as well as to help teachers understand how they might modify their classroom instruction to support student learning.” In speaking with our Literacy Coach and five kindergarten teachers in our building, we are all perplexed about the data that is provided by the KRA to inform instruction. To inform instruction, we would have to have data matched against standards to look for weaknesses and strengths. To our knowledge, the only aggregate information we receive is a standard score for four subscore areas (Language and Literacy, Social Foundations, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being & Motor Development) and the actual raw data put into the scoring spreadsheet for each student. As I shared earlier, our teachers already collect similar data and information before the KRA is completed and data put into the scoring spreadsheet for submission. Additionally, it is our experience that our data is much more in-depth and encompassing compared to that of the KRA.

IV. The data from the KRA does not provide enough delineation for remedial needs, for prescriptive instructional planning, and under reports students with deficiencies. Our district does not use the KRA as the required assessment for determining whether a kindergarten student is “on track” or “not on track.” KRA data has traditionally shown inflated scores indicating only a few students with literacy deficits. From other data, assessments, and teacher observations, we know this to be inaccurate. Typical trends from KRA data only shows a handful of students each year to “not be on track.” This is not in line with our first and second grade data and eventually our third grade guarantee data. For example, this year the KRA showed only 9/108 students not meeting the standards (9%). The assessment we choose to use for making this decision (locally) is

the STAR Early Reading Assessment by Renaissance Learning. It provided more accurate data by identifying 16/108 students (15%). With additional teacher assessments, we've identified 30/108 (28%) students who may not be "on track" and provided a Reading and Improvement Monitoring Plan (RIMP) and early intervention for them. Somewhere between the 72-85% range is where our students tend to perform on the third grade reading assessment. We have found KRA data unusable to include for use in Title I eligibility determination. The KRA is a redundant test we are required to give that doesn't provide us with usable data.

In Closing:

As a principal, former teacher, and parent, I request that you keep the provision inside SB216 to eliminate the KRA as a required assessment and allow schools to make local decisions regarding which assessment(s) are needed for their students and programs. If there are schools that would like to continue using the KRA and believe it's best for them, I say, "You should have that choice." Allow us (an Effective School) to continue to use our own assessments that provide a more comprehensive, more in-depth data that fits our needs. We ask to not be required to give the KRA which is a redundant assessment that yields much less usable data for our district's needs. Help us gain back several days of instruction and many teacher hours of work lost to the administration, scoring, and data input of the KRA. Help us save money on substitute teacher costs so that they can be used in other needed areas. Help us to gain back time by informing instructional practices with data obtained through assessments already decided by our district. Basically, help us save time and money that can be reallocated to much more needed areas. We greatly appreciate your support in keeping SB216 as written regarding the KRA provision.

Thank you very much for your time and for the opportunity to offer brief remarks on issues important to our district.