I’m here to speak in support of the State Board of Education Proposal for the Graduation Alternative Pathways. Specifically, I would like to support the addition of the capstone project as part of the alternative pathways. While I can appreciate the joint proposal of the Fordham Foundation, Ohio Excels, and Alliance, it is heavily geared towards assessment. I know much of the concern is around the rigor of the capstone project and a fear that it will let some students, mostly poor students, slide through, I think there are ways to prevent this. First, the Ohio Department of Education has developed rubrics that have been well thought out. They can be beneficial in increasing the rigor of the projects. Second, involvement of the Business community as partners in this endeavor to be mentors to the students and evaluators of the project can ensure rigor and consistency. Capstone projects, if done correctly, can be a powerful tool to deepen learning for students. I would predict that fewer than 10% of students will take this option.

The reality is that 75% of Ohio’s seniors will continue to meet graduation requirements in the traditional manner. It will be the continued 25% that will struggle to meet the requirements. And those students will be overwhelmingly from low income and poverty backgrounds. What is often not discussed is that poverty has a strong correlation to achievement in school and until we “figure out how to alleviate poverty’s strangling effects on students so they have a better shot..” we will continue to see students struggle to meet the graduation requirements that are almost exclusively centered around assessment, which disproportionately benefits middle class students. The capstone doesn’t solve all problems, but it can be an amazing experience for some students who receive impactful mentoring that integrates critical thinking skills, oral communication, research skills, planning, goal setting, and self-sufficiency, all skills the business community values.

Dr. Antoinette Miranda