

Senate Education Committee

Testimony on Graduation Changes

Written Testimony: Melissa Cropper

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Chair Lehner and Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, I am submitting written testimony, as I will be speaking at the funeral of Dal Lawrence. Dal Lawrence served as president of the Toledo Federation Teachers for 30 years. He was a leader in improving public education in Ohio.

As we stated in our Primary and Secondary testimony, we would prefer to have this amendment on graduation requirement changes heard as a stand-alone bill. We have vetted earlier concepts with our members and are just now sharing this version with our members as well. The following are our preliminary recommendations while we wait for further input from our members.

We agree with the proposal to only require tests for ELA II and Algebra I for graduation. We also recommend reducing tests to the federal minimum of ELA II, science, and Algebra I (or integrated math). Reducing the testing burden will allow teachers and students to focus on learning and mastery of different subject areas.

We recommend two additional alternative options for students who struggle with testing: having a GPA of 2.5 or higher in both the Junior and Senior years, or successfully completing a school sponsored internship opportunity. It’s important we provide options other than testing for students to show they have the broad skills necessary for a career.

We also recommend removing the requirement that students must complete one of the foundational options, and instead allow them to choose freely from all of the options.

We call for the elimination of the pejorative term "at-risk,” and suggest replacing it with “not on track.” We prefer to have ODE establish a graduation template for schools to use with all students entering the ninth grade. We support students identified as falling behind being eligible for supplemental services and help.

We propose changing the language that calls for the State Board of Education to work in consultation with House and Senate Education committees because the chairs of both of these committees already serve on the State Board of Education now. The State Board has elected and appointed members whose responsibility is to determine cuts scores and score ranges. The Ohio Department of Education has in the past presented information to the education committees before implementation. We feel this has been a good process and will continue to work.

We strongly oppose having the executive workforce board establish competency scores for the Algebra I and ELA II end-of-course examinations for graduation eligibility. This is the responsibility of the State Board and should remain so.

We recommend allowing students to earn any two seals, instead of requiring that one seal have state-determined criteria. The determined state seals are too dependent on testing. We

are looking for options that are not test-dependent.

This concludes my testimony and we hope you will consider these recommendations as the process moves forward.