

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of the State Board of Education's proposal for graduation requirements.

My name is Michele Timmons and I live in Reynoldsburg which is in Senate District 31. I am a lifelong Ohio resident, a mother to three fantastic young men (one of whom you will meet today) and a huge advocate for Ohio's youth. In fact, my entire 28+ year career has been focused on improving outcomes for children and families.

I have served as a high school teacher; a middle and high school principal and a special education director.

I am the founder of Foxfire High School, in South Zanesville, which is one of the state's first and most respected dropout recovery community schools.

I founded the Ohio Care Team Collaborative through the Muskingum Valley ESC which coordinated family and community engagement and incubated school based wraparound services across 15 schools in 6 Ohio counties.

Over the last eight years, I have had the amazing opportunity to support educational innovation in rural, suburban and urban communities in Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky and Maryland. The crux of my work focuses on increasing multi-system collaborations so all youth thrive - in school - and beyond.

Collectively, these experiences led to my presence here today, speaking to you in support of the Ohio State Board of Education's

recommendation for graduation requirements for the Class of 2021 and beyond - and in opposition to the proposal submitted by the Fordham Institute, Ohio Excels and the Alliance for High Quality Education.

In 2018, I was thrilled when Ohio launched *Each Child, Our future*, as the state's five year strategic plan for education. Superintendent DeMaria and the State Board led a thoughtful process engaging educators, families, employers, policymakers, philanthropy and youth in the design of this plan. I personally participated in stakeholder outreach and saw the impact of that outreach on the final product. When I read the final document, I realized that for the **first time in my career**, the state put forth a plan that clearly placed the **needs** of Ohio's youth above the interests of adults. It is right minded. It promotes innovative practices in the classroom. It also sets the expectation that Ohio schools must rethink systems so we are truly addressing the needs of the whole child and preparing youth for life beyond high school.

The State Board's recommendation for graduation requirements is completely aligned with the State's strategic plan and its one goal to annually increase the percentage of graduates who, one year after graduation are: enrolled **and succeeding** in post secondary learning, serving in the military, earning a living wage or are **engaged in a meaningful, self sustaining vocation**.

Much of my professional work of late has been engaging educators, families, industry professionals and community partners in developing the core knowledge, skills and work habits youth need to be successful in college and the 21st century workforce. Oftentimes this work is referred to as creating a Portrait of a Graduate. While vocabulary varies,

nearly every community identifies that prior to earning a diploma, high school students need to be able to **demonstrate:**

- Mathematical skills
- Communication skills
- College and Career Ready Skills
- Technology skills
- Problem Solving skills
- Leadership skills
- Interpersonal/Soft skills - such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and timeliness

Coincidentally, just 3 weeks ago, Forbes published the [10 Skills you Need for the Future of Work](#).

1. Creativity
2. Emotional Intelligence
3. Analytical (critical) thinking
4. Active learning with a growth mindset
5. Judgement and decision making
6. Interpersonal communication
7. Leadership
8. Diversity and cultural intelligence
9. Technology
10. Embracing change

This list aligns rather well with what communities are telling me they need from graduates. So now, let's look at how the two proposals stand up against these criteria.

In my written testimony you will see Attachment A which outlines the extent to which the State Board and the Fordham, Ohio Excels and Alliance Plan (I will refer to it as simply the Alliance plan) each address these needs. For the sake of time, I am highlighting only my key concerns with the proposals.

Did you know that under the Alliance proposal, it is very possible for students who complete the career experience pathway options to not pass a math skills test?

Did you know that under the Alliance proposal, it is very possible for students who complete the career experience pathway options to not pass a English skills test?

However, under the State Board's proposal 100% of Ohio's graduates will be required to demonstrate both math and English skills. This plan also provides students with 14 ways to demonstrate English skills and 15 ways to demonstrate math skills?

Did you know neither proposal requires demonstration of oral communication skills? The State Board's proposal provides a variety of ways for this to be accomplished but it isn't a requirement itself.

Did you know that under both proposals, it is possible that a student could complete high school without a requirement to demonstrate college and/or work readiness.

- The State Board's proposal includes a variety of college and work based learning opportunities that are likely to be used by students who struggle academically.

- The Alliance proposal has fewer options, but still provides some college and work ready seals.

However, an average student who is solely focused on compliance can earn a diploma without demonstrating success in advanced coursework or career readiness - on either plan. This is a disservice to thousands of students across the state. We no longer live in a world where high school is the 'end of the line'. Every student needs to be ready for something. Whether this is a locally defined demonstration of learning or a formal state requirement (not another test - or boxes to check), we can not allow students to earn a diploma without also ensuring they are ready for their next step in life! Whatever step that may be.

Did you know only the State Board's proposal requires students to demonstrate their use of technology skills. The Alliance Plan doesn't even offer a technology skill seal under its preparation for college or career.

Problem Solving/leadership and soft skills: The Alliance proposal has no mechanism to encourage, support or require students to demonstrate such skills. Yet in my conversations across the state and nation, employers tell me that these skills are the most important skills for employee retention. A GPA and a strong resume may get you the job, but without the soft skills you can't keep the job. The State Board's proposal requires districts to adapt policies for students to demonstrate sufficient acquisition of these skills, but leaves it up to local decision on how these skills are assessed.

In conclusion, while the State' Board's proposal is not flawless, it is directly in line with what communities and industries are telling us they need in our graduates. It is focused on developing systems that allow schools to encourage students to engage in meaningful learning. It moves away from the 'check the box' mentality. It is what Ohio needs now so our youth will be better prepared for the future.

I am happy to take questions should you have them.

Thank you.

APPENDIX A

What youth need for success beyond HS	State Board	Ohio Excels, Fordham, Alliance Plan
demonstrate mathematical skills	<p><i>One math option does not require passing some type of math exam. End of course exam passage OR earn C or better in a non-remediation College Credit Plus course OR 2.5 GPA on 2 years of HS math OR earn required score on other math skills test OR pass an online math exam OR complete a competency based demonstration within a culminating student experience.</i></p>	<p><i>All math skills options include passing some type of math exam. Primary: earn 'competent' score on Algebra 1 test; If NOT then student can earn show credit in one College Credit Plus course OR meet either the career experience or military readiness component. It is possible to meet career experience without passing a math test.</i></p>
demonstrate ELA skills	<p>End of course exam passage OR earn C or better in a non-remediation College Credit Plus course OR 2.5 GPA on 2 years of HS English OR earn required score on other English skills test OR pass an online English exam OR complete a competency based demonstration within a culminating student experience.</p>	<p><i>All English skills options include passing some type of ELA exam. Primary: earn 'competent' score on English test; If NOT then student can earn show credit in one College Credit Plus course OR meet either the career experience or military readiness component. A student who uses the career experience path can earn a diploma without a clear demonstration of ELA skills.</i></p>
demonstrate college and work ready skills	<p>Embedded as an options for meeting ELA/math skill requirements including: WorkKeys, ASVAB, ACT/SAT, AP and College Credit Plus, etc. Embedded as options for well rounded curriculum including: industry credential, portfolio, culminating student experience. Embedded as options within locally defined domains which include OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal. It is possible that a student may meet all graduation components through academic or test based options without demonstrating college or work ready skills.</p>	<p>A student who scores competent in math and English can earn a diploma without ever demonstrating college or work ready skills. For example, a student can obtain a science seal (state defined) and an arts seal (locally defined) and never take advanced coursework, never leave the school for service or work learning and never prepare for life beyond high school.</p>

demonstrate technology skills	All students must demonstrate competency in at least one area of technology.	No requirement.
demonstrate problem solving skills	Locally defined leadership/reasoning and Social-Emotional domains are expected to address this area. Additionally, it is embedded as options within ELA/math skill requirements(culminating student experience), and well rounded curriculum (industry credential, portfolio, culminating student experience).	No requirement.
demonstrate leadership skills	Locally defined leadership/reasoning and Social-Emotional domains are expected to address this area. Additionally, it is embedded as options within ELA/math skill requirements(culminating student experience), and well rounded curriculum (industry credential, portfolio, culminating student experience).	No requirement.
demonstrate soft skills (interpersonal skills)	Locally defined leadership/reasoning and Social-Emotional domains are expected to address this area. Additionally, it is embedded as options within ELA/math skill requirements(culminating student experience), and well rounded curriculum (industry credential, portfolio, culminating student experience).	No requirement.
demonstrate a passion and/or a plan for the future	Not specified, but could be easily embedded within locally defined domains.	No requirement.