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**Senate Education Committee
OEA Testimony: Graduation Requirements (HB 166)
Wednesday, May 22, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school social studies teacher from Worthington with 16 years of classroom experience, and I currently serve as Vice President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 122,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the issue of high school graduation requirements and the proposed amendment that has been distributed by the Chair.

OEA is opposed to the amendment as it is currently written. The proposal does have some positive aspects that I will highlight. However, there is a fundamental flaw at its heart—an overly-rigid reliance on high-stakes testing.

Ohio is one of only 13 states that relies on high-stakes testing for high school graduation. This number has decreased since 2002 as more and more policy makers have come to recognize that standardized testing does not serve all our students well. Ohio enacted alternative graduation pathways for the classes of 2018 and 2019 in order to offer additional flexibility.

OEA believes that any proposal for long-term graduation requirements must include a viable, attainable and meaningful path to graduation that does not rely on the results of high-stakes testing. Students should be able to demonstrate what they know in ways other than a standardized test. By this measure, the proposal before the committee falls woefully short.

Our chief objection to the proposal is in the rigidity in how the language defines competency if students do not score a certain level on the state Algebra I and English Language Arts II tests. After two attempts, a student may use an alternate demonstration that is limited to 1) college-level course completion through College Credit Plus; 2) a career tech pathway, or 3) enlisting in the military. These choices are not viable options for all students. This rigidity seems to stem from the desire of proponents to have measures that are independently verified and consistent statewide. Let us be clear about the subtext...they don't trust teachers.

In the strongest terms, OEA believes that the professional judgement of licensed educators is the most valid method for making decisions about student work and readiness for graduation. A child is more than a test score. Those of us who are parents know this about our children and OEA's members recognize this about their students. Ohio's graduation requirements should reflect this as well.



This proposal would be greatly improved by incorporating a way for students to demonstrate what they know and can do with an additional option. One possibility would be to use the grade point average in ELA/math courses as a demonstration of readiness (as was offered in the Alliance’s initial graduation proposal). Another option would be to incorporate something similar to the culminating student experience in the proposal from the State Board of Education (SBOE). Without such options, parents, students and educators will have the same complaints that Ohio’s graduation requirements do not reflect the strengths and abilities of our students.

A second issue in the amendment is the determination of a competency score on the Algebra I and English Language Arts II tests. It is unclear how this score would relate to or differ from the range of scores already set by the SBOE. It’s also unclear why the Governor’s Executive Workforce Board would be responsible for setting these scores. OEA recommends that setting score ranges and issues related to standards, curriculum and assessment continue to be a responsibility of the State Board of Education.

The diploma seals offer some flexibility and recognition of student abilities such as in the fine and performing arts or student engagement. However, OEA believes that they could be voluntary, or if this framework is used, students should be given the option of choosing any two of the proposed seals instead of being required to have at least one that is “state defined.”

As I mentioned, there are positive aspects to this proposal. One improvement is that the amendment would reduce the number of high school end-of-course exams by eliminating the tests in ELA I and Geometry. Federal law requires three subjects to be tested at the high school level—one in math, one in ELA and one in science. There is no requirement in federal law that these be used to make high-stakes decisions about students, such as graduation requirements. OEA supports a reduction in state-mandated testing to the federal minimum and would be supportive of a further reduction in testing. Additionally, OEA appreciates the proposal’s emphasis on identifying at-risk students and providing appropriate supports.

Chair Lehner, OEA stands ready to work with you, this committee and other education stakeholders in developing long-term graduation requirements that work for Ohio’s students. OEA does not support the amendment as currently drafted. At a minimum, we urge the following changes:

- Allow students who do not meet the requisite score on the ELA II or Algebra tests to demonstrate competency by the use of either the grade point average in related courses or by demonstrating competency with something similar to a culminating student experience.
- Establish the SBOE as the body that sets competency scores related to state testing.
- Provide that students may select any two of the seals detailed in the amendment.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I welcome any questions you may have.