



**The Alliance for High Quality Education
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 319
Senate Education Committee
June 9, 2020**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to offer proponent testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 319. SB 319 provides much need flexibility to assist school districts in responding to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented schools as they plan and prepare to open for the 2020–21 school year.

My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of The Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE*). Prior to joining the Alliance as its executive director, I served as superintendent for the West Geauga Local Schools for thirteen years. I earned my doctorate at Cleveland State University in the area of Urban Educational Administration.

The Alliance offers support for SB 319 and thanks the bill sponsor, Sen. Matt Huffman, and this Committee for seeking to provide necessary statutory relief to provide school district boards of education, administrators, and educators with the tools they need to successfully navigate the ongoing COVID-19 realities facing our schools in the upcoming school year. While we generally support all the provisions in SB 319 As Introduced, I would like to focus on the provisions Alliance Members view as most timely and critical. I am also adding an additional proposal for consideration.

Flexibility for educator evaluations, temporary authority to furlough employees, and licensure flexibility to permit educators to temporary teach outside of grade bands and subject areas are at the top of the Alliance’s priority list heading into the next school year.

Teacher and Principal Evaluations

We support the provisions in SB 319 that would extend the timelines for the completion of evaluations and modifying the required components of the evaluation rubric for teachers and principals. Due to the conditions under which the 2019–20 school year ended, it was impossible if not improbable to complete, in any comprehensive manner, both teacher and administrative evaluations as statutorily designed.

In addition, the absence of state testing data impacts the availability of reliable value-added and student growth measure data. Without this data, the student growth measure requirements of the teacher and principal evaluation rubric cannot be completed with fidelity. For the 2020-21 school year, districts and schools should be able to move forward with only the teacher performance components of the evaluation system.

Finally, flexibility regarding the two- and three-year evaluation cycle is important despite not using student growth measure data for the 2019-20 evaluation period. School leaders and educators should be focusing all their attention and resources on ensure the health and safety of students as they return to school and to focus on what is most important...teaching and learning.

Temporary Furlough Authority

This SB 319 provision would allow school boards the authority to furlough employees for financial reasons. This authority provides an additional budgeting “tool in the toolbox” for school boards for the 2020-21 school year only. A furlough option is necessary due to additional anticipated budget cuts to the school funding formula for fiscal year 2021 and unknown impact at the local level in terms of potential for reduced property tax collections.

While we understand the reluctance of teacher unions to agree with this provision outside of the collective bargaining process, due to the timing of the last round of funding formula reductions as well as preparing for additional rounds of cuts next school year, boards of education need access to a temporary way to reduce costs without having to let employees go through a reduction in force (RIF). As opposed to a RIF where employees get fired, furloughed employees continue to receive insurance benefits and have access to use accrued but unused paid leave. Upon return, a furloughed employee also resumes their respective contract status that existed as the time the furlough was authorized.

School districts need a similar tool, as afforded other local governments, that is flexible and the least disruptive approach to balancing budgets that can be implemented at the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Educator Licensure Flexibility

While not currently addressed in SB 319, the Alliance asks that the bill sponsor and this Committee support an amendment to provide temporary licensure flexibility for the 2020-21 school year only. The Alliance ask that the bill be amended to permit educators to teach outside of their current licensure grade bands and subject areas for next school year. We feel strongly that this is necessary to permit district administrators flexibility in assigning teachers and staff as appropriate to accommodate social distancing requirements and blended learning options for students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. SB 319 provides time-sensitive tools that school districts undoubtedly need heading in to the next school year. I am happy to answer any question you have at this time.

*The Alliance for High Quality Education is a consortium of 73 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio including the Toledo, Cleveland, Akron-Canton, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati areas. The Alliance for the last twenty-five years has represented its members' interests on matters of state education policy and funding, as well as contributing to fostering high quality educational opportunities for students in their districts and those across the state.