

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

June 24, 2020



INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY For SB 320

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&
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&
Legislative Committee Chair for the First Ring Schools Collaborative

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Minority Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit interested party testimony for Senate Bill 320 regarding opening schools for the 2020-2021 School year.

Thank you for allowing us to share a few thoughts about how districts can use this time to prepare for the fall 2020-2021 school year. Not only will we need to make plans for physical changes at the school, our normal policies and procedures will need to accommodate the new public health requirements and account for the abrupt end of the academic year this past spring.

We are looking at plans for the fall school year. There are several options being discussed among the schools. We appreciate the flexibility in the initial draft guidelines for Ohio's primary and secondary schools but need more specifics to efficiently begin the planning process. We have provided written comments to the governor and are hopeful that those comments will be taken into consideration and included in the Governor's forthcoming plan.

Fundamental to all planning questions are the requirements for social distancing and spacing guidance. This central question will dictate most solutions. Once the schools are provided with the fundamental restrictions, they can begin to develop various solutions for transportation, food service, labs, auditoriums and develop appropriate restrictions for other common areas of their facilities. While all of Ohio's Schools will be adopting new health policies to help combat the potential for increased viral infections caused by the COVID-19 virus, we should also use this time to adopt appropriate academic tools.

The Need for Flexible Restrictions for Occupancy, Attendance and Transportation

1. Reduced occupancy in classrooms
 - (a) will there be maximum limits based upon square footage or only the number of people in a defined space?
 - (b) will schools need to maintain student spacing at all times during the day, or can schools use protective devices like plexiglass dividers when social distancing is not practical?
2. Measuring attendance in hours and days of active participation and will these standards be different for virtual or physical participation?

3. Transportation capacity and spacing requirements
 - (c) School bus schedules
 - (d) Utilizing public transportation
 - (e) Parent drop-off

Other Concerns and considerations

1. Budget Shortfalls - Public schools in Ohio are facing budget uncertainty for the coming school year and the five-year forecast is predicting significant shortfalls and districts will likely be on the ballot much sooner than expected. Given the economic recovery underway, there may be large portions of voters in Ohio, who would normally support public schools, but might have to think twice, based on their own economic and job security status.

Any future budget cuts for schools need to address EdChoice vouchers. Any reductions in total ADM funding should not include EdChoice students. Moreover, The amount of funding deducted for voucher students needs to reflect any budget reductions suffered by the public school, otherwise the school is receiving reduced funding from the state but then paying the full voucher amount to private and charter schools – which results in an unfair “double deduction” for voucher students (a lost percentage of ADM funding received and a full distribution to fund the EdChoice scholarship).

2. Shortages for licensed staff - If Covid is prevalent in the fall we may need flexibility in filling staffing shortages

3. Schools will need a safe harbor from incurring penalties due to state assessment scores. While the aggregate data obtained from test results may be useful for determining the impact the school closings had on districts and students, punishing schools for the disruption will serve no academic or management purpose. Punishing schools for lost achievement in 2020-2021 will merely widen the technology gap and spotlight the already existing disproportionate impact upon Ohio’s less wealthy school districts.

4. We recommend that we use this time to restructure and reform the State Report Card and other tools for measuring academic performance. If we adopt a safe harbor for testing impact until the 2021-2022 School year, we will have sufficient time to study and make the necessary State Report Card adjustments without an immediate impact upon the very next calendar year. No matter what happens this fall it will not be a normal year. The academic impact from this spring will carry over and the emotional impact upon the students, parents and the teachers will not disappear over the summer. As we adjust to

distance learning and other changes, we should use this period to recalculate how services will be delivered in the fall and beyond.

We should use this time wisely. While we are all unfortunately experiencing adjustments to our educational lives, we should be thoughtful and reflective about the future. Allowing schools to benefit from the safe harbor recommendations of this past school year will benefit us for next year as well. It will position schools to be in session for a full year after COVID-19, and provide educators in Ohio the valuable time we need to put together a strong accountability focused Ohio Report Card. We believe students should definitely be tested during the normal testing period. However, we should only use the results of the testing to assist educators with focusing on the impact of true academic plans. The added pressures of a high stakes performance test in the 2020 – 2021 school year could actually reverse the recent academic improvements made by many schools, like those in our two organizations. We should be building better dreams for tomorrow as we manage to reinvent ourselves today.

In order to discuss, plan, develop and implement necessary changes for the school year our administrators will have to develop various contingency plans and then obtain school board approval, alignment with teachers and staff and adequately communicate with parents, students and the community. This is the perfect time to re-think how we deliver public education to our residents. We should also evaluate how we measure academic success.

In conclusion, there are many unknowns for the 2020-2021 academic school year. We should use this time to transition away from those policies that are divisive and move to a more inclusive and collaborative approach where schools can help each other by sharing techniques and strategies that have demonstrated positive results. As administrators we learned new approaches from one another during a very difficult and emotional time this spring. Let's keep the collaborative momentum working for our students and our state as we prepare for the fall.

Thank you for allowing us to share our constructive thoughts with the committee on behalf of Ohio's Mid-Sized Urban and First Ring Schools.