

Senate Education Committee Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and other members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Senate Bill 358.

As a long time high school American History teacher in Ohio, I wholeheartedly support the common sense extension of previous moratoriums related to standardized testing and the high stakes consequences associated with said tests, including the state report card and state takeovers of districts. I believe that it is in the best interest of Ohio's students to apply for a federal waiver on this year's state tests, and to provide flexibility with regard to the 3rd grade guarantee, as well as the graduation requirement.

What we know is that these measures of students & districts are based on standardization, that the educational product provided by districts is supposed to be consistent, and that students will learn evenly across demographics. Even in an ideal situation, with professional educators like myself diligently following Ohio's content standards, this is near impossible. The reality of education is that professionals meet students where they are in a given content area, provide appropriate instruction, review, remediation, or acceleration depending on the individual student, and facilitate the pursuit of appropriate academic goals according to the individual. A system based on standardization is wildly difficult according to the realities of human intellectual development.

Now, if you also include the adaptation of the educational environment according to the constraints of a global pandemic, then a system based on standardization becomes completely absurd. This is why the flexibility established in Senate Bill 358 is so important.

When I return to school over the next two weeks, I will be teaching virtual classes, as well as a hybrid model with students in class physically twice a week. I will be conscientious to provide an equitable, quality product in both situations. However, I can already see where there will be differences between the two based upon environment. In order for this to be successful, I will need flexibility in methodology, approach, assignments, assessments, and otherwise to allow for divergent student paths as they control more sizable pieces of their education. This flexibility hardly exists in a standardized system tied to high stakes assessments. SB 358 facilitates it.

Other districts in my county are returning fully virtual to start the year. Still others will have students attend classes in person 4 or 5 days a week. We are all pursuing a different framework for what we do, but the one thing we all have in common is that we have absolutely no idea how this is going to play out from a perspective of student and faculty health. What we have been told by the Governor and local health departments is that there will be cases of COVID in our schools. Hopefully, these are innocuous and involve little missed time for students and educators. Statistically we know better. Kids are going to get sick, and so are their teachers. They are likely to miss sizable portions of their school year. The research indicates that some may suffer the ill effects of the virus for months. Others, asymptomatic or uninfected, will miss weeks of school in quarantine having been in proximity to positive cases. Entire schools will shut down for periods of time.

Our job as educators will be to maintain a consistent, coherent educational product in this environment. This is our reality. As such, I believe it makes absolutely no sense to move forward with Ohio's customary system of standardized tests, evaluations, report cards and related penalties. To do so in this period of time is, as I said previously, complete absurdity. Please move forward with the flexibility provided by Senate Bill 358 for the sake of us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Matthew T. Jablonski