

## **Testimony of Carol Beckerle – in Support of Senate Bill 358 –9/23/2020**

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, and Ranking Member Fedor.

I am Carol Beckerle, and I am here today to express my overall support of SB 358. While I am speaking here in my individual capacity, I am also currently one of the newest members of an urban board of education.

By way of background, I previously spent 13 years as a special education teacher. Prior to becoming a teacher, I practiced law – so I come to you from a somewhat unorthodox career path.

I would like to address the provisions regarding Kindergarten Readiness Assessments. For districts that are engaging in exclusively virtual learning, this assessment represents a significant hardship, one that is not outweighed by its benefit.

To be clear, the KRA is an important tool in an ordinary year, which informs instruction for our newest students. But this is not an ordinary year. For districts where learning is entirely virtual, parents or guardians would be required to accompany their child into the building, potentially having to take off work, arrange for childcare for siblings and procure transportation. For many parents in large, urban, as well as rural, districts, this is a significant burden. Likewise, it is a burden on the district's teacher, nurses, principals and custodians to open and sanitize buildings, and prepare to test each kindergartener, while adhering to all the social distancing and testing protocols. The arguable incremental benefit from administering this assessment during virtual learning does not outweigh these burdens. I encourage this committee to adopt an amendment that allows districts to administer this assessment once they have begun in-person learning.

Likewise, the burden of administering the fall administration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade OST for districts that are 100% virtual significantly outweighs the benefit of such testing – which generally does not provide anything close the same level of useful information provided by the KRA.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage this committee to view this and other related legislation through a post-Covid lens.

Everyday in school districts across the country another wheel comes off the bus.

- Zoom is crashing.
- Internet is crashing
- Logins aren't working

- Hot spots aren't working
- Infection rates fluctuating and varying wildly. Rates in poor urban zip codes are significantly (as in over double) the rates of surrounding neighborhoods
- Unengaged parents
- Over-engaged parents
- Teachers using new technology and supporting new curriculum in real time
- Students learning new technology and navigating new curriculum in real time
- Too many platforms.
- Not enough platforms.
- Badly designed platforms.
- Redefining roles and expectations of teachers and administrators
- Yes, sports. No, sports. Maybe, some sports.

I am confident this list is not complete. But I can assure you, I have been contacted numerous times on each one of these topics. Indeed, if one were to seek a barometer of how serious, extensive and complex this crisis is, they should just monitor my inbox. (and I suspect the same can be said for all of yours!)

**All of this was entirely predictable** and yet, we boldly pushed forward, admirably (albeit naively) clinging to the belief that by sheer force of will, we could salvage this school year.

Several weeks in, it has become clear, that the cost of the current approach in terms of stress to our children, teachers, staff and families undeniably outweighs the marginal (at best) educational benefit of our current approach.

**Rather than continuing** to plod forward, ignoring these realities, I believe we should hit the pause button and consider how best to set our districts up for success after the pandemic.

Post-pandemic, most students across the country will (finally) have full-time access to electronic devices as well as reliable Internet.

This is an educational game changer.

Technology-infused education, when fully actualized, is transformational. **Its capacity to help close the equity gap** through deeper, targeted, experiential and interactive learning cannot be over-stated.

But the game cannot be changed overnight.

Teachers, who until now have been teaching students who did not have devices, must be trained and coached in effective integration of technology.

This will not happen with a few hastily thrown together teacher trainings.

To unleash the transformational power of technology, our teachers need ongoing, interactive training and coaching. What better opportunity for teachers to hone these skills but in the real time virtual learning, that has been foisted upon us during this pandemic?

If we continue on our current path, which entails shifting between 100% virtual and blended learning based on the rise and fall of infection rates, teachers will be relegated to learning how to utilize technology on-the-job, improving incrementally and disjointedly. The better path would be for districts to stabilize their instructional model, and embrace 100% virtual learning with the goal of ensuring teacher mastery of transformative levels of instruction right out of the (post-pandemic) blocks.

This strategy cannot stand alone. It must be coupled with a broad community partnership dedicated to attending to our students' social emotional, health and safety needs. In Columbus, our community partners, Columbus Parks and Recreation, and faith leaders are well on their way with this effort through Learning Extension Centers and Active Learning Points.

Both programs are providing important programming and safe locations for students to do their virtual classwork. These programs should be replicated and expanded to include school buildings in high concentration neighborhoods – allowing school nurses, counselors, social workers and administrators to join forces with community partners to meet students' social emotional needs.

If we can ride out this pandemic managing to train our teachers to provide transformational instruction while simultaneously providing for the emotional and physical well being of our students, there will be no stopping the post-Covid success of our students.

I encourage you to create and work to pass legislation that incentivizes districts to stabilize their instructional model – rather than reacting to the fluctuations of infections rates -- in order to

- Implement meaningful, ongoing training and coaching in the delivery of transformational technology-infused instruction throughout this 2020-2021 school year and
- Collaborate with community partners to provide social emotional programming, health services, counseling and safe spaces for students during the 2020-2021 school year

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. I would be happy to answer any questions.