



# THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

**Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 166  
Before the Ohio Senate Finance Subcommittee on Primary  
and Secondary Education**

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Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 166.

My name is Greg R. Lawson, I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

Since the 1990s, Ohio’s spending on K-12 public education **has grown faster** than inflation even as Ohio’s achievement gap between African-American and white students remain stubbornly high according to the ***Nation’s Report Card***. In 2017, African-Americans trailed white students by 28 points in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, essentially the same as the 27-point difference seen in 2002, and Hispanic students lagged behind white students by 15 points (the data was not collected in 2002 for this population). The same troubling numbers largely apply to 8<sup>th</sup> graders in **reading** and are even worse for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. Spending more state money on education has not proven to be a viable solution to this persistent problem.

Nevertheless, House Bill 166 currently proposes spending an additional \$400 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and \$150 million more in FY 2021, even though Ohio ranks among the top 10 states with the largest projected enrollment declines over the rest of the decade according to the **National Center for Education Statistics**. More concerning still is that more state funds will be spent just as Ohio considers watering down state report cards, reducing accountability by eliminating academic distress commissions, and weakening graduation requirements. More money for less accountability should be a non-starter.

As others have acknowledged, today’s report cards have problems. They are overly complex and include metrics that saddle poorer school districts with particularly bad ratings. But the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater. The Buckeye Institute takes no specific position on the proposed revisions to the report cards, but strongly cautions against converting report cards into mere data dashboards that lack the contextual background for parents and communities to better understand them.

The budget may also mistakenly propose eliminating academic distress commissions. The existing statute regarding those commissions may be flawed, but the commissions should not be eliminated. School districts that have failed their students for years should be held accountable. The state should not intervene in the day-to-day operations of local school districts, but taxpayers and parents rightly demand accountability. Including aspects of House Bill 154 in the budget would deny such accountability, and would be a mistake.

Finally, The Buckeye Institute does not believe that watering down graduation requirements will help students achieve greater future success, but we do generally agree with the joint proposal offered by **Ohio Excels**, the **Alliance for High Quality Education**, and the **Fordham Institute** regarding graduation requirements. This Committee is already familiar with the joint proposal’s details, so it suffices to say that we applaud the flexibility that may be created by reducing some of the testing requirements that have burdened teachers and created a teach-to-the-test mentality. We also support the joint proposal’s plan to offer other career, technical, and apprenticeship pathways for graduation. Although not perfect, the joint proposal does improve upon the status

quo and is vastly superior to some of the other proposals currently being circulated.

In conclusion, The Buckeye Institute urges this Committee to look closely at how much the state spends on primary and secondary education. Children are an incomparable resource and we do owe them what they need to succeed. We do not, however, owe the education bureaucracy a blank check to spend as they see fit even as our public schools perennially lag behind and enrollment declines. We should not expect less of our students, teachers, and administrators by watering down report cards, reducing accountability, and lowering graduation requirements. Ohio should not choose the path of low expectations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have at this time.

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*Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.*

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