**Interested Party Written Testimony on HB 166 ~ Graduation Requirements**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**Neil Gupta, Ed.D.**

**June 5, 2019**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of including an important graduation requirements proposal in HB 166. The proposal submitted by the State Board of Education would help provide support to our students across the state.

My name is Neil Gupta, and I serve as the Director of Secondary Education for Worthington City Schools. I also represent our middle and high school principals across the State through my position as Supervisor-At-Large on the Board of Directors for the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators. I’ve been a district administrator for the past 13 years in three public schools in Ohio and have volunteered my time serving on the OASSA Board of Directors for the past 10 years.

In my role as a district administrator, it is my job, along with my colleagues, to ensure all students graduate college and career ready. In Worthington City Schools, we are experiencing a growth in our enrollment that is also changing the demographics of our schools. Since 2007, we’ve more than doubled the number of English Limited students in Worthington.

In an effort to create a graduation requirements system, the State has provided many avenues for students to demonstrate their knowledge and proficiency of standards. Ohio has approved senior work and community service experiences as part of the graduation requirements for the class of 2020.

For the Class of 2019, 29 students participated in the Alternate Pathway from Worthington City Schools. Of the 29 graduates, 16 of them selected work or community service hours as part of their pathway.

The state board’s recommendations would permit a similar “culminating experience” for use by students for classes beyond 2020. Those recommendations were developed through the work of a group of 25 stakeholders including superintendents, principals, and teachers. The committee met multiple times over several months to address this important issue. that plan was its expansion of opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

No longer would tests be the only path to a high school diploma. Instead, the students could demonstrate their readiness for post-high school success through a variety of both test and non-test options.

*I urge you to include these options in any graduation requirements plan; the option for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in ways that do not rely on high stakes tests if that best suits their abilities.*

**Ohio Curriculum ChoiceOption**

As mentioned above, the Worthington City School District is experiencing a growth in our enrollment that is also changing the demographics of our schools (more than double the number of English Limited students since 2017).

With the recognition that some students find themselves in a situation where it will be impossible to meet the traditional (and alternative) pathways to graduation, the State has provided an additional option for them for the past several years (the graduating classes of 2014 through 2019). Known as the Ohio Curriculum Choice Option, this option allows families and students to fulfill the additional levels of math or science requirements with a Student Success Plan.

While it is our goal for all students to be prepared after high school, the Ohio Curriculum Choice Option provides an alternative for some students to continue after high school at a two-year program, business industry credential, or apprenticeship.

In Ohio, 118,617 students graduated in the 2014-2015 school year. Of this number, 857 students participated in the Curriculum Choice Option, or 0.72%. The State Department of Education conducted an analysis of the Class of 2016, and the percent of students who participated in Curriculum Choice was also under 1%.

In Worthington City Schools, four of our 711 students who graduated participated in this opportunity, or 0.56%.

While the number does not seem a like a lot, we do feel it is beneficial for a small percentage of students in very particular situations. As you can see by the numbers, Curriculum Choice does not seem to be “abused” by students looking to take an “easier” path.

The State Department of Education shared the Ohio Curriculum Choice Findings and Recommendations in a December 20, 2017 Memorandum. In this document, they supported Curriculum Choice for the Classes of 2018 and 2019. They also stated they would provide an additional study of the graduation and course data in a follow-up report by December 15, 2019.

Since Curriculum Choice provides an appropriate opportunity for a small percentage of students, *I recommend that legislation allows for Curriculum Choice to be extended to the Class of 2020 immediately.* In addition, I recommend the State Department of Education study the findings from the December 15, 2019 report to determine future continuation of this choice. If we continue to see less than 1% of our students participate in this Choice, I will recommend we continue providing this opportunity.

On behalf of Worthington City Schools and the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators, we strongly support Ohio Curriculum Choice as an opportunity for our students to graduate and become productive citizens in our State. Chairman Dolan and members of the Committee, thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this vital matter.

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Director of Secondary Education

Worthington City Schools