

**House Education Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

**HB 67 – Proponent Written Testimony**

**February 18, 2021**

**Emily Schweppe, 1st grade teacher, Reading Community City School District**

Chair Manning, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of HB 67.

I want to share with you about my personal teaching experience this year.

I teach in a one building Pre-K-12 district. We were able to safely return to school with two options for parents: a blended in person/remote half-day model or full remote learning. With the exception of two remote periods, our school day looked like this: the first cohort arrived in the morning for 3 hours of in-person learning and left before lunch to participate in remote afternoon learning. Once the morning cohort left the building, we had a 50 minute transition period consisting of sanitizing tables, chairs, materials, responding to parent emails, parent phone calls, staff meetings, team meetings, making copies and eating lunch. The afternoon cohort would then arrive for their in-person learning and we would deliver the same instruction as we did for the morning cohort while they were engaging in remote learning.

Since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, my district has communicated that establishing positive relationships continues to be at the heart of what we do and are more important than ever this year to help foster student growth. We use an approach called “Responsive Classroom” which focuses on creating an environment where students can do their best learning by integrating academic and social-emotional skills; an environment that is joyful, students are challenged and know they are cared for and safe.

We have worked to maintain this type of engaging learning environment as much as we can within the safety guidelines. This might be learning about two-digit addition with our friend “Gus the Plus” or discovery learning by finding seeds outside and experimenting what will happen if we plant them in two different environments.

While maintaining that environment has been challenging, what’s more challenging is responding to a question I am asked by my students. On multiple occasions my first graders have raised their hand in the middle of a lesson and asked, “Ms. Schweppe, when will COVID be over? I just don’t like it.”

Each time I am caught off guard by that question and a wave of sadness runs through me. I know that their priority isn’t solving the two digit addition equation, or discovering if living things can

grow in different environments. In those moments, I am reminded that my little first graders are *surviving a pandemic*.

We know that high stress levels greatly impact our mental, emotional and physical health and this year is a prime example of that. During remote learning periods due to COVID, we are battling tech issues such as students being unable to hear me for whatever reason or their internet goes out. I even had a student unable to login to remote learning on his Chromebook because the letter “t” (the fourth letter of his name) was broken on his keyboard.

During in person learning they are being asked to spell the muffled sound I am making from behind my mask, then make a quick pivot to remote learning due to increased cases, or switch to learning with a different teacher for an individual quarantine period. While all educators are providing the best possible education within the guidelines, it is clear that the pandemic has dramatically increased the stress that students experience because of the increased challenges they are facing every day.

My district continues to have regular data meetings to measure student growth and discuss how we can address the implications that the pandemic has had on our students in our district. Instructional time needs to be dedicated to closing the gaps, fostering social-emotional learning, and doing as much as we can to support the whole child as we guide them through the pandemic.

Results of the state tests won't be available until the summer which does not add timely value to our instruction. We need to do all that we can to provide the best instruction in the safest environment for our students right now.

I ask that you act on waiving the state testing requirements. Let's send the message to our students that during this global pandemic, their emotional well-being is our number one priority.

Thank you for your consideration.