

House Education Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 67 – Proponent Written Testimony

February 18, 2021

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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.

It’s no secret that this year has been an unparalleled and unprecedented challenge for educators, parents, advocates, and communities. I teach 5th grade Humanities at STEM Middle at Baldwin Road, and this year has required ingenuity and resiliency I didn’t even know I was capable of before this year. It’s been difficult. However, it’s also been worth it, and through my students and their growth most days I am still able to find the sparks of joy that drew me to this profession. On the days that bring more challenges than joy, these are the moments I hold onto. I’d like to tell you about one of these sparks that still fills my heart and strengthens my resolve on difficult days.

Like many districts, Reynoldsburg returned in a remote model after the winter break. The semesterly switch also brought families the opportunity to change their designation from “virtual academy” or “hybrid” when our schools went back into hybrid mode. One of my students who had been a virtual only student the first semester was particularly excited that his family chose to switch to “hybrid” and eagerly anticipated the day when he could walk through our doors. Within seconds of the communication going out to families and students about our January 19th return to hybrid, this student sent me a direct Zoom message to say, “Oh my god! Oh my god! I’m going to get to see you! I get to go to school. I’m so happy, I’m crying right now.” Even when we were all virtual, he would send messages about wishing class could go longer and saying that he would stay on our class Zoom calls until dinner time if he could. When we had a snow day last week he demanded to “speak to the manager,” wanting to know who made the call because “I was supposed to get to talk about what I read with you yesterday!” Every moment of class time with his classroom community and teachers is as precious to him as it is to me and to every student and family I partner with.

This is the story of just one student who would be adversely impacted by robbing valuable class time for testing this year. Every single second I spend with my students is high-impact and high-value for instruction and social-emotional learning and support with an unprecedented urgency this year. In addition, due to the nature of the pandemic and the requirement to test in-person, the logistical aspects of even administering state tests this year will cause them to take even more class time than they normally would. This is unacceptable. My students and their families have worked hard and made many sacrifices to partner with educators and schools to make sure learning has never stopped this year. They understand that, after the community of people—staff, students, family, and community—who make school happen, our most precious resource this year is time.

Seeking a waiver of federally mandated state tests this school year would allow us to preserve and use this resource to its fullest extent, by working with and directly helping our students.

Finally, I want to make sure I speak up for the families who have chosen to remain or switch to virtual learning this year. These choices were not easy and were not made lightly by families. Some of these families made the difficult decision to stick with virtual learning because the student or family had a personal experience with COVID-19. Some have even lost loved ones to this pandemic. These choices to stick with virtual learning were made knowing that it would require sacrifice for their families in time, energy, and adjustment. These choices were made out of love and concern for their child with a deep commitment from the family to the education of that student. Should we proceed with state testing this year, we will be asking families to send their students into buildings just to take these tests. This is wrong. Not only will it be impossible for students to do their best if they are experiencing anxiety about the virus as they enter buildings just to test—some for the first and only time this year—we would be adding another layer of trauma onto what has already been a traumatic year for these students and families. Seeking a waiver of federally mandated testing this spring could prevent further trauma and would respect the choices these families made to keep their children home to keep them safe.

We know time is of the essence on this issue as March quickly approaches. I urge you to quickly take action to pass HB 67 so that my students and I can continue to put the remaining time in this school year to the best use possible—learning, growing, and supporting each other as we write history together as scholars during this pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate your dedication to education and students in Ohio.