

House Bill 67 (state testing waiver) Testimony

February 21, 2021

I am a third grade teacher at Westlake elementary school located in Westlake Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. This year has already been labeled, described, interpreted, explained by many so I will not waste any time telling you that this has been an “unprecedented year “or that it has been a “challenging year “for teachers, parents and children. These are known facts that we do not have to repeat because we’ve heard them repeated over and over and we have all witnessed all of the challenges this school year has brought.

What has been frustrating has been the expectation to do what we would normally do under circumstances that are not normal. In schools with administrators who support their teachers and children students, there have been many changes and adjustments in order to make progress and find success during this “unprecedented “year. This is a sign of the administration who is looking for the success of their students and teachers regardless of the situation.

However, unfortunately, there are administrators who insist on trying to make this year as normal as possible, by doing the things that they do every year, whether that’s testing or scheduling, etc. they are finding that students are not successful, teachers are frustrated, and there is no progress being made.

Many districts around the state, including ours, have been trying to find a balance of what we can “normally” do regardless of pandemic and what we need to adjust , change, or frankly—just not do this year so that we can put the success and progress of our students first rather than trying to prioritize a checklist of items that we have to “just get done.”

State mandated testing. This is a perfect example of one of those items on the checklist that teachers and students have to do every year that should not and cannot be done this year. If the state has gone so far as to remove the retention clause of the third grade guarantee, because of the pandemic, then why are we testing in the first place? Is it just to check this item off on our list of things to do? Are we trying to measure the progress students are making during this “unprecedented “year? What is the purpose? We teach our students that we need to look for the purpose and intention of what we were doing in order to truly understand and be successful. Trying to prepare third graders to take the air test is going to take away precious instructional time that can be allocated for direct instruction, intervention, progress monitoring, and all of the good teaching that we do. Trying to figure out district issued devices that need to be brought back from other students in order to test our students is a nightmare. Telling them that this test that they’re going to take will not give us that much more information, especially since they are scheduled to take it three-fourths of the way into the year rather than at the end of the year. Many districts already have district and grade level assessments in place to measure the growth and progress of all their students. I currently have a handful of students on RIMPs (Reading improvement and monitoring plan). I know where their gaps are and we have been providing interventions, re-teaching strategies, and home support for these students to make growth. We have utilized MAP testing and progress monitoring benchmarks to “take the temperature” of these students to measure their progress and make adjustments to our teaching. Yes—teachers are doing all of this despite teaching mode, despite the pandemic that has greatly impacted every aspect of our daily lives. We’ve gotten to know our students, regardless of the learning mode they are engaged. Whether it’s been virtual, hybrid or all in, teachers know where their students are and where they need to be.

If we are going to continue to say that this is an unprecedented year, then we need to make unprecedented decisions. If there is any year for us to do away with state testing, it is this year. Please pass House Bill 67, waiving state testing for the remainder of this year. We don’t need any more distractions in the classroom.

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