

February 17, 2021

Re: House Bill 67

Dear Members of the Ohio House of Representatives and the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Rebecca Calvin, and I am a high school teacher who teaches in Tuscarawas County. I am writing to you to strongly urge you to support House Bill 67, which would remove the requirement for Ohio schools to administer state mandated tests, and would require the Ohio Department of Education to request a waiver for all federally mandated tests.

This past year has been a lesson in adaptation and resilience for all of us. School closures and remote learning have removed the security of public school that often serves as the only source of stability during the turbulent years of adolescence. When my students transitioned to remote learning during November and December of this year, they lost that stability.

There is only so much that work schedules, time management tips, recorded lessons, Zoom meetings about mental health, inspirational quotes, and reaffirmations that “you can do this, and you will make it through” can do. Once that stability of in-class instruction is gone, motivation and optimism soon follow. I can call my students back to their computer, but I cannot take their phone; I cannot turn off the television. There is only so much frustration that I can feel towards my students before that turns to empathy for their unique and unfair situation. Since their prefrontal lobe takes more time to develop, teenagers often do not have ideal judgement- and decision-making skills, and need guidance from adults in these areas. I can provide that for forty-one minutes every day, and parents and guardians can provide that when they are home, but we are asking students to use skills they haven’t even developed to learn and thrive in an environment in which most living people have never experienced.

I teach in a rural district largely made up of manual and industry laborers who cannot work from home. The biggest argument from my students in favor of remote learning is that they can work more hours to support their families and contribute to the household income. Their focus is not on their education; it’s on survival. Our federal government continues to neglect this population by delaying aid to families struggling during the pandemic, so part of the responsibility resulting from that negligence has fallen to those who should hold it the least - *children*.

For parents and guardians who are able to work from home, another dilemma ensues - they are not teachers; they are parents. I have a student who has four younger siblings, and is expected to help those children with their education. Parents with multiple children in multiple grades are expected to not only provide high-school level instruction to my students, but to students in middle school and elementary school as well. Unlike my colleagues and I, they often have not received the formal education and training to be able to do that. As a result, remote-based learning differs widely from in-class learning.

After an activity in which I asked my students to reflect on their year thus far, I read their responses. Almost all of my students mentioned coronavirus. I could sense the apprehension and fear from my

freshmen students as they expressed their frustration with entering high school and its complications and changes from middle school, let alone experiencing their first year in high school walking one-way down hallways, wearing masks and distancing themselves from friends. I could sense apathy from my junior students, their words holding despair and acceptance instead of the vigor and passion that we as educators aim to help them develop during this stage in their life.

I have had many conversations with my students about the current situation in which they find themselves. I have been honest with them - this is unfair to them. This is not normal. They are being forced to learn lessons in resilience and strength years before they should be expected to. I can express empathy as much as possible, and I can have them complete free-writes and SEL activities, but I can't truly understand what they are going through. The most that I can do is tell them that I have their best interests at heart; I care about them. Like teachers to their students, you too have a responsibility; with support of legislation that recognizes the unique challenges of your constituents, you are also saying you have their best interests at heart; you care about them. Forcing adolescents to ignore the circumstances in which they find themselves in order to check boxes for state and federal requirements is unfair and unnecessary during this time. Their resilience cannot be demonstrated in a multiple-choice question and answer. They *are* learning, they *are* working hard - but these are lessons that we learn from life experience, not textbooks and worksheets.

A few weeks ago, one of my junior students came to me with desperation in her voice and tears in her eyes: "Ms. Calvin, when is this all going to stop?" There is no difference between a young child asking you for guidance, and a teenager looking to you for support when their world has been turned upside down - you instinctively want to give them an answer and the reassurance that you, an adult, can completely shield them from the uncertainties that have been forced upon them. And there is no greater heartbreak than telling a child that you don't have the answers, but that you can offer your empathy and support. It is unfair to deliberately break that shield and pile on more.

My students rely on me for consistency in the support that I can provide; the most important part of my job is to get them through adolescence with as much guidance and grace as possible. That is part of your job, too - when you were elected to office, you were chosen to represent the best interests of *all* of your constituents, teenagers included. At this age, teenagers are learning the universal ethical principles that guide moral development. Provide an example for them to follow.

Teenagers often think they are not heard or understood - show them that they are. Show this population of constituents and future voters that they are valued members of the community.

Sincerely,

Ms. Rebecca Calvin