

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 200. I am Karen Boch, Superintendent of Wellston City Schools.

*Wellston* is a rural Appalachian district located in Jackson County. It is predominately white, and the vast number of students come from households of poverty. Specifically, our level of poverty is such that students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch. We are a small school district with approximately 1350 students.

Many of our students come from backgrounds of trauma, and their legal guardians are grandparents, relatives or family friends. The families do the best they can with the resources available. However, taking care of additional individuals is a strain physically, mentally and financially. Several years ago, we lost two students, two staff members, and several first-graders lost a parent - all within the same school year. The reasons ranged from cancer to car accidents to addictions. In the last two weeks, we have had siblings move into the district who witnessed their father commit suicide. The stories of trauma coupled with poverty are endless and intensified as a result of the pandemic. As a school district, we must build a system that includes wrap-around services, even with the limited number of providers and resources in southeastern Ohio.

Does poverty matter? Absolutely, but it is not an excuse as to why students are underperforming. The impact of poverty is complex and not isolated to limited financial resources. As a member of the Speaker's Task Force on Education and Poverty (2017), it was clear that we must look through multiple lenses: adverse health and mental health issues, a child's family dynamics, along with other challenges such as transportation, safety, support structures, and food insecurities - all of which play a critical role in the child's academic success.

As you can see, addressing poverty is not one-size-fits-all and should be tackled from many different angles. Ultimately, to create an optimal learning environment for our students, we must address the lack of basic needs to close the gap. In the extensive analysis of Dr. Howard Fleeter, it has been proven time and time again that achievement has a positive correlation to wealth. Unfortunately, most of the measures for which we are held accountable do not consider the socioeconomic background.

HB 200 is a testament to the fact that it is possible to improve the current report card into a more equitable measure for all school districts and students. Accountability should provide districts with reliable information needed to analyze their practices and measure the effectiveness of their PK-12 system to improve. Below are several ways in which HB 200 has a positive impact.

- First and foremost, it removes the A-F system and replaces it with six Academic Performance Ratings from "Significantly Exceeding Expectations to "Meets Expectations, to "In Need of Support. No matter the setting, be it the classroom or the report card, the A-F system is complex and does not provide the audience with the story behind the grade. It is also a very punitive system, and one overall grade component cannot capture what is happening in our schools.
- The Achievement component, a measure significantly impacted by economic status, moves from only counting students who meet a specific benchmark (percent proficient or above) to

applying a weight based on performance to all test scores, thus including the performance of *ALL* students (Performance Index). It also equalizes the scale by adding the "Approaching Proficient" multiplier, which recognizes the improvement of students from limited to basic to proficient.

- Revisions to the Achievement component acknowledge that the Performance Index Scale of 120 is unattainable. Setting the highest score at the average of the highest ten percent of the Performance Index scores achieved in the 2018-2019 school year makes the measure attainable.
- Additionally, it moves Performance Indicators, performance and improvement of students who retake the end-of-course exams, gifted identification and services, and chronic absenteeism to report only.
- The Progress component utilizes an overall score. It allows for use of the most recent three-year average of value-added data or the most recent year of value-added data, whichever measure would result in a higher rating for the district or building. Importantly, it also removes the subgroup demotions and Value-Added rankings.
- The Gap Closing measure continues to use Annual Measurable Objectives but recognizes that either achievement or growth can determine success. It also removes the lowest 20% subgroup, keeps the n-size at 20, and eliminates subgroup demotions. Addressing the details mentioned above is essential as it provides a means of levelling the playing field for high poverty districts such as Wellston City Schools.
- There are no significant changes to the Graduation component. However, it does provide critical information to address issues such as high mobility rate; students with disabilities delaying graduation; and the percentage of students who officially withdrew and did not receive a high school diploma.
- Finally, it is refreshing to see changes to K-3 Literacy. The current component only focused on the percentage of students moving off-track to on-track from Fall to Fall. This achievement measurement put high poverty districts at an immediate disadvantage as students were being held accountable for three summer months without instruction. The Third Grade Guarantee is a positive change as it focuses on the performance of *all* students by measuring the percentage of students who meet the promotion rate on the reading portion of the Third Grade English/Language Arts assessment.

As a district that values continuous improvement, Wellston City Schools see HB 200 as a positive step forward in addressing the inequities with the Local Report Card as it currently stands. A test score does not define our students or organization but instead the degree to which we help our students become individuals who know how to reflect, create, collaborate, and be critical problem solvers. This is how we define our success. As stated by Barack Obama, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." It is time to make changes to Ohio's school report card that provide a fairer,

more accurate, more understandable reflection of the challenges that school districts face each day and the work they are doing to help each student succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent of HB 200.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Boch, Superintendent of Wellston City Schools