

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 on behalf of House Bill (HB) 200. I am Dr. Todd M. Nichols, Superintendent of Cuyahoga Falls City Schools.

To provide some background, I am in my twenty-eighth year of administration. Fourteen of those years have been spent as a superintendent in two different districts: the last ten in Cuyahoga Falls. I have been on the BASA Report Card Committee for thirteen years. As you can imagine, I have lived through all phases of the Report Card and Accountability process and I would like to commend and express thanks to Representative Don Jones and Representative Phil Robinson for their leadership in developing HB 200. From my perspective, their bipartisan partnership has led to legislation that will make immediate changes to Ohio's school report card to provide a more fair and understandable report card. We appreciate the inclusion of three Report Card Committee members: Stephanie Starcher who represents our rural school population, Cameron Ryba who represents our suburban districts, and Marlon Styles who represents our urban districts. The point is, it seems that we have reached a place where bipartisan leadership is truly interested in the contributions of practitioners. A phrase I use in my leadership has been: "when making a decision, make every attempt to involve those who are most affected by the decision." That said, we appreciate your consideration.

For many years, I have focused on the purpose of the Local Report Card. I fully understand the federal requirements placed upon states; then, I would like to believe that the purpose for the Local Report Card is not only to report to the state, but to inform and improve student achievement and growth at the district level. The problem is the current format is too complicated.

Further, the designations on the current format of the local report are dependent primarily upon student achievement driven by demographics. As the superintendent of two different districts, I have seen this scenario play out in different and similar ways. In one district, with a large population of disadvantaged students and a large population of students with disabilities, making significant improvement on Report Card measures was next to impossible. Over the last ten years in my current district, we have seen a significant change in the demographics. Specifically, our population has grown much more diverse. Ten years ago, we were over 90% white, approximately 1% English learners and less than 30% disadvantaged students. Currently, we are just over 70% white, 6% English learners, and nearly 50% disadvantaged students. Although our Local Report Card may not reflect it, we are a much better school district today, in terms of opportunities to become employed, enlisted, and/or enrolled. For instance, we have grown in advanced manufacturing, welding, HVAC, auto mechanics, criminal justice, broadcast communications, etc. Our schools are much more than the reported statistics.

Through the collaborative process, HB 200 represents a more understandable Local Report Card, and we believe it will present a greater opportunity to achieve the purpose to inform and improve student achievement and growth. There are several positive factors included in HB 200 that create excitement and hope for change.

First, the six performance ratings replace the current letter-grade system. Ratings that range from “Significantly Exceeds Expectations” to “Meets Expectations” to “In Need of Support” are more descriptive and are less entrenched in the historical connotation associated with the letter-grade system.

There is no question that student achievement and growth represent our core business. As such the Achievement component upon the Performance Index allows for every student and every score to be counted in the measurement. The focus at the building and district level is to move students from one level to the next. For example, it is as much a reward to help a student grow from a “limited” level to “basic” level as it is to move a student from a “proficient” to “accomplished.” Further, the addition of “approaching proficient” helps balance the multipliers above and below the proficient level. Lastly, redefining the threshold and targets associated with the Performance Index make much more sense. The current score of 120 is not attainable; as such, basing expectations and ratings upon an unattainable threshold never made sense.

Allowing the Progress component to be flexible by using the most recent three-year average of value-added data or the most recent year of value-added data will help districts that are moving quickly to demonstrate growth while not harming those that have tremendous swings from one school year to the next.

The Gap Closing component represents both achievement and growth. By allowing multiple pathways for students to meet the state-set criteria, either through student achievement or growth, we are providing an opportunity for our buildings and districts to be recognized for their work. Moreover, it levels the playing field that has been so largely based upon the demographics of a district.

In terms of Graduation Rate, I remember the changes to the formula to have a clear definition across the United States. As such, we understand the measurement terms will not be changed which will provide consistency. However, HB 200 proposes the inclusion of valuable information which will help districts address the challenges associated with high mobility rates and share the story of doing what is right for our students with disabilities.

While there has been much discussion over the years to Prepared for Success. I remember when and how it became a component of the Report Card and supported telling the rest of the story. Unfortunately, our hopes for this measure did not come to fruition. While we wanted the component to represent the ways in which we were preparing students, the measurement became punitive. For that reason, HB 200 is recommending that Prepared for Success become a report only category. The information is important, but there is no fair way to measure it as a component.

The last component to be measured is Third Grade Guarantee previously known as K-3 Literacy. There is no question about the importance of literacy by the end of third grade and the associated research regarding the implications for those who are not literate by the end of third grade. However, the K-3 Literacy component was solely focused on the percentage of students moving from off-track to on-track. This caused a focus on a small group of students and cases in which the school district did not achieve the standard despite having no students retained. HB

200 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 ELA assessment.

Most notably, HB 200 removes some of the punitive aspects of the report card such as subgroup demotions currently in place for the Progress and Gap Closing components. As mentioned earlier, our district's population of English language learners has grown significantly. Recently, we experienced a subgroup demotion in part due to the calculation of students who tested out of the program. Demotions are not federally required and are arbitrarily damaging.

Lastly, the removal of an overall rating in favor of component rating will help communities see the entirety of the district. Too often, schools are judged, realty decisions made, and taxpayer opinion cast at the ballot based upon an overall rating. HB 200 is a fair, honest, and reliable way for us to tell the whole story to our constituents and community leaders in a much more transparent and understandable way.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent of HB 200. We are glad to answer your questions.