



Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and House Primary and Secondary Education Committee members for giving me the opportunity to provide opponent testimony today on House Bill 200.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C.

While I stand before you to provide opponent testimony, I'd like to begin by commending you and the bill sponsors for tackling an important and incredibly complex issue. School and district report cards perform a variety of critical functions. For parents, the report cards offer objective information as they search for schools that can help their children grow academically. For citizens, they remain an important check on whether their schools are thriving and contributing to the well-being of their community. For governing authorities, such as school boards and charter sponsors, the report card shines a light on the strengths and weaknesses of the schools they are responsible for overseeing. And, finally, as we are reminded during challenging times like this, it can help officials identify schools in need of extra help and resources.

Because of the many roles it plays, it's essential that Ohio get it right when designing a report card. The current report card has some important strengths and has even drawn national praise from the Data Quality Campaign and the Education Commission of the States. Nevertheless, there are facets of the report card that can and should be improved. Fordham published a report in 2017, [Back to the Basics](#), calling for a variety of reforms to Ohio's report card framework including simplifying it and making it fairer to schools serving high percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

And yet, you're probably wondering why this is opponent testimony. We strongly believe that any report card must adhere to four critical principles. First, it must support equity and ensure high expectations for all students and that each student counts. Second, it must advance transparency and offer parents and communities clear, simple, honest information about school performance. Third, it should be fair and give every school the opportunity to demonstrate growth and improvement. And, fourth, it must be accurate and ensure components are measuring what is intended.

In analyzing HB 200 against these principles, we have serious concerns. For ease of consideration and discussion, this testimony will attempt to be specific and identify issues one at a time.

- **Switching to a rating system based on descriptors:** Moving from A to F grades to using words reduces transparency. While other rating systems like stars or a 1 to 100 scale could work, the labels adopted in HB 200 either have no meaning to regular families or in the case of "making moderate progress toward expectations" are actively misleading. This could also create a

challenge in some of our most diverse districts. In Columbus, for example, families speak more than 100 languages. The text descriptors proposed would be a nightmare for families to navigate and greatly reduce transparency.

- **Eliminating the overall rating:** This is another change that would negatively impact transparency. Akin to a GPA, an overall rating offers a broad sense of performance by combining results from disparate report card measures. It focuses public attention on the general academic quality of a school. In contrast, a system without a final rating risks misinterpretation. It would enable users to “cherry pick” high or low component ratings that, when considered in isolation, could misrepresent the broader performance of a district or school.
- **Changing value-added (student growth):** The bill makes a couple of changes to the value-added report card component that would negatively impact the report card. First, it allows a school or district to choose the higher of its one year or three-year growth data. This reduces transparency by hiding critical information. A well-constructed system should never simply allow a school to choose the rating that makes it look better. Second, it eliminates subgroup demotion without incorporating it elsewhere on the state report card, significantly damaging equity. It would allow the growth of a variety of student groups to simply not be considered when a school’s impact on student learning was examined. It would set Ohio back 20 years to a time when the academic achievement of the state’s historically disadvantaged student groups could more easily be swept under the rug.
- **Modifying the gap closing component:** HB 200 increases the number of students, or n-size, from 15 to 20 for the performance of a group of students to be reported on and considered in the ratings system. This would greatly impact both transparency and equity. As a part of its ESSA application, the Ohio Department of Education calculated the number of students that would be included in calculations under various n-sizes.¹ A move from 15 to 20 would remove 4 percent of students with disabilities, 8 percent of Hispanic students, and more than 12 percent of multiracial students from reporting requirements. Academic performance for these students would be out-of-sight and that, in the long term, could exacerbate opportunity and achievement gaps. Finally, HB 200 also continues the current practice of letting schools choose between being judged on performance index or value-added measures when evaluating gap closing. This could again fail to shine a light on student groups that aren’t getting the supports and resources they deserve to make strong academic progress. In the end, both achievement and growth matter, not one or the other.
- **Diminishing the value of the third grade literacy measure:** The proposed legislation would essentially render meaningless the third-grade literacy rating and impact both accuracy and equity. Measuring the promotion rate, as HB 200 does, doesn’t accurately measure what’s

¹ <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-ESSA/ESSA-Appendix-B.pdf.aspx> (page 3).

relevant. Ohio has a promotion rate under the third-grade guarantee of 95 percent but a proficiency rate of only 67 percent. The proposed change doesn't align with the research which clearly delineates the long-term challenges faced by students who are unable to read at grade level in third grade. It's essential that we measure what matters—and that's whether children are proficient readers, not just promoted to the next grade. The equity implications are even more profound. HB 200 would only use results based on students who had been in the school or district from kindergarten through the third-grade state assessment. Given what we know about student mobility, low-income students—statistically, those least likely to read on grade level in third grade—will be systematically excluded from the calculations as they tend to be far more mobile than middle and upper income students. This change would be putting the interests of adults in school systems ahead of Ohio children and should not be adopted.

- **Jettisoning prepared for success:** This component is the only measure that looks entirely beyond state test scores to determine how ready young adults are when they leave K-12. Unfortunately, it was constructed too narrowly and had an overly ambitious—perhaps even unrealistic—grading scale attached to it. The result has been a roundly hated measure that nevertheless is arguably the most important measure of student success. For transparency and accuracy purposes, this component should be reformed. But it shouldn't be abandoned. Let's continue to recognize students who are college ready, but also begin recognizing those who are ready to successfully enter the workforce or the military.

Report cards are a balancing act. Ohio's current state report card can and should be improved, but it's critical that any changes ensure that the report card supports equity, transparency, fairness, and accuracy. As introduced, HB 200 falls short—especially in regards to equity and transparency. We urge this committee to continue its efforts to ensure that the report card is consistent with our state's priorities and beliefs. Namely, that all students—given the proper support—can learn and achieve at high levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.