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## House Education Committee

### Testimony on House Bill 200

**Lisa A. Gray, President, Ohio Excels**  
**April 20, 2021**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 200 (HB 200). My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. Joining me today to help with questions is Kevin Duff, our Director of Policy and Research.

Ohio Excels – a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community – is committed to helping improve educational outcomes for Ohio's students and ensuring that all K-12 schools prepare students for success in the next step of their lives, whether it is higher education, the military, or the workforce.

School and district report cards are a critical part of improving student outcomes in Ohio. Report cards give parents, families, and members of the community – the primary audience of the report cards – an annual snapshot of how well students are learning. Report cards help identify our highest-performing schools so we can learn from them and flag which schools need additional support.

Ohio's current report card began in 2013. At the time, it received national attention as a model for innovation and transparency. However, over the past several years, it has become clear that the report card needs significant changes. We believe Ohio needs a new report card that:

1. Prioritizes equity and ensures that every student counts;
2. Ensures each component is more accurate, predictable, and fair; and
3. Simplifies and streamlines the report card to improve transparency and offer clear, honest information for parents and the public.

We appreciate the efforts made by the bill sponsors, Representatives Jones and Robinson, to improve the report card. HB 200 includes some positive changes. The bill appropriately focuses on using the Performance Index as the Achievement Component and Overall Value-Added as the Growth component. We are happy to see that HB 200 maintains the four- and five-year graduation rates and reports information on how schools are serving students who did

not graduate on time. Finally, we believe that adding context to ratings is very helpful for parents and community members. So, adding trend data for each rating is a step in the right direction.

**However, we have some strong concerns about many of the changes in HB 200.** Ohio Excels believes that HB 200 works against our key priorities and design principles for a new report card system.

**Equity:** Report cards should count all students, regardless of their demographics and mobility – period. If the state is serious about improving outcomes for all student groups, it starts with measuring where they are. Unfortunately, HB 200 includes changes that make this impossible. First, and perhaps the most egregious, is the Third Grade Reading Guarantee component. Despite all that we know about the importance of reading at grade level by third grade, this proposed measure does not include any student who was not continually enrolled in a single school or district from kindergarten through third grade. That means that thousands of mobile students – who are disproportionately low-income and minority students – will not be counted. Our mobile students face many barriers to learning. As a state we should be paying more attention to their achievement and progress, not less. The state already stipulates that a student must be there for a full academic year before they are counted. This window absolutely should not be extended. It is our most vulnerable students who will unfairly pay the price for this policy proposal.

Furthermore, HB 200's changes the minimum "n-size" required before students are reported by their affiliated student group, such as English learners, students with disabilities, or the student's race or ethnicity. By increasing the minimum from 15 to 20, HB 200 would stop reporting data for nearly 20,000 students according to their student group. We strongly oppose this change and any measure that does not count all students. Again, these groups include many of our struggling students and they should not be ignored in our accountability system. We have to ask ourselves: Are the changes being proposed good for our students? If we cannot answer "yes," then the change should not be made.

**Transparency:** School and district report cards were created to provide parents, families, and the community with critical student performance data that educators already have access to. The intent of Ohio's report cards was always for external stakeholders, and any changes should prioritize their needs and perspectives. This is why it is critical for potential reforms to simplify the report card and make the results more transparent. However, HB 200 moves in the opposite direction. For example, HB 200 eliminates the overall rating, a useful feature that allows parents to quickly evaluate schools and districts.

In poll after poll, Ohio's parents have indicated that, among various options, including a 0-100 scale, text descriptors, and stars, A-F letter grades are the preferred ratings for parents. Roughly nine out of 10 parents believe letter grades are clear, easy to understand, and appropriate for rating schools. Because of this, Ohio Excels strongly supports maintaining letter grades on the report card. That said, we know that our education associations strongly object to receiving letter grades. However, the six ambiguous text labels created by HB 200 are not the solution. Labels such as "making moderate progress toward expectations" do not clearly convey the performance of students to parents, families, and the public.

**Components:** While having fewer, better measures of student performance is important, HB 200 effectively removes several of the best components from the report card. Teaching children how to read is the primary goal of all elementary schools. The current report card attempted to measure how well students are improving their reading skills in the early grades, but it is not a perfect measure. However, HB 200 abandons this by transitioning to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee promotion rate. The promotion rate does not accurately reflect how well students are able to read. It is not even aligned to reading proficiency, and many students are excused from the policy entirely. Half of districts have a promotion rate of 99% or 100%. We know from several other measures, however, that far more students than that are not reading at grade level by the third grade – critical academic benchmark that often predicts future education success.

The current Prepared for Success component has many problems. However, the goal of the component aligns with the fundamental purpose of secondary education – preparing students for life after high school. We believe that the component has great potential and can be an important non-test-based feature of the report card – something educators have been clamoring for. It can be simplified, made fairer, and include additional career, academic, and military-focused ways for students to demonstrate above and beyond the graduation requirements that they are ready for their next step. Instead, HB 200 eliminates this component entirely.

**Implementation:** HB 200 includes several changes that will make it hard to implement. HB 200 changes the number of rating levels on the report card and the number of performance levels on state tests from five to six. This will make comparisons with previous years' report cards impossible and prevent schools and districts from showing improvement from year to year. The change to six levels also requires the bill to change all policies that are contingent on report card ratings. For example, as currently drafted, HB 200 will likely restrict where new community schools can open. Moving to six performance levels on state tests will require the state to change the tests and potentially make them longer so that there are enough questions to adequately differentiate students into six levels, instead of five.

HB 200 also sets up two report cards, one for the state and one for federal reporting. The bill describes a different set of ratings and rankings for federal purposes. This will decrease transparency and create situations where schools might have acceptable ratings on the state's report card but still not meet federal requirements. Furthermore, it appears that the federal reporting does not meet the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This means that HB 200's state report card or federal reporting will have to change significantly before it can be implemented.

In conclusion, while we appreciate the sponsors' interest in improving the report card, we do not believe that HB 200 as written is the right approach for Ohio's students, especially our most vulnerable students. Improving the report card is a complex task, but this task must focus on what is best for students. Ohio Excels knows firsthand how difficult and complicated this can be as it has been working with a diverse group of stakeholders – education associations, student advocates, the business community, and other stakeholder groups – to make improvements as well. We cannot reiterate more strongly that these changes have to put students at the center. Our combined proposal can now be found in Senate Bill 145. We encourage you to consider elements from that proposal as you look to improve HB 200. Thank you again for the opportunity to share our testimony, and we would be happy to answer any questions you might have.