

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 145. I am Dr. Cameron Ryba, Superintendent of Strongsville City Schools.

Over the past twenty plus years, I have dedicated my career to education. I've dedicated my career to supporting students in realizing the best versions of themselves no matter what advantages or challenges they brought with them into my classroom, our building, or our school district, while at the same time challenging mindsets, paradigms, and organizational systems that work against this goal.

During my time as Superintendent, I have been a member of the BASA report card committee and the accountability committee for the Alliance for High Quality Education. The work I have done in this area for BASA led to me being selected as the suburban Superintendent representative on the original report card study committee and a member of the bipartisan workgroup with Representative Jones that developed HB 200.

With multiple bills and many insights being shared, it is wonderful to witness robust conversations occurring regarding the reform of the state report card. However, each day I am growing more concerned that lines are being drawn, positions are being fortified, and instead of creating a space to solidify the significant commonalities between HB 200 and SB 145 and have the necessary discourse outside of public hearings to address the differing thoughts, we are becoming stuck on the differences between our views or opinions. I challenge all of us to rise above our positions and keep our focus on the possibilities - the possibilities of a report card system that is understandable and meaningful to all stakeholders - a report card that drives and inspires growth and improvement through a supportive accountability structure for the children of Ohio.

The goal of my testimony is to solidify our commonalities and add a practitioner's perspective on our differences. This perspective is not just mine alone, but grounded in a scope of collaboration with Superintendents around the state, whether in affluent or economically challenged areas, whether high achieving or not, whether urban, suburban or rural - this work is built on the foundation of the expertise and experiences of those selected by their communities to lead our Ohio schools.

As we explore the components of the state report card that are proposed to be rated in both SB 145 and HB 200, there is consensus or in my opinion, consensus can easily be found in the areas of Achievement, Progress, and Graduation.

With regard to Early Literacy, again, I believe we are conceptually close. If the desired outcome of this component is to ensure that our students have the necessary reading skills to be proficient readers in grade 4 and beyond, then that should be the sole measure. Why would we continue the flawed practice of including the off-track/on-track component of Early Literacy that is not a valid and reliable comparative measure to capture progress? If we cannot come up with a thoughtful argument to respond to this question, it should be removed as a component of this rated measure.

In terms of the other areas proposed to be rated in which the gaps in thought may be more disparate, I would like to utilize my time to challenge some prevailing ideas and offer the insights from someone leading this work in our schools.

First, it is important to note that our words matter and the change in our verbiage from Gap Closing to Equity without doing anything to address the inequity in the reporting system that falls underneath that reporting area is not only wrong, but offensive. Coupling this inaccurate terminology with the stance that student groups must meet both the achievement **and** growth metric to be defined as a success, SB 145 has doubled down on a plan to identify winners and losers - to point the finger instead of lending a supportive hand.

As a leader, I have many challenges which are brought to me for support and guidance. And when this occurs, I always have a similar response - what's the real challenge here? What's the real problem you are trying to solve? All too often we are implementing solutions that are attacking symptoms versus real problems. If the problem is that all student groups are not seeing similar levels of success or proficiency on state tests then why would we carve out the option for students and school districts being recognized for the growth that students are making even if they have yet to reach the goal?

When you go to get a snack and put a bag of popcorn in the microwave, you have those kernels that pop right away, those that pop all together, and those that need a little more time and pop after you have pulled the bag out. Do you throw away those kernels that took longer? Did they taste any different? Absolutely not. Those kernels are just as delicious and satisfying as those that popped first. They just needed a little more time. So why would we establish systems that devalue students who are on the path for success, but just need a little more time to pop and shine? That is why a system that equally values achievement and growth based on the criteria set by the state is not only equitable, but also provides meaningful data that is attacking the real problems of achievement gaps in our state.

With regard to Prepared for Success, it is my belief that this component of the report card can be meaningful and give context to the work that schools are doing to prepare students for life after high school. With a focus that is targeted on pathways to enlistment, enrollment, or employment that reflect the goals of the communities we serve, Prepared for Success gives context and insight into the work the district and buildings are doing to ensure a successful pathway for students in life. However, Prepared for Success as a rated measure serves to define success based on the eyes, biases, and views of those creating the system. Based on the diversity of our state and our inability to quantifiably define what success means to each local school district, I continue to advocate that this be a reported measure only. Ohio continually espouses the importance of local control. Let's put those beliefs into action and let our communities that elect their Board of Education and hire their Superintendent define and determine what Prepared for Success looks like to meet the unique needs of their community.

Since the pandemic, we have not had a true state report card and we will not again this year. We have not ranked and filed our school districts by letter grade and articles have not been written touting the successes or perceived shortcomings of the work we are doing. I have not had parents in my community reaching out with concerns that they do not know the quality of education their child is receiving because the building does not have a designated letter grade from the state.

In my recent meeting with our business partners and in discussions with the city, no one is clamoring with concerns of people not wanting to move to our city due to the uncertainty of the state of our schools. Concerns are not being shared from our robust and diverse business community of workforce development with the absence of a report card letter grade to quantify the work we are doing with students and the value we are bringing to our community. This is not

just my story in a high achieving suburban school district, but this is the same story across the state.

If think tanks and policy groups want to share their insights without having any contact with educators, I respect their right to do so. But just because they have an opinion - an opinion based on long established structures that feel comfortable to others - doesn't mean we should listen to and act on their opinions.

At the start of the pandemic, our state shut down the schools and this fall you turned to us and said, you are the experts, we trust you to make the best decisions for our children and our communities. You trusted us as strong leaders and decision makers with the health and safety of thousands of individuals in an area that is not our expertise. Yet, we did it. We took it on, we completely restructured our organizations and our delivery model in a few short months. Students were learning at school, at home, or a combination thereof. We rose to the challenge. Yet, even with this work and success of our public schools during the pandemic still in the forefront of our minds, we do not turn to our practitioners with the same level of trust, respect, and support to hear their voices in their area of expertise when making decisions about how we will educate our youth and be held accountable for this work.

We need to come together and build consensus on the rating system for our report card. In a recent letter of support for SB 145 written from various business partners, it shared the need for grades or stars so that, in my words, we can hold schools accountable and we can build a workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead into the 21st century. But what if the system that we have created is doing just the opposite? Our business partners and workforce does not need rote learners. We need thinkers. We've moved from isolated learning to complete a task to developing learners that know how to learn - developing learners who are creative problem solvers, effective communicators, and critical thinkers. If we believe that rated components and an overall rating based on a state testing system with punitive measures is going to solve this problem and reach this goal, this is a misguided premise.

So as our legislative leaders ponder this critical component and reflect on the outcomes our systems are creating, please remember that whether it be letter grades, stars, or descriptors, we are making a determination as to which symbols we want to use that best capture the spirit and foundational focus for our state accountability system and the outcomes we want for our students. If we want to make a statement to our district leaders, our teachers, our staff, our students, and our communities that we believe in a system of accountability that is focused on growth and support, it is time to move away from old paradigms of what is comfortable to us. We need to have the courage and foresight and move to what is needed for our students - a system that is focused on celebrating and supporting growth.

Courage is the ability to take action even when you cannot predict the outcome. I cannot share with you today that every change made based on the final version of the legislation is going to work out as intended. However, what I can share with you is that if we don't make a change, if we don't break from what we have always done, we will never realize what we could be. Please have the courage to listen intently, to reflect deeply, and to continue to make decisions based on what is best for every student in Ohio. If we can come together to make these changes, we can create a meaningful future for public education - a future that provides our students with the skills and knowledge necessary to not only find success on a standardized test, but also to find success in life. I am here to not just share my thoughts and the thoughts of my Superintendent colleagues, but to offer my continued help and support to see meaningful changes enacted and to

do the work necessary to see new legislation through. I am at your disposal to continue this work and dialogue.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party of SB 145. I am glad to answer your questions.