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Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Sub. HB 82 Proponent Testimony
June 23, 2021

Chair 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 in support of Sub. HB 82, which now includes language to reform Ohio's current accountability system, also known as the state report card. I am Dr. Erik Roush, and I handle policy and government affairs for Columbus City Schools.

As I noted in my previous testimony, there appeared to be broad consensus in the need to overhaul the existing system, and while there was some disagreement as to how to approach that overhaul, I believe that the bill before you today represents countless hours of discussion and negotiation and a better product than the individual efforts of HB 200 and SB 145 as they were introduced.

I applaud the elimination of the Indicators Met as a graded measure. While the information may certainly be found to be useful, it essentially served to doubly penalize schools and districts who do not reach the 80 percent threshold – hit first on the Performance Index (PI) and then again on the Indicators Met criterion. Setting the maximum performance index score at the average of the top two percent – rather than the mathematical maximum – is also a reasonable approach. These shifts are welcome.

I am glad to see both the four-year and five-year graduation rates are maintained in the calculation of the overall graduation rate as it is more important that students find their way to commencement even if it takes an extra year. I am also supportive of reporting those students who continue to receive services under their individual education plans (IEPs) beyond the typical graduation thresholds. This allows us to demonstrate our commitment to what is in the best interest of students while also providing a data point to explain why our graduation rate is lower than it could be. As noted previously, this still remains a good opportunity to approach the federal government to revise how they account for students within the graduation cohorts as we are limited to this reporting mechanism due to federal requirements.

I maintain that it is important that when viewing progress, we look at more than a single data-point. The three-year weighted average of this component recognizes that a trend is not established in a single year – either positive or negative. This should diminish severe swings in either direction while still maintaining the meaningful differentiation required under federal law.

I am happy to see the use of stars maintained in the rating system. In a district where over 90 different languages are spoken, where some individuals may benefit from a non-verbal rating mechanism, we believe that stars provide a sound approach. Stars are a well-known mechanism, used by businesses and services in a variety of sectors. Rather than numbers or letter grades – upon which individuals automatically attribute a 0-100 scale due to past experience and conceptualization – the use of stars provides a clean slate upon which to base the accountability system while addressing the challenges listed above. I am also pleased to see that this bill does not approach stars as a monolithic solution – the inclusion of descriptors, colors, and trend lines will help to provide greater context to the stars and, hopefully, generate greater curiosity and conversation around their meaning.

One final note I would like to raise as we begin to dismantle the various punitive measures attached to the report card is the need to divest the accountability system from the flawed parent trigger pilot program. This program – applicable only to Columbus City Schools – generates unnecessary costs in terms of human capital and in the supplies and materials needed to produce the information to send home to students. In the nearly ten years since its inception, the District has not received a single request to utilize its provisions. As we conclude work on this important reform, I would be remiss if I did not request that it be included in the final package.

Is the system set forth in Sub. HB 82 perfect? No, but it is certainly a vast improvement over the current mechanism, and I would argue that one would be hard pressed to find an accountability system that provided such perfection. It provides a sound system aligned with federal law. It more fairly identifies those schools in greatest need of additional resources while removing the discouraging nomenclature of failure. It is a move away from a system most everyone agrees is flawed towards a better, clearer, more understandable system.

Thank you.