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The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

Ohio Senate Education Committee

Scott DiMauro – President, Ohio Education Association

SB 295 – Opposition Testimony

December 10, 2024

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, my name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school social studies teacher from Worthington with 16 years of classroom experience and currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of our approximately 120,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 295.

SB 295 proposes a heavy handed and overreaching state approach to local schools that receive low ratings on state report cards. The bill would expand reliance on standardized test scores for labeling schools as underperforming, arbitrarily forcing districts to take extreme measures such as squandering prior investments in school buildings by closing them, transferring control to external operators that have no link to the community, or indiscriminately replacing at least half a building's staff, regardless of the ability to replace that staff.

The impact of the actions compelled by SB 295 would harm students and communities. The harsh measures required by the bill ignore mitigating factors, forcing districts to make counterproductive decisions that could harm well-functioning schools. Language in the bill also requires overriding collective bargaining agreements, which always strips districts of local control, the ability for districts and staff to collaborate in making decisions that are based in the reality of the district and community, and silences educators of their voice to advocate on behalf of students. All of these steps would contribute to destabilizing schools and communities, which is detrimental to the success of students and does not contribute to positive outcomes.

The proposals in SB 295 also contradict the state report card guidance on how to interpret low ratings. The report card description for one star, the lowest possible rating, is "Needs significant **support** to meet state standards." SB 295 does not do this. Instead of offering significant support, SB 295 proposes significant punishments that will most likely destabilize schools where many great things are happening, even if those successes are not revealed on data printouts of standardized test scores. The punitive approach of SB 295 draws further concern by triggering



those penalties with narrow report card measures based on test scores triggered by arbitrary cutoffs. This approach ensures significant numbers of schools will be continuously under threat of heavy-handed state penalties, an approach unlikely to benefit students, educators or society. This simplistic and punitive approach is the opposite of what Ohio state report cards call for and OEA opposes it.

The proposals in SB 295 mirror the failed policies of the past that focus on penalizing districts without addressing the root causes of opportunity gaps, such as poverty, mental health challenges, community disengagement, underfunding, and the educator staffing shortage.

Top-down mandates that rely on flawed testing data have not worked and will not work. For example, SB 295 still repeats the same mistakes of the state takeover concept still in Ohio law, an experiment that failed in three consecutive districts and should therefore be repealed. Those repeated mistakes include 1) proposing large-scale interventions in local schools based on narrow and misleading testing data, and 2) assuming without evidence that test score data deemed too low by the state is the result of shortcomings in district leadership or teachers, and not rooted in some other cause, such as family and community-wide poverty, deprivation, and other traumas that create known barriers to learning.

The barriers to learning caused by under resourced schools and communities do not disappear when a state punishes a school district. Rather, these barriers are alleviated and relieved by providing students with access to “wraparound services” that get students to school and ready to learn. This “community learning center” concept seeks real solutions by focusing on root causes, such as meeting the basic needs of students that are known precursors to being prepared to learn. For example, a student who needs glasses can’t read, a student who is hungry can’t pay attention, and a student embarrassed because of issues connected to the lack of dental health care doesn’t ask questions. These are not school leadership or teacher quality challenges, so arbitrarily changing principals and teachers would do nothing to meet the learning needs of students or increase the test scores that are deemed so valuable by the state.

If there is going to be a three-strikes-and-you’re-out rule, it should apply to the stale, failed, repackaged, top-down, big government, standardized testing driven proposals in SB 295.

SB 295 also continues the mistakes of the past by punishing poverty instead of offering help or support to schools and students. The bill does this by aimlessly and needlessly destabilizing schools and students with flagrant and draconian punishments linked to test scores whose value has been debunked, as the state report card confirms every year that standardized test scores merely correlate with community poverty rates and do not reflect the inherent value and quality of schools. This is why broader, non-test-based measures have been added to the

report in recent years, such as the Student Opportunity Profile, a shift in perspective and direction that OEA commends the General Assembly for making.

In closing, OEA calls on the Ohio General Assembly to oppose SB 295 and shift its perspective away from punishing poverty and move to a perspective that recognizes the barriers to learning caused by poverty.

Ohio's students and educators deserve better than repackaging the failed policies of the past. Because public education and our public school's matter, OEA stands ready to work on solutions that address systemic challenges and invest in our schools so that every student has the opportunity, the support and the resources they need to prevail over the challenges they face, regardless of their zip code, background, or economic status.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address the committee and I am available for any questions.