



MARBURN  
ACADEMY

**HB 49 Proponent Testimony**  
**Jamie Williamson, Marburn Academy**  
**Ohio Senate Finance Committee**  
**Chairman Scott Oelslager**  
**June 7, 2017**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the committee, my name is Jamie Williamson, and I am the Head of School of Marburn Academy in Columbus, Ohio. Marburn Academy is a nonprofit, tuition-based private independent day school for children grades 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> with learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD, and executive function issues. I am testifying today to urge the Senate to support a provision in the House passed version of HB 49 which provides a testing exemption for scholarship students at schools accredited by the Independent School Association of the Central States (ISACS). This proposal includes students at Marburn Academy being served by the Jon Peterson Special Needs or Autism Scholarship programs.

Marburn Academy was founded in 1981 by a group of visionary parents, educators, and civic leaders who saw our community's need for a school that would provide effective instruction for bright students whose learning differences prevented them from succeeding in traditional school programs. During that time, we have provided the means for over 2,800 young people to transform their school experience from failure and defeat to one of success and hope. In addition, tens of thousands of students in other schools have benefited from the training their teachers have received through Marburn's outreach programs. Marburn Academy serves students with average to superior intelligence that have been unable to learn in their previous schools due to difficulties often labeled as learning disabilities from approximately 30 Central Ohio communities and is one of only 13 schools in the United States accredited for its Orton-Gillingham classroom instruction system by the *Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators*.

The ISACS high school testing and graduation requirement exemption in HB 49 is important to Marburn Academy. Marburn Academy is accredited by ISACS and a state approved provider for both the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and the Autism Scholarship. Two years ago the General Assembly removed the graduation and testing requirements for students attending ISACS-accredited chartered, nonpublic schools except for students attending on state scholarships. Since Marburn Academy has Autism and JPSN Scholarship students, this language excluded them.

At Marburn Academy, we are deeply committed to accountability and the growth of our students. Our students have a variety of complex academic needs and as such they greatly benefit from individualized assessments that allow us to be diagnostic. Every year, we administer individual assessments in reading and math designed to measure student's skills, determine patterns of strengths and weakness, and compare their performance to national

norms. We utilize the data from these assessments to inform, monitor, and adapt the instructional program for our students. By focusing our assessment on the foundational academic skills, we are then able to understand why a student is struggling and intervene to address the issue. This allows us to meet our students where they are academically and as a result, they find tremendous success while in our care.

In accordance with current state policy, we administer the end of course exams as required for each of our high school students receiving the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and the Autism Scholarship. These assessments are criterion referenced and are designed to measure acquisition of content knowledge and progress toward a standard. For typically developing students that have strong academic skills these measures help identify what needs to be retaught. However, it is important to note that these assessments assume foundational reading skills. Marburn Academy serves students that have been primarily diagnosed with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and disorders of written expression, and without this skill-focused approach, our students are unable to experience significant academic progress that they are capable of attaining. While our students do receive academic accommodations such as extended time for these assessments, there is not accommodation that can mediate deficits in those foundational academic skills.

Further, it is important to note that this additional layer of testing required by the State does nothing to enhance the learning outcomes of our students. In fact, they do the opposite. The end of course exams rob our students of incredibly valuable instructional time that we could be using to target their individual academic needs, and provide no useful data to help us meet their needs. Given the complex needs of our students it is imperative that we keep our focus on testing that is most appropriate to build their skills.

In summary, we are asking for your support of the ISACS testing exemption so that Marburn Academy can continue to do the great work that we are known and held accountable for by students and families across central Ohio in a way that is appropriate for our students to deliver an exceptional educational experience.

Chairman Oelslager and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on this important issue for our school and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our request. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.