



Toledo Public Schools
Toledo Public Schools Educational Campus
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Proponent Testimony for HB 154, Stephanie Eichenberg, Toledo Public Schools Board of Education

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding House Bill (HB) 154. I am Stephanie Eichenberg, President of the Toledo Public Schools Board of Education. I urge you to act swiftly to pass HB 154.

The state, by undercutting locally elected Boards of Education, implies a presumption that the voters of local districts cannot see what is right before their eyes, that they are unable to take steps that promote positive momentum for their district. In Toledo, those that passed HB 70 severely underestimated our voters and our district.

Our voters see a district that has increased graduation rates since 2014, from 64% to 79% overall, from 60% to 80% for African-American students, from 59% to 77% for economically disadvantaged students and for students with disabilities graduation rates have improved from 54% to 70%. Our voters see a district where we have improved 3rd grade promotion rates from 71.9% to 85% since 2015. In that same time, we have increased enrollment in TPS schools by over 1,700 students. This past year students increased proficiency in 33 of the 41 tested grades and subjects.

We at Toledo Public Schools have worked productively between our Board, our Administration and our bargaining units on innovation and additional supports that lift-up our students. We implemented freshman clusters to add an additional layer of support for 9th grade students, at the most critical time of risk in their high school career. We opened the Aerospace and Natural Science Academy of Toledo, where we graduate licensed airplane mechanics and urban agriculturalists who become a part of Toledo's growing food production industry. This year we re-invented two elementary STEM schools where we had struggling neighborhood schools, better serving the same students with a new curriculum and reimagined spaces. We re-structured our gender separate high school academy as a School of Business. We attract national attention for the quality of the Toledo Technology Academy, and of course many of our graduates at Toledo Early College are graduating with their High School diploma and Associates degree concurrently.

We have 29 separate Career Tech pathways leading to an over 90% graduation rate, and our AP and CCP enrollment has more than doubled over the past four years, while we implemented new gifted programming in 4th-7th grades, increasing in scope each of the past 3 years.

Just last week, we announced Toledo SMART Academy charter school will close and become a bilingual school within Toledo Public Schools. The board of a local charter school has opted to close in order for us to support their students and staff in their inventive curriculum.

We've done this despite having over 2,700 homeless students (the most of any Ohio district) and 86% of our students on free or reduced lunch. Our community recognizes our accomplishments and approved our last two levies at over 68%.

Despite all of this, Ohio's school report card awards Toledo an "F", and tells me our students are failing. I know what I see, and I know what Toledo sees, which is impressive improvement. It is the state's metric used for implementing the undemocratic Academic Distress Commissions and CEO's that does not

recognize our success. While I have confidence that we are close to moving ourselves off the “F” rated pathway, should the Ohio Department of Education change the Third Grade Reading Guarantee promotion cut score, or the graduation requirements change yet again in just a few years, that could result in a state takeover under current law. I ask you, how is it that a district that is clearly improving drastically both academically and financially, could still be considered failing?

As a twenty-four-year corporate market researcher in my private life, I can assure you, it’s entirely possible to build data models to get the result you want. Unfortunately, I’m convinced that even though our positive improvements are perfectly obvious to our community and I hope now to you, we are dealing with a metric that is designed to designate TPS as failing, so that the state can assert itself into our local governance. This is wrong on many levels, but most of all it is wrong for our students who have found increased success in our recent innovations and who should not be subject to random top-down change from people who do not know our community.

I urge you to pass HB 154 so that our district may continue to flourish as we carry on with our very positive strategy.